THE PRACTICE OF POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS IN CATALONIA AND SCOTLAND

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the practitioners of political public relations in Scotland and Catalonia. The study is focused on investigating the constitutive elements of political PR practitioners as a professional group and as a practice, and the influence that different media systems have on the practice of political PR. This is a comparative study that combines micro and macro-level analysis. The thesis is one of the first studies to approach political PR as a profession and to compare sub-state nations to explore communication practices in the political sphere.

The theoretical framework for this thesis combines a neo-institutional approach to professions, and the theory of media systems models to explore and compare the context where political PR practitioners work. The empirical data of this thesis derives from in-depth interviews to Heads of Communication in parties and governments in Scotland and Catalonia. The analysis of the empirical data is based on thematic coding.

The central argument of this thesis is that the practice of political PR and its practitioners occupy a professional role in the division of labour in the political sphere of Scotland and Catalonia. The professional role of political PR practitioners is that of a hybrid model that combines classic traits of professions with informal structures and shared professional identities resulting from the constant influence of the political and the media sphere. As a practice political PR is about relationship management and networking with the core actors and channels of the media sphere. Media systems provide the profession with different tools of influence over the media sphere influencing levels of professional power and professional performance. Catalan practitioners have a wider range of institutional tools because of the strongly interdependent relationship between the media and political spheres. Whereas Scottish practitioners use their professional power and performance to overcome the limitations to political influence in their media system.

LIST OF KEYWORDS: political public relations; sub-state nations; media systems; spin doctors; professionalization.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the experts who manage communication strategies and practice political public relations within political parties and governments. They are understood as a profession and are analysed in a comparative perspective. This chapter will introduce the main reasons to undertake this study and, related to this, the theoretical approach taken for such purposes.

> 'Naturally every politician of consequence has needed influence
> over the press and hence has needed relations with the press'
> (Weber, 1994 p.11).

Communication has been a major concern for political parties and governments (Wring, 2001). Nevertheless, there is little known about the experts who, as staff members of political parties and governments, manage the day-to-day communication activities and electoral campaigns – i.e. political public relations. What is it that they actually do in political parties and in governments? Where do they come from Political parties and governments in Western democracies now face an increasingly complex communication sphere with: the already-established 24/7 news outlets; decline of trust in traditional news media; severe financial crises facing media groups; and the emergence of diverse and rapidly changing forms of online communication (Chadwick, 2013). In addition to these changes in the communication sphere, recent social and economic developments are redefining the way politics is understood (Vowles and Xezonakis, 2016). A significant part of these changes are related to the reconfiguration of nation-states and the emergence of sub-state nations, and new forms of territorial organisation also at the supra-state level (Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010). In that complex context, political parties and governments appoint experts informally labelled as 'spin doctors' to help them survive in the new communicative and political eco-system.

The starting point of this thesis is that there is a need to generate new knowledge about political public relations experts that overcomes the limitations of the 'spin doctor' concept and places these experts in the wider picture of media and political systems. Consequently, there is a need to develop research that combines micro and macro level analysis to explain the elements that constitute the practice of political public relations.

This thesis aims to contribute to add to the the recently-emerged field of political public relations empirical data on the characteristics and main traits of the practitioners of political PR. The goal is to contribute to understand how political PR is put in practice in governments and parties.

Existing knowledge on the experts who manage communication or political public relations activities within political parties and governments is problematic and needs to be further developed from comparative perspectives. Previous studies have represented these experts as the figure of the 'spin doctor' (Atkinson, 2005; Esser et al., 2001; Schmitz and Karam, 2013; Sumpter and Tankard, 1994), a folk term originally used by USA and UK journalists to complain about political parties threatening their journalistic independence (Byrne, 2014). In these studies, 'spin doctors' are presented as the deviation from a normative model of party press officers because of their lack of ethical standards and professionalism (Ribeiro, 2015; Sumpter and Tankard, 1994). These assumptions are problematic because their empirical basis is limited to analysing journalistic representations of these experts in cases where they have become public figures – primarily within the USA and UK in the late 90s. None of these studies, despite their elaborate, long lists of the daily activities of the spin doctor (ie. Gaber, 2000), have used the same experts as primary sources of information, nor have they used a clear theoretical framework to elaborate on their analysis. Until now, these studies have been uncritically accepted (Stockwell, 2007) and there have been no serious attempts to develop adequate theoretical frameworks to explore these key experts beyond the concept of 'spin doctors'.

In addition to the lack of adequate theoretical frameworks to examine political public relations experts, there is a lack of comparative knowledge not only in the case of 'spin doctors', but more generally in the field of political communication on sub-state nations (Fernández-Quijada and Sellas, 2013). The lack of comparative studies on political PR practitioners or 'spin doctors' results in a lack of knowledge about how different cultural, media and political context influence these practitioners. In addition, comparative studies in political communication and public relations have so far remained focused on the nation-state level (Esser, 2013; Gibson and Rommele, 2009; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Pfetsch, 2013).

Sub-state nations are essential elements to understand some of the most important changes happening in a globalised world where the power of the state seems to be declining (Tierney, 2005). Comparative studies on sub-state nations and territorial politics have built on their own area of sub-expertise in political science and political sociology (Keating, 2008; Stolz, 2010; Swenden and Maddens, 2009) nevertheless, these studies do not examine the communication dimension of sub-state nations. Sub-state nations present an opportunity to explore the role that communication plays in this sphere of the political world where political parties and governments face complex challenges in claiming their differentness and legitimising their status on a new territorial level (Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010). Exploring political public relations experts in sub-state nations is a first step in understanding the communicative dimension of these units of analysis, which challenge traditional conceptions of state boundaries and, therefore, of their respective media systems.

Scotland and Catalonia have been, and still are, experiencing crucial political developments that might shape their territorial organisation as sub-state nations. These political developments, including a wide-range of events from independence referendums to political conflicts with the state, make communication a central concern for political actors as one of the keys to navigate the newly-emerging landscape.

The devolution of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government in 1999 were regarded as an open door to generate a new mode of understanding the relationships between governments, parties and news media (Schlesinger, 1998). The relationship between news media and Tony Blair's government had become an issue because of the controversial figure of Alastair Campbell, who at the time was the government's Head of Communication – or Blair's spin doctor, as labelled by UK journalists (McNair, 2004). UK journalists reacted against Campbell, who was accused of misleading journalists with false information and using aggressive media relations methods (Esser, Reinemann, and Fan, 2000). Scotland's political life began operating within this media relations context, and in 2012 an independence referendum was announced. However, in these almost two decades, few have explored what happened to Scottish 'spin doctors' the after Campbell era. Who are the communication experts

in Scottish political parties? How do they operate in the media system of a devolved nation? Are they similar to equivalent experts in other sub-state nations?

Catalonia, considered as having many common aspects with Scotland's political autonomy development (Greer, 2007) and having also announced in 2012 their intention to demand an independence referendum, has developed a stronger and more independent Catalan media system (Guimera and Fernandez, 2014) and has a series of party communication experts that have always remained out of the media's focus. The term 'spin doctor' is not to be found in Catalan news media and there are no famous public figures such as Alastair Campbell. Brown (2003) speculated that spin doctors only make sense in those media contexts where news media are commercially-oriented and news frames have not been already determined by historical traditions of parallelism between parties and news media. Media relations in Catalonia are embedded in a context of strong interdependency between political powers and news media, with a dedicated Catalan public broadcast system; a system of public subsidies to private news media; and news media having traditionally played a significant political role in key historical events (Fernández, Sarabia, Sánchez, and Bas, 2011; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Nevertheless, there are several previous studies that indicate party communication experts in Catalonia play an important role in Catalonia's political life as agenda-setting actors (Aira, 2010; Castelló and Montagut, 2011) and as media relations managers (Xifra, 1997). Despite these differences, are Catalan communication experts similar to their Scottish equivalents? How does a different media system impact these professionals?

To contribute to the generation of new knowledge on this area, it is argued that the figure of spin doctors, or political public relations practitioners, needs to be reconceptualised. This reconceptualisation of the political public relations expert needs to incorporate a defined and clear theoretical framework missing from previous studies. In addition, these experts need to be reconceptualised in alternative political scenarios that have not only an interesting communication dimension but are also representative of some the most significant political changes occurring in Western democracies, such as changes in the territorial organisation. Consequently, the reconceptualisation of this figure needs to happen in a micro- and macro-dimension:

firstly, these individuals who have been identified in different Western democracies (Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2001; Charon, 2004; Aira, 2010) need to be approached as a professional group in order to capture the complexities and dynamics of this group and to overcome the limitations of the 'spin doctor' concept; secondly, this reconceptualisation needs to happen in a comparative perspective to explore patterns of similarities and differences across existing media and political systems.

This thesis examines the Head of Communication figure within political parties and governments in Scotland and in Catalonia with the following specific aim: to generate empirically-based knowledge about the structure and practice of the political public relations profession in a comparative perspective. This general aim relates to two main research questions: what are the constitutive elements of the performance and practice of the political public relations profession?; and how do specific national media system impact the political public relations profession? To answer these questions, this thesis draws from first-hand empirical data obtained through in-depth interviews with the communication heads of the main Scottish and Catalan parties and respective governments. Two main assumptions underpin this research design: the experts in communication hired as Heads of Communication for parties and governments are part of a professional group; and this professional group is to be found in different political systems, with some variations that relate to the characteristics of each national media system. This thesis is operationalised by combining micro- and macro-levels of analysis and combining two interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks for each level of analysis.

There are two basic pillars in this thesis and two sub-aims related to it: political public relations experts will be examined as a profession; and these professionals will be placed in the larger picture of political and media systems in sub-state nations. This thesis aims to advance and generate new knowledge on these experts and their characteristics by exploring their professional category from an alternative explanatory framework, particularly the neo-institutional theory on professions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008). Conceptualising political public relations as a professional group challenges previous studies that rejected categorising these experts as such (D. G. Lilleker and Negrine, 2002; Pfetsch, 2004). Neo-institutional

theory views professions as dynamic social institutions that are not necessarily formed by classic professional characteristics, such a body of certified knowledge, codes of ethics and professional associations, but that might be reproduced and maintained through different social practices and structures (Noordegraaf, 2007).

This thesis aims to contribute to an existing body of comparative work in political communication that, until now, has generally ignored sub-state nations as valid units of comparison and has also ignored political public relations experts as a significant element of these media systems. As neo-institutionalists affirm, professions are maintained and socially-created from the actions of individual practitioners, and they are mutually-constitutive of the context in which they operate (Scott, 2008). Therefore, political public relations cannot be understood in isolation from the wider context, in this case the media and political systems. Redefining Hallin and Mancini's (2004) dimensions of media systems, this thesis explores the media and political systems of Catalonia and Scotland to examine the impact of different systemic configurations on the political public relations profession. The aim is not to explore the adequacy of Hallin and Mancini's models to the cases of Catalonia and Scotland, but to use their four media system dimensions as analytical concepts to explore the context in which political public relations operate.

Main argument

The main argument of this thesis is that inside media systems, along with politicians and journalists, is a third group with professional characteristics: political public relations practitioners. These professionals operationalise the relationship between political parties or governments with the wider communicative sphere, which includes not only news media but any element that projects the image of these political actors on the public. The profession emerges in different media and political systems, with degrees of variation in their professional power related to the tools to influence the communicative sphere that are available to these professionals in each system. More specifically, the data demonstrates that:

- *Political public relations' professional structure responds to a hybrid model of professions constructed around a client-oriented professionalism found*

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across Scotland and Catalonia. These professionals share conceptualisations of professionalism and ethics based on serving the needs of the party rather than a public service-oriented view commonly associated with journalists and politicians.

- *When media systems are explored from the perspective of the political public relations practitioner, a series of structural features emerge as tools (e.g. public subsidies) that political powers can use to influence and shape the media sphere. These tools, along with the degree of interdependency and complexity in the relationship between political actors and news media, relate to the differences encountered in terms of professional power and autonomy between Scotland and Catalonia. When the sub-state dimension is explored from the perspective of the political public relations profession, it emerges that territorial decentralisation affects professionals in Scotland and Catalonia because it determines the availability of tools of influence over the media system.*

- *Catalonia's high degree of interdependence and complexity in the relationship between the media and political spheres provides practitioners with a larger number of institutional and informal tools of influence over the media sphere. The complexity of a relationship that has many dimensions –a system of public subsidies; the use of news media as part of political strategy; a network of media pundits controlled by parties; the active intervention of news media in key political events – is the basis for Catalan practitioners to claim their relevance and become essential professionals for any party or government.*

- *Scottish practitioners occupy similar organisational positions to their Catalan counterparts. However, Scottish practitioners operate in a context dominated by a more liberal and less interventionist media policy tradition, with partisanship restricted to online media and newspapers, and an overall relationship between the political and the media spheres based more strongly on managing personal and individual contacts with journalists and news editors. In that sense, their power is limited.*

The findings of this thesis highlight the relevance that communicative needs have acquired for political parties and governments, up to the point that a profession has emerged to attend these needs. It also sheds light on the relevance that sub-state nations have as valid units of analysis to explore significant features of political communication. This thesis and its findings could be of interest to scholars exploring both actor and systemic dimensions of the relationship between the political and the media spheres, to political scientists interested in party organisation and party strategy, and to sociologists working on the emergence of new professions. More specifically, this thesis aims to generate debate and interest about the need to build strong explanatory and interdisciplinary frameworks to better conceptualise the interaction between communication practices and politics.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 review the academic literature that has approached the figure of communication experts in the political sphere. In addition, Chapter 2 develops the theoretical framework of the thesis. Chapter 3 explores the media and political contexts where political PR practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia. It the basis to start the empirical analysis of the thesis. Chapter 4 puts forward the research design of the thesis based on a comparative and qualitative approach to the professional group of political PR practitioners. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 offer the analysis of the empirical data. Chapter 5 explores the individual characteristics of those who practice political PR and the main professional norms and ethical principles of the profession. Chapter 6 looks into the role that political PR practitioners play in governments and political parties. Chapter 7 explores the performance and professional power of political PR practitioners in relation to the wider media system. Chapter 8 discusses the findings of the data analysis results in relation to the core debates in the academic literature.

CHAPTER 1 POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS: PORTRAYAL AND EVALUATION IN ACADEMIC LITERATURE

This chapter examines the academic literature about spin doctors and the political and media contexts in which they operate. The aim is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the different approaches to the issue. This chapter offers an integrative approach of different academic fields –political science, media studies and public relations- that address the same ontological phenomenon – communication experts in political parties and governments- and yet remain disconnected.

The chapter puts forward two arguments. Existing studies are problematic because they offer an incomplete account of political public relations practitioners. Biased explanatory frameworks and a lack of robust and comparative empirical data are the main shortcomings in the literature. This chapter argues that political public relations offers the most convincing framework to capture the complexities and dynamics of communication experts who work in political parties and governments. Political public relations is also a convenient overarching umbrella to integrate existing knowledge on these experts. Studies on these experts is spread over many different fields that do not speak to each other. Furthermore, this knowledge is hidden under different labels, designating these experts as spin doctors, media consultants, or press officers. There are gains to be made if this knowledge and its many labels are articulated under one single area of knowledge, delimited by one label.

The chapter is structured into five sections, one for each field that examines communication experts in the political sphere. Each section analyses the dominant normative frameworks, theoretical approaches and empirical basis used by each of these fields when studying political public relations practitioners. In general terms, media scholars demonise spin doctors as a deviation from the romanticised normative model of the press officer. They are usually ignored in public relations

studies because political parties are not considered spaces where public relations is practised. Finally, political marketing scholars do not consider in-house party or government staff as part of their model of political consultants.

1.1 Five different fields and one ontological object of study

This section examines and problematises how different bodies of literature portray and evaluate political public relations practitioners. There is much to be said in favour of existing studies. Nevertheless, they all have serious limitations. The main limitation is the existence of different field-related normative frameworks that generate incomplete accounts of communication experts in political parties and governments.

Five different fields approach the study of communication experts in political parties and governments: media studies, public relations, political communication, political marketing and political public relations. Each of these fields has its own normative framework. These normative frameworks determine different conceptualisations of the role that communication plays in the political sphere and the subsequent methodological and empirical approaches to its study. Table 1.1 summarises these normative frameworks according to: the role they attribute to communication in the political sphere; the way these fields evaluate communication experts in the political sphere; and the empirical data that underpins these studies.

Table 1.1 Main approaches in the study of communication experts in the political sphere

Field	Kind of communication knowledge	Role of experts	Source of empirical data
Political marketing	Strategies and techniques to satisfy the needs of the political market	Political marketing consultants: help politicians to	Limited to external campaign consultants

			understand the market

(Harris, 2001; Strömbäck, 2007; Newman, 2008; Savigny, 2009; Cwalina, Falkowski and Newman, 2011)

Political communication	News management	Spin doctors: proactive strategists of media relations	Politicians and journalists' assessments of their relationships

(McNair, 2000; Brown, 2003a; Stockwell, 2007; de Vreese and Elenbaas, 2009; Mcknight, 2015)

Political public relations	Purposeful communication to maintain and build relationships	Political public relations practitioners: involved in the management of all communication-related relationships	No empirical studies

(Kirby, 2005; Froehlich and Rüdiger, 2006; Xifra, 2010; Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2013; Gonçalves, 2014)

Public Relations	Public relations is only practised in government communication	Spin doctors: propagandists	Limited to practitioners in government

(Verčič *et al.*, 2001; Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002; Sriramesh Dejan and Vercic, 2003; Botan and Taylor, 2004; Moloney, 2006)

Media studies	Political communication as an attempt to breach the watchdog role of news media	Spin doctors: deviation of an ideal model of press officers	Journalists' perceptions on these experts

(Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; Atkinson, 2005; Frenkel-Faran and Lehman-Wilzig, 2007; Brants and Voltmer, 2011; Schmitz and Karam, 2013; Fisher, 2014)

Table 1.1 shows which areas of knowledge lack robust empirical data because these normative frameworks limit the empirical basis of most studies. Media studies only use journalistic sources for their studies because they want to examine how spin doctors impact journalists. Public relations studies ignore practitioners working in political parties because they consider these settings more related to propaganda than to public relations. Political marketing studies do not consider in-house permanent staff members –the majority in the European context- as part of their model. Political communication studies are too focused on the wider relationship between politicians and journalists and rarely use first-hand data from spin doctors. Political public relations has no strong normative frameworks, but, because it is a young, emerging field, there are almost no empirical studies on this area. There is consequentially a gap in the empirical data: none of these studies approached practitioners working in parties and government.

In addition, as observed in Table 1.1, these fields are dominated by constant attempts to assess the positive or negative impact of communication experts in the political sphere. Consequently, the literature is divided between those fields that portray these practitioners as a threat to democracies –media and public relations– and those studies that regard these practitioners and their activities as beneficial for democratic debate(Hobbs, 2015): political marketing, political communication, political public relations. Generally, scholars criticise spin doctors because they examine the relationship between politicians and news media from normative, liberal democratic ideals that argue for a free press serving as a watchdog of political powers (Raupp and Kocks, 2016). In that context, spin doctors are regarded as manipulative attempts from political parties to control free media. In contrast, the strategic perspective found in political studies understands the role of communication expertise in democracy as enhancing the relationship between parties and voters (Lees-Marshment, 2010) since communication strategies allow parties to better know their voters' needs and communicate their messages more efficiently, thus promoting

democratic discourse. The following sections will examine the main strengths and problems in each of these fields.

1.2 Spin doctors in media studies

There is a body of media and political communication studies that consider the figure of the 'spin doctor' and its main activity, 'spinning', as a threat to democracies(Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; Gaber, 2000a; Franklin, 2003; Bennett and Entman, 2003; Swanson, 2004; Ribeiro, 2015a). These critical scholars argue that spin doctors are a deviation from a normative model of press officers (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; Gaber, 2000a) and spinning a deviation from a normative model of media relations (Bennett and Entman, 2003).

It is usually the case that those who argue for the dangers of these communication professionals tend to use the term 'spin doctor' and their studies tend to focus on the effects that 'spinning' has on news production and political engagement (Gaber, 2000a; Moloney and Colmer, 2001; Franklin, 2003; Dhani, 2011). The term 'spin doctor' is an Anglo-Saxon pejorative term created in 1984 by American journalists during the Mondale-Reagan debate to refer to the candidates' advisors who, after the debate, tried to convince journalists that their respective candidate had won the debate (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994). The term was later imported to the UK and Australia (Fisher, 2014), and widely used by journalists during Tony Blair's government at a time of contentious relationships between Blair's Head of Communications and the news media(Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2000). However, spin doctor does not appear in other media contexts, such as in Spain or Catalonia where the public is unaware of the significance of the term (Xifra, 2010b).

Even though some scholars point out that the negative connotations embedded in the term 'spin doctor' have softened in the last decade (Ribeiro, 2015), it is still the case that 'spin doctor' remains an unscientific neologism(Frenkel-Faran and Lehman-Wilzig, 2007) that is difficult to use as an analytical term (Brown, 2003). Consequently, the use of the term spin doctor as an analytical

tool is questioned here because, as McNair alerts, 'the media analyst should be cautious in endorsing the journalists' terms and referential frames' (2000, p.137). Nevertheless, media and political communication studies make the conscious choice of using the term 'spin doctor' because they endorse a negative view of these experts working in parties and governments.

Media studies compare spin doctors to a romanticised old press officer. Spin doctors lack the professionalism and ethical standards of old press officers working in political parties and governments(Tenscher, 2004; Serrano, 2010) .These new professionals were presented as having aggressive communication strategies: always ahead of the opposition's moves, using 'unorthodox methods' and personal contacts with top editors to push their 'liquid' versions of truth, and always acting in their client's interest (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994). Schmitz and Karam (2013), after surveying 163 Brazilian journalists, contend that there is a 'legitimate demarcation between a professional and ethical press office that plans and executes its strategies and proactive actions, and the spin doctor' (p.104). From their perspective, spin doctors do not build proactive and long-lasting relationships with journalists, they are not loyal to the truth, and they use lobbying, advocacy and public affairs techniques.

Spin doctors are regarded by critical media scholars as a danger to democracies because their main work - i.e. 'spin' - is seen as a way of managing relationships between political actors and journalists that endangers the journalists' independence from political powers (Stockwell, 2007). It is not very clear what, exactly, is meant when the word spinning is used because its use has been extended from referring to the core action of 'spin doctors' to describe the entire Public Relations profession (Atkinson, 2005; Louw, 2005). However, in the political context, Swanson (2004) defines 'spin' as a negative, omnipresent tendency 'by which political actors try to shape journalists' reports to partisan advantage' (2004, p.51).

 Spin is associated with political control of meaning, which threatens journalistic independence (Hobbs, 2015). For instance, Brants and Voltmer

(2011) see spinning as the cause that has undermined the cooperation between journalists and politicians. Politicians and governments try to 'control the spin of a message, but journalists have strategic considerations of their own, such as a desire to convey news that sells'(Fogarty and Wolak, 2009, p. 134). From these perspectives, the spin doctor becomes the figure that puts into practice political elites' attempts to control media coverage and, therefore, the presence of spin doctors is dangerous because they allow for 'powerful manipulation and distortion of the democratic process' (Street 2011, p.10). These views are similar to those found in the public relations field.

1.3 Public relations: spin doctors as propagandists

Public relations is the practice and discipline that explores communication practices within organisational settings (Heath and Toth, 2009). One might contend that political parties and governments are also organisational settings (Panebianco, 1988; Webb and Kolodny, 2006) with their own communication practices. However, the field of public relations has an uneasy relationship with communication practices in the political sphere, and subsequently with the spin doctors who practise them. This uneasy relationship between public relations and politics limits the capacity of the field to serve as an exploratory framework for communication practices in the political sphere. The argument unfolds as follows.

Public relations scholars consider spin doctors as representing a dangerous tendency 'towards the manipulative and propagandistic' (Moloney, 2000, p. 117) and, therefore, spin doctors are damaging for the public legitimacy and reputation of the field and practice of public relations(Moloney, 2006; Coombs and Holladay, 2014). In general terms, the field of public relations – particularly the dominant system theory or functionalist paradigm(Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002) -rejects the use of public relations for propaganda purposes (L'Etang, 2009). The functionalist PR paradigm makes a clear distinction between propaganda and public relations. Public relations is a managerial function that ensures two-way communication between the

organisation and its public and stakeholders (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002), whereas propaganda aims to 'manufacture compliance' (Coombs and Holladay, 2014 p.18) using lies, deceptions and manipulative control of information (Heath and Toth, 2009). From this perspective, public relations is only practiced in 'organizations (profit, nonprofit, and governmental)' (Coombs and Holladay, 2014 p.31) and political parties are usually excluded from the field of public relations.

PR textbooks rarely mention political parties or political competition, and, if they do, it is to remark on the exceptionality of those contexts where 'genuine two-way symmetry can occur only where both parties have equal power to influence the other – and it is worth remembering that this is the rarest form of PR' (Fwakes, 2001, p. 16). Or Leach (2009) argues that, theoretically, good public relations can improve the relationship between political parties and voters by helping them make more informed decisions and enhancing democratic debate. However, he is mainly skeptical because these are no longer parties' core priorities in their promotion strategies.

Until recently, PR scholars have only approached the political sphere through government public relations(Ledingham, 2001; Liu, Horsley and Levenshus, 2010; Echart and Canel, 2011; Sanders, Crespo and Holtz-Bacha, 2011; Rice and Somerville, 2013; Waymer, 2013). Public relations studies focus on government communication because governments allow for 'the cultivation of long-term relationships oriented to mutual understanding rather than being modelled on short-term, vote-winning approaches to communication' (Echart and Canel, 2011 p.110). Short-term and vote-winning approaches relate to persuasion and the manufacture of compliance, and therefore the propagandistic model (Grunig *et al.*, 1995). For instance, Lee (2014), when outlining the PR objectives of governments, qualifies the political purpose of government relations as 'dangerous'.

One of the reasons for the uneasy relationship between politics and public relations lies in the origins of the discipline. Although the discipline arose from

communication practices in political parties and governments in the early 20th century (Edwards, 2014), it has grown apart from the persuasive and propagandistic dimension of politics (Coombs and Holladay, 2014). In the post-war context, Bernays (1955), the so-called father of public relations, warned that PR techniques in politics can be 'subverted' and used for anti-democratic purposes. Similarly, the first book on the practice of PR within the US political context also warned of a negative change happening in the political sphere as 'the propaganda function in politics has, more and more, moved out of the hands of the lay politician into those of the propaganda specialist' (Kelley, 1956, p. 2). As Gonçalves (2014) argues, these first conceptualisations of PR, propaganda and politics, have remained in the functionalist approach to public relations.

Although functionalists dominate the field, critical public relations scholars open the door to the inclusion of politics. Critical public relations scholars recognise similarities between modern forms of politics and the practice of public relations (McNair, 2004; L'Etang, 2006; Sheehan and Xifra, 2015). Unlike functionalist scholars, critical public relations scholars embrace the power and propagandistic dimension of public relations (Heath and Toth, 2009). There have been some attempts from public relations scholars to integrate what they call applied communication areas, such as political communication, under the umbrella of PR theories(Xifra, 2001; Botan and Taylor, 2004). In that sense, Botan and Taylor (2004) defend linking public relations to communication practices in the political sphere through issues management theory commonly accepted in PR theory. They argue communication practices in the political sphere are applied PR techniques to one specific issue, in this case political goals. From a more nuanced approach, Xifra (2001), in his study of public relations models in Catalan parties, states that PR is the main communication form that parties and governments use to communicate with their voters and citizens. However, the most significant attempt to link public relations theory and politics is the sub-field of political public relations (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2013; see section 1.6).

1.4 News management and spinning as political communication

Political communication understands communication in the political sphere as the outcome of the relationship between the political and the media spheres (Raupp and Kocks, 2016). The relationship between spin doctors and journalists is the starting point for these scholars because they understand spinning –the core action of spin doctors- as news management. Spin, or news management, is a proactive, systematic strategy to manage media content (Stockwell, 2007; Brown, 2011; Quinn, 2012; Hobbs, 2015). The concept of news management is approached from three different perspectives in political communication: the rational choice approach(Quinn, 2012); the rhetorical approach (Brown, 2003); and the political communication compass (Hobbs, 2015). In all three approaches, spin doctors are portrayed as active intermediaries in the relationship between the political and the media spheres. These perspectives, while useful to understanding the dynamics of the relationship between practitioners and journalists, fail to recognise the wider scope of tasks and functions of political public relation practitioners.

Using the model of rational choice exchange, Quinn (2012) argues that political parties use spin doctors to control the information they provide to journalists. Journalists need this information, while at the same time parties need journalists to communicate with their voters; therefore, he argues a process of rational exchange –in the hands of the spin doctor- occurs. Quinn (2012) bridges rational-choice political theory and political communication to recognise the strategic decision-making processes behind spin doctors' tasks. The second approach uses the idea of political communication as a rhetorical process to highlight the active role of spin doctors (Brown, 2003). Brown (2003) holds that spin or news management –he uses both terms interchangeably- is a dialogic or rhetoric process where bargaining, dialogue and mobilisation happen between the two parties to the relationship. Therefore, the spin doctor establishes a rhetorical dialogue with journalists, negotiating and promoting certain frames and meanings. Brown (2003) argues news

management is something characteristic of democratic politics and a proactive strategy rather than a detrimental practice.

The third and final approach is the political communication compass (Hobbs, 2015). This approach proposes a framework to assess and categorise the ethical value of the spin doctor's actions using Habermas' concepts of ideal speech: unversalisation and free speech. Hobbs (2015) argues that news management –the spin doctor's main activity– is ethical when it does not interfere with the rational debate of ideas in the public sphere, and instead aims 'to raise awareness of politicians, issues, services or policy initiatives' (Hobbs, 2015 p.9). He notes that spin doctors can interfere with the rational debate of ideas when their activities are covert and aim to deceive and manipulate journalists and the public, including the creation of fake partisan blogs or the use of fake whistle-blowers. Hobbs' (2015) framework is useful to challenge the idea that only old press officers practiced ethical communication as some media studies defend –i.e. Sumpter and Tankard (1994). However, the framework lacks strong empirical data to test the validity or accuracy of some of the activities Hobbs attributes to spin doctors.

1.4.1 Media systems and spin doctors

The majority of studies on spin doctors focus their attention on the micro-level analysis of the spin doctor's activities. There are only a few studies on political communication that consider the relationship between spin doctors and the wider media and political spheres (Brown, 2003; Esser, Reinemann, and Fan, 2000; Frenkel-Faran and Lehman-Wilzig, 2007; Manning, 2001; McNair, 2011). The main issue with these studies is that they lack a strong empirical basis or defined theoretical framework. Despite these studies not developing a systematic examination of how political and media contexts influence spin doctors, they point towards the need for a deeper exploration of this issue. Two main approaches stand out in this area.

In the first, Brown (2011) claims that news management –or spin– is limited and less necessary in media systems with strong partisan audiences and strong

partisan media. He argues spinning is necessary in those contexts where news frames are open to be influenced and modified. If news media offer ideologically-shaped content, suited to the demands of the public or to pre-established political views, then the spin doctor has less scope for action and his or her services are less necessary. He uses the UK's two-party system to argue that spinning makes sense in contexts where the differences between the two parties are not so much ideological but of representation.

Nonetheless, Brown's (2011) views can be challenged because there is no comparative data to contrast whether spin doctors are less relevant in a strong partisanship media system. Until now, studies on journalistic sources point out that spin doctors are more powerful in those contexts where political and government sources are dominant in their relationship with journalists (Manning, 2001). Spin doctors' capacity to influence is limited in those contexts where there are elevated levels of mistrust between journalists and politicians (Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2001). However, these claims lack a wider theoretical framework to explain how these elements of mistrust and power could relate to other features of the media and political systems.

The second approach can be interpreted as opposed to Brown's (2011) arguments. Pfetsch (2001) argues that political public relations practitioners – spin doctors- play a role in both politically-oriented (Germany) and media-driven systems (USA). There are politically-driven political cultures, such as Germany, in which both journalists and political public relations practitioners perceive their roles as politically-oriented. Party goals shape how they perceive their professional role in a context where the traditional role of the German media has been that of mobilising pre-existing political factions. Political public relations practitioners seek coverage in those news media that 'match' their party aspirations. By contrast, the USA is a media-driven political culture where political public relations professionals seek unqualified media coverage in a more commercially-oriented media system. It should be noted that the aim of Pfetsch's (2001) study is the wider relationship between politicians and journalists, as is the case for the majority of studies in this area. Nevertheless,

this study(Pfetsch, 2001) remained, until now, the only comparative study on the relationship between politicians and journalists in the USA and Germany that used political public relations practitioners as units of analysis alongside journalists.

Brown (2011) and Pfetsch's (2001) studies indicate there are elements in the relationship between the media and the political sphere that might influence the characteristics of spin doctors. Partisanship and political parallelism between news media and political parties seem to be factors that could determine the power and relevance of spin doctors. However, these elements need a systematic and comparative approach to better understand the impact of the wider media and political systems on spin doctors.

1.5 Political marketing consultants

Political marketing frames communication in the political sphere as a process of exchange intended to identify and satisfy the needs of the political market (Cwalina, Falkowski, and Newman 2009). Therefore, political marketing practitioners 'focus on candidate image, strategic product development, target marketing, news management, spin control, permanent campaigning and negative advertising' (Plasser, Scheucher, and Senft, 1999 p.105). There is a significant body of research in the field of political marketing related to communication experts in the political sphere. Political marketing as a field uses the model of political consultants (Bohne, Prevost and Thurber, 2009) to define these communication experts. Political consultants are external experts hired by governments and political parties, mostly during election periods, to advise on specific areas such as media, polls, legislation and up to 34 different specialisations (Waismel-Manor, 2011). The object of study of this thesis is limited to in-house professionals in the area of communication and the market-oriented view of political marketing studies is not endorsed here. However, some political marketing scholars consider famous spin doctors such as Alastair Campbell as political marketing practitioners (Notesthe *et al.*, 2014).

Political marketing scholars were the first ones to identify that a change was happening within US parties as marketing experts were increasingly replacing 'party bosses' as campaign directors (Reid, 1998). 'Media expert' is identified as one of the actors of political marketing, though Kinsey (1999) suggests that, despite being the one with most public visibility, he/she is not the most important. Pollsters and researchers are the ones creating the market intelligence that is afterwards used by the media consultant; consequently, from a political marketing perspective, the former have higher significance (Kinsey, 1999). This perspective contrasts with media or political communication studies that present spin doctors as autonomous and the most powerful expert in parties and governments (Stockwell, 2007; Hobbs, 2015).

Political marketing conceptualises the political sphere as a political market and voters as consumers(Savigny, 2009). Political marketing includes political communication and public relations, but mostly refers to 'a range of marketing tools including voter profiling, segmentation, micro-targeting and e-marketing to inform their communication' that allow parties to 'respond to market intelligence in the way they design the political product they offer' (Lees-Marshment, 2010 p.2). Political marketing scholars show concern in the use of PR in the political sphere because they argue its efficiency in reaching voters is highly dependent on contextual factors like the strength of the opponent or the channel of communication (Cwalina, Falkowski, and Newman 2009). They regard political marketing as those strategies that underpin parties' activities, such as communication (Lees-Marshment, 2010).

In terms of techniques used in political marketing, Lees-Marshment (2010) points to those activities that allow the party to get better knowledge of their voters. Based on the UK Labour Party, she depicts a Marketing Oriented Party model in which knowledge obtained from focus groups, polling and segmentation is used in different stages to inform strategies, redefine goals, generate new policies and evaluate success or electoral failure (Lees-Marshment, 2010). Consequently, political marketing becomes a process and almost an organisational feature. Polling and segmentation become

organisational routines. Nevertheless, (Peng and Hackley (2007) argue the adoption of political marketing strategies seems to be dependent on internal party perceptions of political leaders and relevant figures. Parties adopt political marketing techniques and strategies if relevant figures see them as necessary for the party.

Political marketing studies contribute to demonstrating that there is a group of professionals -in this case political consultants- and not only isolated spin doctors that possess specific skills and expertise(Panagopoulos, 2006; Grossmann, 2009) to manage the communication needs of parties and governments. However, the political marketing framework refers to very specific models of party organisation that might not fit the wide range of different political parties examined in this thesis.

1.6 Political public relations: definitions and principles

Political public relations offers the most adequate normative framework for the purposes of this thesis. The youngest of all the fields analysed above, political public relations seeks its place combining public relations, political communication and political marketing theories. Political public relations conceptualise communication in the political sphere as a management process to establish influential relationships in the political sphere (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2013). There has been some interest in describing some of the activities of political public relations practitioners (Moloney and Colmer, 2001; Louw, 2005; Froehlich and Rüdiger, 2006; Jackson, 2010). However, there is no established definition of who is a political public relations practitioner other than its use as a synonym for 'spin doctor' (McNair, 2000; Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2001; Joe Atkinson, 2005; Jackson, 2010; de Vreese and Elenbaas, 2011; Somerville and Kirby, 2012). Hence, there is an opportunity to build a new definition of political public relations practitioner out of strong normative frameworks.

The emergent field of 'political public relations' offers a more comprehensive framework for the study of communication experts working in political parties

and governments. Three main arguments underpin the adequacy of political public relations. First, it places political organisations and their communication as objects of study per se. Parties, governments and other political actors are not examined through the lenses of their effects on the media. Second, the concept of the political public relations practitioner is useful for the purposes of this study because it is an integrated approach that acknowledges the managerial and strategic dimensions of communication experts working within political organisations (Jackson, 2010). Political public relations practitioners as a concept includes both external consultants and in-house practitioners working for political parties and governments. Third, it occupies that space between political communication studies that largely ignore public relations theory and public relations theory that addresses the uniqueness of political organisations' communication (Stromback and Kiousis, 2011).

Stromback and Kiousis (2011) claim political public relations aims to bring knowledge together from different fields such as political science or political communication. As a field of research, the distinctive trait of political public relations is that it recognises the purposeful nature of communication in politics –rejected from the discipline of public relations– and at the same time integrates different public relations functions. Their definition of political public relations is, until now, one of the most nuanced attempts to define this area of expertise and knowledge that is situated between political communication and public relations:

> *'Political public relations is the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals'* (Kiousis and Stromback, 2011 p.8).

This conceptualisation of political public relations as a management function of relationships and influence for political purposes steps away from limiting

conceptualisations of 'spin' as manipulative news management (Swanson, 2004). Jackson (2010) emphasises that political public relations involves both a strategic level determining the interaction between decision-makers and its public, and a tactical level designing specific campaigns for political actors. Therefore, it should not be limited to media relations or news management exclusively (Stromback and Kiousis, 2011) as has been the case in some studies where 'spin doctors' have been identified as the core players of news management (Manning, 2001). The scope of political public relations is wider than political communication's areas of study. Jackson (2010) finds the core difference between political communication and political public relations is that the latter focuses on a wider range of stakeholders who are influenced by or influence political actors. Political communication is usually focused on the chain of influence between politicians, journalists and public opinion.

1.6.1 The political public relations practitioner

In the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of studies that use the term 'political public relations practitioner' as a synonym for 'spin doctor' (Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2001; Atkinson, 2005; de Vreese and Elenbaas, 2009; McNair, 2011). These studies offer useful descriptions of the activities usually associated with political public relations. In doing so, these studies overcome some of the restricted views encountered in political communication, political marketing and media studies. However, these studies are still limited because they do not take into consideration the impact of political and media systems and the lack of robust empirical data to underpin their categorisations. They also fail to offer explanatory frameworks to understanding how a group of individuals happens to reproduce the same practices in different contexts. There have been some political PR studies at the supra-state level exploring EU institutions (Laursen and Valentini, 2013) but there are no comparative studies at the sub-state level. The argument unfolds as follows.

The main idea behind these political public relation studies is that the practice of political public relations includes not only news management or media relations, as defined in media and political communication studies. As Froehlich and Rüdiger (2006) declare, 'the goals of political public relations extend beyond bringing attention to or away from political issues' (p.18). The political public relations practitioner is, for instance, involved in communication processes in policy-making (Moloney and Colmer, 2001; Brown, 2003b; Louw, 2005). In that sense, Louw (2005) argues that the core activities of political PR practitioners are to: manage support/criticism during policy-making processes, including both media and stakeholder relations; manage internal party communication; and finally, and most importantly, shape audiences' perspectives.

McNair (2011) divides political public relations activities in 'proactive devices' and 'reactive political public relations'. As proactive devices, McNair (2011) refers to those activities 'designed principally to attract positive media coverage of an organization' (p.7), which include party conferences, news conferences or the use of image management. As reactive political public relations, he depicts those activities used to limit damage to the organisation, and in this area he includes 'lobbying of journalists, spinning of potentially damaging stories, suppressing of potentially damaging information' (McNair, 2011 p.7). The political public relations practitioner finds a place in almost all aspects of the daily routines of parties and governments.

Political public relations practitioners play strategic roles for parties and governments. Existing studies describe the strategic role of political PR practitioners as creators of a meta-narrative (Moloney and Colmer, 2001; Stockwell, 2007) and as agenda-setters (Aira, 2009). The role of the political public relations practitioner is to transform complex tactical moves happening behind the scenes into a meta-narrative (Stockwell, 2007) that seems natural or coherent to their public(Moloney and Colmer, 2001). They are also portrayed as active actors in agenda-setting processes. Aira (2009) claims the ultimate goal of 'spin doctors' is to influence news media agenda beyond

traditional campaign or political events coverage, making sure the party's interests get represented on a variety of different policy issues, such as culture or sports, thereby generating a sense of proximity between politicians and voters beyond traditional campaign coverage. Previous studies on spin doctors ignored that these practitioners have a role in the party or government's overall strategy. Practitioners' status –in-house or external- is not relevant, and neither is the organisation they work for –parties or governments.

Political public relations studies overcome the limitation of public relations studies that associated dynamics of political competition with propaganda (Coombs and Holladay, 2014; Lee, 2014). Political public relations studies incorporate the dynamics of political competition –such as winning elections or different patterns of party competition for power- as part of political public relations. Practitioners' activities are aimed to win elections, steer votes or maintain parties in power (Ribeiro, 2015; Jackson, 2010). Political public relations studies do not see the fact that top-down approaches to communication dominate parties and governments as problematic (Xifra, 2010a). They argue that political contexts -and also public relations in general- cannot be examined according to 'virtually impossible demands of dialogue' (Somerville and Kirby, 2012 p.240) as found in the dominant propaganda framework of public relations.

Despite offering a more nuanced approach, there is still scope for improving current understandings of political public relations practitioners. Political public relations studies do not have a strong empirical basis. Some of them used secondary sources, such as practitioners' memoirs, as empirical data (Louw, 2005; Stockwell, 2007). There are very few studies that interviewed or questioned practitioners (Aira, 2009; Xifra, 2010a). Furthermore, none of these studies take into account whether political or media systems might impact the practice of political public relations. There is an absence of comparative studies on the practice of political public relations.

Political public relations is a good frame to define the actions of communication experts working in the political sphere. However, the discipline of political public relations needs to theorise their practitioners. The first step should be that of identifying core practices, tasks and roles of political public relations practitioners. Nevertheless, these practices, tasks and roles are not the result of isolated individuals. These practices happen in a context and for a reason. In the following chapter, I argue this exercise of theory-building around political public relations practitioners starts by examining them as part of a professional group and also part of specific political and media systems.

1.7 Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated that different academic fields approached differently the same ontological object: communication experts in political parties and governments. These studies indicate that these experts threaten and challenge the watchdog function of journalists (media studies); help governments to build better relationships with their stakeholders but use propagandistic models of communication in political parties (public relations studies); are active mediators in the relationship between politicians and journalists (political communication studies); help parties and governments to understand the needs of the political market (political marketing studies); and play strategic roles in their organisations (political public relations).

This chapter also demonstrated these studies have serious limitations. They are dominated by field-biased frameworks that assess whether these experts are good or bad for democracies. These field-biased frameworks have generated a restricted and limited view of political PR practitioners. There is not robust empirical data behind these studies. Neither are there comprehensive explanatory frameworks that go beyond examining isolated individuals doing the same communication practices. Nor is there any attempt to explain whether political or media systems might have an impact on these experts.

On the basis of these arguments, the figure of the communications expert in the political sphere needs to be reconceptualised. Political public relations is a

good starting point to define and categorise communication practices in the political sphere. However, these practices need to be placed in a larger explanatory framework combining micro- and macro-levels of analysis to overcome existing limitations. The following chapter will propose a new framework to reconceptualise the figure of political public relations practitioner.

CHAPTER 2 PROFESSIONALIZATION OF POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS

This chapter develops the conceptual framework that underpins the study of political public relations practitioners in this thesis. This chapter proposes the reconceptualization of political public relations practitioners as a profession and offers two theoretical frameworks to examine them and the media and political contexts in which they operate.

The main argument of the chapter is as follows. Studies on political public relations practitioners lack the theoretical framework to explain how similar practitioners appear in different contexts. The practice of political public relations is most adequately explored if considered conceptually as a profession and examined accordingly in a comparative perspective. This chapter is based on the assumption that political expertise has developed over time, to the point where it has now grown in size and specialization (Bohne, Prevost and Thurber, 2009; Waismel-Manor, 2011; Serazio, 2014), in this case towards communication specialization. This political expertise now occupies a particular niche in the division of labour in the political field that can be seen through shared work and practices in different media and political contexts. Hence, there is a need to develop this analysis in a comparative framework.

The aim of the chapter is to structure a conceptual framework based on two elements: a neo-institutional approach to understand professions, their practices and structures; and the theory of media system models to articulate a systematic and comparative approach to explore the wider media and political contexts in which these practitioners work. Professions are social and dynamic institutions constituted by the existence of a series of shared practices and identities, which are not necessarily linked to the existence of formal institutions such as trade bodies or codes of ethics. These shared practices and identities emerge both from the active role of the individual practitioner as a crafter of its own occupation, and from wider social contexts –in this case, media and political systems- that shape and also determine the way these practices are put in place. Existing approaches to the professionalization of political communication are inadequate for the purposes of this thesis.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The first section explores existing approaches to the professionalization of political communication and political consultants, and demonstrates the lack of adequate sociological frameworks in the field. The second section presents the theory of media system models and its analytical concepts as the framework to explore the context in which professionals operate. The final section explores the main features of neo-institutional approaches to professions as the most adequate framework to study the specific characteristics of political public relations practitioners.

It is not the goal of this chapter to reconceptualise definitions of profession and professionalization (Macdonald, 1995; Suddaby and Muzio, 2015), nor is it to explore the adequacy of the three different media system models to the two cases analysed in this thesis –Scotland and Catalonia. This chapter extracts analytical concepts from existing theories on professions and media system models that will provide a comprehensive portrait of the political public relations occupation, both at the micro-level dimension (practices and self-identity) and the macro-level (influences of media and political contexts). These analytical concepts engage critically with the existing gaps in theoretical approaches to the study of political public relations practitioners, and provide the basis for articulating the research questions and aims of this thesis.

2.1 Current understandings of professionalization and professions within the political communication sphere

This section discusses the main shortcomings and limitations of existing studies on professions and professionalization in the political sphere. The term professionalization has been used in the fields of political communication and political marketing studies for a while now. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that these studies do not offer an adequate framework to explore the case of political public relations. The main limitations and shortcomings in these areas of study support the need to develop a less restrictive and sociologically-underpinned approach to the concept of profession, and a comparative approach that takes into consideration the influence of media and political systems beyond the US model of political consultants.

2.1.1 Professionalization of political communication

This section explores current conceptualizations of the so-called professionalization of political communication. The main argument is that current conceptualizations of the professionalization of political communication (Holtz-Bacha, 2008; Negrine & Lilleker, 2002; Petrová, 2012) divert their scrutiny away from the individual practitioner. These conceptualizations overlook the emergence of occupations. The term professionalization is used to describe how political organisations mimic media routines to become better competitors (Gibson & Rommele, 2009; Mancini, 1999; Strömbäck, 2009), and ultimately legitimise their power by becoming similar to their immediate context (D. Lilleker and Negrine, 2002). These studies are actually describing processes of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) rather than a professional project.

So far, political communication scholars have understood professionalization as the institutionalization of changes occurring in the interaction between political and media spheres (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Mancini, 1999; Negrine and Lilleker, 2002b). Professionalisation of political communication is depicted as a process of adaptation to the new media environment that brings a more efficient and planned organization of skills and campaign resources that are now aimed at specific goals (D. Lilleker and Negrine, 2002). Professionalized campaigns are characterised 'by being permanent, by the central campaign headquarters being able to coordinate the messages and management of the campaign and by using expertise in analysing and reaching out to members and target groups' (Strömbäck 2009, p.97). Therefore, political organisations become professionalized when they adopt centralised, permanent and expert-managed campaign organisation structures.

Professionalization of campaigns is understood as a series of activities and practices that can be measured through different professionalization indexes (Gibson and Rommele, 2001; Lisi, 2013; Tenscher *et al.*, 2015). These indexes measure the extent and relevance of 'professionalised' activities such as direct mail, telemarketing, newsletters, campaign teams, PR and media consultants, databases, opinion groups, opinion polls, focus groups, negative campaigning and continuous campaigning (Lisi,

2013). There are almost no references to the communication experts who design and manage these activities. These studies consider communication experts as playing a secondary role in the process of professionalization (Strömbäck, 2007). For instance, communication experts' perceptions are sometimes included in professionalization indexes to evaluate the efficiency of professional campaign techniques (Tenscher *et al.*, 2015). However, the emergence of communication experts is not considered a main driving force in the professionalization process.

Within these approaches focused on measuring the emergence of new activities, political public relations practitioners are only taken into consideration as elements that are now increasingly used by parties in their campaigns (Holtz-Bach, 2008). In that sense, Mancini (1999) points out that some of the routines and tasks that political public relations practitioners carry out were formerly in the hands of party members or amateur volunteers. However, these routines are not considered indicators of the existence of a profession, but indicators of the degree of media influence over politics. Studies on the professionalization of political communication fail to recognise the emergence of a professional project because there is a lack of sociological underpinning in their analysis.

Even in the very few cases when sociological dimensions have been put in place by these studies, they have failed to build strong theoretical underpinnings for the study of political communication or political public relations practitioners (Esser & Teschner, 2005). For instance, Negrine and Lilleker (2002) contend that political communication practitioners or political public relations cannot be considered professionals since they 'lack of those elements that characterise classic professions' (2002, p.28). Similarly, Pfetsch (2004) considers that both political public relations and journalism are 'underprofessionalized because socialization in both areas takes the form of 'learning on the job'' (2004 p.351). Both studies only consider the concept of profession from a widely-questioned functionalist approach in which professions can only be recognised if they have abstract certified academic knowledge and governing institutions. These scholars fail to acknowledge that these functionalist approaches have been long disregarded by sociologists –see for example Larson (1979)- and that

there are alternative frameworks to understand professions based, for instance, on power (Abbott, 1988) or identity (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011).

These limitations indicate the need to seek alternative sociological approaches to the concept of profession and professionalization that reflect the reality of emerging professions beyond these wider changes of institutional isomorphism.

2.1.2 Professionalization of external political consultants

Beyond existing research on the so-called professionalization of political communication, there is a growing body of political science and political marketing research that has explored the professionalization of consultants and party employees in the political sphere (i.e Bohne, Prevost, & Thurber, 2009; Farrell, Kolodny, & Medvic, 2001; Grossmann, 2009; Panagopoulos, 2006). Despite contributing a wide range of relevant empirical data, the majority of studies in this area depend on a functionalist perspective of professions, focused on identifying the classic professional elements: certified knowledge, trade bodies and regulations. In addition, the applicability of their findings to the cases of Catalonia and Scotland is limited because their conceptualization of political marketing experts or political consultants is limited to the US model of external experts hired only for campaign purposes (Medvic, 2003).

As Webb and Kolodny (2006) argue, the majority of studies on party professionals make use of a strict definition of profession that is only based on examining select items: training, mobility amongst different organisations, autonomy of the rank and file, self-regulation and commitment. When these elements are applied to the European context, it emerges that European political marketing consultants present a lower degree of professionalization than their US counterparts because of low levels of association membership in Europe and the lack of formal training possibilities (Plasser, Scheucher and Senft, 1999). US campaign consultants, however, have been found to be on the way to becoming a profession because they meet three out of the five criteria that form a profession: they have professional associations, a formal code of ethics and institutional training (Waismel-Manor, 2011). No alternative elements that could signal the existence of a professional project, such as shared practices or identities, are taken into consideration in these approaches.

Despite using a limited functionalist conception of profession (Wilensky, 1964), studies on this area indicate the need to explore the impact that different media and political systems might have on emerging occupations in the political sphere. For instance, Plasser, Scheucher, & Senft (1999) explain that European parties tend to have more in-house professionals, rather than external consultants, because of the institutional background of political competition in Europe. They find that party-centred styles of campaigns, media policies that allow free television advertising during campaigns and publicly-funded electoral campaigns facilitate the use of in-house professional party staff (Plasser, Scheucher and Senft, 1999).

The majority of studies (Panagopoulos, 2006; Bohne, Prevost and Thurber, 2009; Waismel-Manor, 2011) find that someone who is a permanent member of party staff cannot be considered a political consultant because 'party staffers and political consultants do not entirely share the same perspective on elections' (Medvic, 2003 p.124). Medvic (2003) justifies his position through arguing that one of the traits of party professionalization is the need to hire external consultants to deal with the complexities of modern campaigning. Some minority voices in the field, such as Kolodny and Dulio (2003), argue that party consultants hired in lieu of permanent staff should be considered party employees. This conceptualization of party employees would open the door to establish comparative equivalences between the European and US models.

The limitations in the political marketing and political science literature on professionalization indicate that there is a need for more comparative approaches in the study of emerging professions in the political sphere (Webb and Kolodny, 2006). Empirical data and alternative theoretical frameworks need to be drawn into the field to contest the idea that professionalization of communication in the political sphere is not only related to external professionals but also in-house experts are key in the European context.

2.2 Neo-institutional approaches to the profession of political public relations

This section explores neo-institutional approaches to profession and professionalization. The aim is to provide a theoretical basis to reconceptualise political public relations or spin doctors as a profession. The following sections argue neo-institutional theory on professions offers an adequate framework to systematically investigate political public relations as a profession and, at the same time, to engage critically with the main shortcomings of the literature.

The main issue with the academic literature is that there is not rich empirical data to explain how spin doctors, or political public relations practitioners, exist in different political and media systems but with similar characteristics (see Chapter 1). The main argument is that the use of the neo-institutional framework (Suddaby and Viale, 2011) will contribute to overcoming this gap in the existing academic studies. This thesis approaches political PR practitioners as a professional group as the way to offer a systematic analysis that explains the characteristics and features of these practitioners in different contexts. I aim to put forward an explanatory framework based on neo-institutional approaches to professions.

Neo-institutional theories on professions are significant and relevant for this thesis because they propose a redefinition of the traditional concept of profession. This new concept of profession is adequate to explore political public relations because it breaks with fixed notions of what elements should comprise a profession. Political public relations does not possess the traditional and characteristic elements of professions: trade bodies, codes of ethics, nor certified knowledge. Neo-institutional theories on professions are also adequate because they recognise the role of contexts and individual practitioners as active agents and constitutive elements of a profession. In that sense, neo-institutional theories provide a convenient framework to explore the impact that media systems have on political public relations.

2.2.1 Profession, professionalization and professionalism

The sociology of professions is an academic field that explores three inter-related concepts: professions, professionalization and professionalism (Macdonald, 1995; Empson, 2007). These three concepts help to explain the different theoretical frameworks that operate in the field: functionalist (Wilensky, 1964), power approach

(Freidson, 1986), and neo-institutional (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). The basic unit of analysis within the sociology of profession is the group of workers who are socially-recognised as a profession (Empson, 2007). The concept of professionalization explores how groups of workers become recognised as a profession (Freidson, 1999). Professionalism is the system of values and identities that supports professions (Evetts, 2013). It encompasses those norms, beliefs, and identities that define who is a professional or who acts professionally (Evetts, 2003).

There are three main paradigms in the sociology of professions that define professions, professionalism and professionalization: trait or functionalist paradigms (Durkheim, 1957; Wilensky, 1964); knowledge or power approaches (Larson, 1979; Freidson, 1983); and neo-institutional or hybrid approaches (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). Professions go from being defined as sets of norms in functionalist approaches, to socially-constructed elements to achieve power and social closure in power approaches, to the latest stage where professions seek new forms of survival in service-based economies (Svarc, 2015) and are seen as a hybrid (Noordegraaf, 2007). From a trait perspective, professionalization can only happen when occupations establish formal training schools, create professional associations and adopt a formal code of ethics to regulate practices (Wilensky, 1964). In opposition, power approaches defined professionalization as the power to create monopolitistic barriers of access to the occupation and gain autonomy from the state to articulate their own norms (Freidson, 1986). Finally, neo-institutionalists integrate the two previous approaches, recognizing that processes of professionalization have some stable and defined traits, but that these are socially-constructed through shared practices and not necessarily related to autonomy and monopolistic barriers.

Functionalist approaches describe the 'classic professional' (Wilensky, 1964; Parsons, 1968; Mayhew, 1997). Workers act professional –professionalism- when they adhere themselves to an externally-defined value system that regulates their actions, identities and behaviors as a guarantee of a good public service (Durkheim, 1957). From a power approach, the professional is someone who uses a scientific body of knowledge and gained experience under pre-defined competences –i.e. teachers teach- to offer solutions. This scientific knowledge and experience determine and guarantee the

quality of the service provided (Freidson, 1986). Neo-institutional approaches argue professionalism is nowadays used to guarantee economic success (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). Professionalism is no longer a supreme rule that guarantees a moral social order as claimed by functionalists (Parsons, 1968). Professionalism is seen as a discursive resource that shapes workers' behaviours (Fournier, 1999; Bévort and Suddaby, 2015). The following section explores in detail this figure of the new professional described by neo-institutionalist and the core principles of this theoretical framework.

2.2.2 Professions as embedded institutional actors

Neo-institutional theory offers an adequate framework to study political public relations practitioners for two reasons. The first reason is because the theory provides a more flexible definition of profession as a concept. Neo-institutional theory situates practitioners' actions, identities and relationships as constituents of one institution –a profession- embedded in a large eco-system. The second reason is because the theory explains the relationship and mechanisms of influence between professions and the large context in which they operate. Therefore, neo-institutional theory on professions offers a framework to understand the role that political public relations practitioners play in the political and media system. The argument unfolds as follows.

As the label indicates, neo-institutional theories on professions use neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) to explore professions, professionals and processes of professionalization. Neo-institutionalism is a social theory that aims to explain organizations – including schools, business, and political institutions- from their origins to the mechanisms that allow their existence and reproduction in society (Scott, 1995). Institutions or organizations cannot be understood as supreme and isolated elements that order social life. Neo-institutional theory argues institutions derive from the interactions between the internal actors of the institution, the institution and the context (Scott, 1995). Amongst the different approaches to neo-institutionalism –normative, historical, rational choice, constructivists (Hay, 2009)- constructivist approaches are the dominant ones in the sociology of professions (Suddaby and Muzio, 2015).

Sociologists who study professions use this neo-institutional framework to argue professions are social and dynamic institutions or institutional fields with distinguishable structures (Abbott, 1988; Fourcade, 2006; Suddaby and Viale, 2011). Neo-institutionalism theory places professions as socially-constructed institutions struggling to survive in larger eco-systems (Abbott, 1988; Brock and Saks, 2015). Professions are institutions, but no longer constituted by stable and fixed norms as classic sociologists argued. The structures that constitute professions are dynamic and derive from the interactions between the internal actors of the institution, the institution and the context (Scott, 1995). Professions are seen as interconnected institutions trying to survive in a large ecological system (Suddaby & Muzio, 2015). Abbott (1988) explains that professions define their place in society by claiming specific areas of expertise to be their 'own' in opposition to other occupations, filling the gaps left by others in a large eco-system.

The concept of profession becomes dynamic in the sense that is open to new interpretations. As a dynamic social institution, the content of profession is defined in each case by 'groups with common work' that apply a series of skills and abstract knowledge to a specific area that is claimed to be exclusive (Abbott, 1988). As Abbott (1988) states, professions choose the areas in which they want to achieve full control of their activities. It might be, for example, to control academic certification in some professions, or basic practice norms in others. This idea is key to incorporate under the umbrella 'profession' new groups of workers, such as political public relations practitioners, that until now remained out of this category. Neo-institutionalists see the emergence of a new hybrid model of professionals in Western societies (Noordegraaf, 2007; Muzio *et al.*, 2011; Svarc, 2015). The concept of hybrid professional refers mostly to changes in professionalism that are the new focus of study for these neo-institutionalists.

2.2.3 New professionals and hybrid professionalism

Neo-institutionalism in the sociology of professions has moved the focus of attention from the elements that indicated the existence of a profession to the elements that maintain and reproduce professions. Researchers are no longer interested in examining

different pathways to becoming a profession or to achieving power in certain areas. They are interested in how professions manage to survive in larger eco-systems (Fournier, 2000; Thornton, 2002; Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011; Suddaby and Viale, 2011; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012; Bévort and Suddaby, 2015). The elements of survival are found in professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2007; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). Professionalism –i.e. behaving in a professional manner- is seen as the core structure that sustains professions in a context where neo-liberal economic policies restrict previous models of professionalization (Svarc, 2015); from this, a new hybrid professional emerges.

One of the main critiques to neo-institutionalism is its obsession with structures and the marginalization of actors and agency within it (Empson, 2007). In one of the founding texts of neo-institutionalism, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) described how professions interacted with their context by imitating practices of other competitors and, therefore, becoming similar in a process of isomorphism. Similarly, Scott (1995), one of the fathers of neo-institutionalism, identified how professions, as institutions, create strong cognitive frameworks and systems of belief to survive in the larger eco-system. Nevertheless, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) overlooked the role that individual practitioners play in these structures. Neo-institutionalists in the sociology of professions bring the focus back to individual actors (Noordegraaf, 2007; Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011; Muzio *et al.*, 2011). In this process of survival, individual actors –in this case, professionals- have the capacity to 'create, maintain and disrupt institutions' (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, p. 215).

One of the most interesting elements of neo-institutional theory is the figure of the hybrid professional and its hybrid professionalism. Recent studies point out the disappearance of the knowledge-based process of professionalization (Thornton, 2002; Muzio *et al.*, 2011; Bévort and Suddaby, 2015). In other words, there are professions that no longer seek to create a scientific and certified body of knowledge, and they no longer create structures such as trade bodies to act autonomously from the state or other powers. Professionalization is then 'no mere matter of step-by-step strengthening of professional control in specific occupational domains—it has become a matter of contradictory and controversial attempts to get a grip on occupational

control' (Noordegraaf, 2007 p.764). These studies point out that the classic model of professions can hardly be reproduced nowadays. Professions cannot establish strong boundaries because they operate in networked societies where work flexibility is the new rule (Fournier, 2000; Kirpal and Brown, 2007). Nor can they create strong professional associations to regulate practices because regulation does not fit in neoliberal economies (Evetts, 2003).

Neo-institutional scholars then realise that professionalism, or being professional, is the core-centre of a series of new professions. Professionalism is presented as 'the occupational behaviours and practices of workers who not only have full-time jobs but also possess a clear sense of what their work is about and when it is effective' (Schinkel & Noordegraaf, 2011 p.68). The idea of profession maintains or gives significance to these self-identities. Professionalism is thus the social capital of professions (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011).The focus then moves to practitioners and their way of behaving professionally. Lawrence et al. (2001) define this new focus as institutional work. They argue 'the study of institutional work focuses on situated practices of actors reflexively engaged with the institutions that surround (penetrate) them' (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, p. 56). Professional identity is understood as 'the constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role' (Schein, 1978 in Ibarra et al., 1999, p.764). Therefore, studying actors and professionalism is also studying institutions and their contexts because they are all mutually constitutive. This conceptualization of professionalism opens the door to combine micro- and macro-levels of analysis.

In this new focus towards professionalism, scholars identify a change towards a dominant market logic in professionalism (Thornton, 2002). Professions need to be actively engaged with the market to survive: they need to generate economic benefit more than generate something good for society (Muzio *et al.*, 2011). The new hybrid professionalism is constituted by 'values and skills, such as creativity, multitasking, artistic talent, intuition and expression, orientation to the social economy and the need for clients' (Svarc, 2015 p.402). Being professional is being efficient, and that is satisfying the client and generating income. New professions sell to their clients not their capacity to apply a scientific body of knowledge to specific problems, but their

expertise and creativity in finding new solutions to their problems (Noordegraaf, 2007; Svarc, 2015). This portrait of the new professional or hybrid professional might be closer to that of political public relations practitioners. Political public relations practitioners do not have a scientific body of knowledge like doctors or nurses; rather, they have their experiences and capacity to fulfil the communicative needs of parties. These experiences and capacities derive and depend on the larger eco-system in which they operate.

Professions cannot be explained as isolated phenomena: they are embbeded in specific political and social contexts at the nation or state level (Fournier, 1999; Witz, 2003). In addition, professions also interact and respond to a globalized sphere (Fourcade, 2006). From a neo-institutional perspective, professions as institutions are part of 'interacting system, an ecology' (1988, p.33) where larger social forces affect individual professions 'through their structure within which professions exist' (Abbott, 1988 p.33). In the case of political public relations, the two most relevant structures are the political and media systems. Their eco-system is the relationship between the political and the media spheres.

2.3 Professions, media systems and sub-state nations

This section outlines a theoretical framework to examine the relationship between political public relations and media systems in sub-state nations from a comparative perspective. To do so, I use Hallin and Mancini's (2004) conceptual framework to compare media systems. I define four key elements to understand the political public relations' eco-system. These four elements are: political parallelism, or the nature of links between parties and media; development of political public relations professionalism (the original category was journalistic professionalism); structure of media markets, including social and online media; and the degree and characteristics of sub-state intervention on media policies and public broadcasting (the original category referred to state intervention). This reconceptualization of the theory of media systems incorporates two new elements: the profession of political public relations and sub-state nations.

As explained in Chapter 1, one of the main limitations of previous studies on political public relations practitioners, or spin doctors, is that they overlook the context where these practitioners operate despite the evidence that they exist in different countries (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; Stockwell, 2007; Quinn, 2012). Comparative studies on political communication and media systems usually ignore political public relations practitioners as significant actors in the media sphere (J. G. Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; van Kempen, 2007; Aalberg, van Aelst and Curran, 2010). In addition, these comparative studies of political communication and media systems tend to ignore sub-state nations as contexts of study (Mihelj, 2012; Fernández-Quijada and Sellas, 2013).

2.3.1 The relationship between the media and the political spheres

The basic characteristic of political public relations is that it is situated in the interplay between the political and the media spheres (Frenkel-Faran and Lehman-Wilzig, 2007; McNair, 2011). The term 'media systems' in its most strict sense refers to a collection of organisations and structures that take part in the process of mass communication (Snczyk, 2009; McQuail 1995). However, within the context of political communication studies –and also in this research- it is used as a reference to the interaction between the political and the media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). It is the case that political communication scholars have invested in comparative approaches of media systems because they are interested in 'the effects of different ways of controlling the mass media politically' (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995 p.61). These frameworks seem to be a good starting point to begin exploring the relationship between political public relations and their eco-system.

Different perspectives have emerged in this area. From a normative and functionalist perspective, the classic Four Theories of the Press (Siesbert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956) argues that media systems' political organization and functions are determined by the governing principles and structures of the societies in which they operate. Siesbert et al. (1956) described states where the press was entirely controled by the government (Soviet); where the press was subject to political scrutiny and government licensing (authoritarian); where the operating principle was freedom of speech (libertarian); and states where the press was used to promote beneficial political issues

(social responsibility). These models have been strongly criticised for the lack of elements that actually analyse the relationship between the economical forces and media structures (Nerone, 1995), and for not acknowledging variances within national systems (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995) and being ethno-centric (Curran and Park, 2000).

Political communication studies in this area have looked at the effects that the interaction between the media and the political system have on audience orientation towards politics (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995; van Kempen, 2007); characteristics of the production and communication of political messages (Pfetsch, 2013); and the content of news media (Aalberg, van Aelst and Curran, 2010). However, the most important development in this area of study was the publication of Hallin and Mancini's theory of media system models (McQuail, 2005; Hardy, 2012; Humphreys, 2012). Hallin and Mancini (2004) examine the interaction between the media and the political systems because of their effect on wider democratic politics; to that point, their approach includes not only media-centred perspectives. One of the strengths of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) theory of media systems is that they have incorporated critiques to their theory in posterior reformulations of it (Mancini, 2013; Mancini, 2012, 2015; Mancini & Hallin, 2012).

The aim of the theory of media systems is to explore the political role of news media and its relationship to democratic politics (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). From their point of view, the relationship between media and political systems is articulated according to four dimensions: political parallelism, professionalization of media-related occupations, development of media markets and state intervention. Building from an empirical analysis of 18 countries, they outline three different models – North Atlantic, Liberal and Polarized Pluralist – on the basis of four dimensions: development of media markets, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism and state intervention in the media system. Following these models, Catalonia –as part of Spain or as a Mediterranean nation- is classified as a Polarized Pluralist model and Scotland –as part of the UK- belongs to the Liberal model. Countries belonging to the Liberal model are characterised by an early development of commercial newspapers, little state intervention in media policies, strong journalistic professionalism, and

politically-neutral public broadcast systems. By contrast, in Polarized Pluralist models, there are higher levels of political parallelism; stronger state intervention in media policies; politically-controlled public broadcast systems; and a weaker development of commercial press (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

They argue the relationship between news media and political powers depends on the degree of mass circulation and the commercial orientation of newspapers. Newspapers oriented towards generating massive sales with a wide-range of targeted products tend to be less involved in the political game because their goal is to satisfy readers' needs more than politicians. Political parallelism refers to the different degrees to which news media have distinct political orientations within the political system –referred as the party system. The ideological distribution of political parties within a system influences the degree of ideological and structural dependency of news media over the political system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

There are many levels of analysis in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) theory of media system models: they outline three different models of media systems in Europe -North Atlantic, Liberal and Polarized Pluralist; they analyse the historical development of news media and journalism; and they examine the different patterns of political systems in Europe. However, for the purposes of this thesis, the most important element is the framework they propose to compare media systems. This framework offers a systematic approach (with some limitations - see the following sections) to explore the relationship between the political and the media spheres and, therefore, the eco-system where political public relations operate.

2.3.2 Incorporating political public relations into media systems

The theory of media system models has received numerous critiques and contributions since its publication (de Albuquerque, 2011; Hardy, 2012; Humphreys, 2012; Norris, 2013; Pfetsch, 2013; Brüggemann *et al.*, 2014). However, none of these critiques point to the fact that the dimension of professionalization is only applied to journalists and not to other communication-related actors such as political public relations. Spin doctors or political public relations practitioners are absent from the conceptual framework outlined by Hallin and Mancini. The theory of media system models not

only overlooks political public relations but their conceptualization of professionalism and professionalization need to be revisited.

Hallin and Mancini's (2004) conceptualization of the relationship between journalistic professionalism and political parallelism is useful to start conceptualizing the role that political public relations might have in media systems. The two scholars refer only to the professionalization and professionalism of journalists, leaving the door open to raise similar questions 'about other kinds of media professionals' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004 p.34). Hallin and Mancini (2004) argue that the degree of professionalization of journalists reflects the closeness or separation between the political and media systems. The more journalists are professionally autonomous, the less political powers can interfere in news media. Journalists are less professionalised when 'political parallelism is very high, with media organizations strongly tied to political organizations, and journalists deeply involved in party politics' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004 p.38).

Their understanding of professionalism and professionalization falls into a very limited view of professions and privileges a liberal model of journalism (Hardy, 2012). The degree of professionalization in this case refers to the capacity of journalism as an institution to remain autonomous from political and economic powers. Journalists achieve higher levels of professionalization and autonomy when 'authority over journalists is exercised primarily by fellow journalists' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004 p.35). Journalists become professionals when they have distinct professional norms that respond to their collective interests and respond to altruistic principles.

As neo-institutionalists point out, professions aim to achieve complete autonomy from other powers, and doing so while in constant exchange with their surrounding institutions (Abbott, 1988; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). In this constant exchange, professions develop mechanisms to keep their role, place and legitimacy in the larger eco-system. Therefore, Hallin and Mancini (2004) miss one element in their analysis: mechanisms for maintenance and reproduction of a profession in a larger eco-system. Hallin and Mancini (2004) fail to identify that there are other actors in the relationship between politicians and journalists such as political PR practitioners.

Pfetsch (2013) criticised Hallin and Mancini's (2004) approach because they do not account for the subjective dimension of the actors that are involved in the relationship between media and political systems. Certainly, the conceptual framework, even though it claims to examine subjective dimensions such as professionalism (Evetts, 2013), does not capture micro-level dynamics between different actors. Despite these limitations, Hallin and Mancini's framework is a good starting point for the purposes of this thesis. If the characteristics of the relationship between political and media powers have a direct impact on journalists, it might be the case that similar parallelisms can be drawn to political public relations. Are political public relations different in contexts where there is a higher level of interventionism from political powers in news media?

2.4 Sub-state nations in the conceptual framework of comparative media systems

The theory of media system models is designed for the analysis of nation-states (Brüggemann *et al.*, 2014). However, Hallin and Mancini's (2004) conceptual framework can be adapted to explore media systems in sub-state nations. To do so, I incorporate three analytical concepts: the decentralization of powers and media policies (Humphreys, 2012) as part of the role of the state category; the characteristics of the nation-building process (Keating, 1996); and the dynamics between the national and the state-wide media markets (Chakravartty and Roy, 2013) as part of the structure of media markets category. These three elements can be used to strengthen Hallin and Mancini's conceptual framework, along with the above reformulation of professionalism.

The basic assumption of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) conceptual framework is that each nation-state has a single and integrated media system. This assumption is not limited to Hallin and Mancini but dominates most of comparative studies in political communication (Hepp and Couldry, 2009). Ignoring sub-state media systems has two main consequences for Hallin and Mancini's theory: they fail to acknowledge that media systems are no longer limited to the political boundaries of states (Chadwick, 2013); and that the decentralization, or not, of media policies (Humphreys, 2012) is an

important element in the relationship between political powers and the media sphere. The bias against sub-state nations can be observed when Hallin and Mancini (2004) only note that some countries are not homogenous and they 'characterized by regional variations in both media and political systems: the media in Quebec and Catalonia are distinct in a number of ways from the media in the rest of Canada or Spain' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004 p. 71).

In a latter revision of their work, they keep affirming that regional differences in terms of media structures, such as regional televisions in Germany or Spain, are 'important to understand those cases, but less relevant to others we were considering' (Hallin & Mancini, 2012 p.212). However, it is not a matter of mere regional variations, but that sub-state nations such as Scotland and Catalonia have their own media system (Schlesinger & Benchimol, 2014) that co-exists with state-wide media systems. Previous critiques to Hallin and Mancini's conceptual framework criticised the lack of acknowledgement of sub-state nations and their media systems as part of plural and complex states (McQuail, 2005; Remington, 2006; Hardy, 2012; Humphreys, 2012; Chakravartty and Roy, 2013). I build on from these critiques to incorporate three new elements to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) conceptual framework: decentralization of powers and media policies; new media; and nation-building projects.

2.4.1 Decentralization of powers and media policies

Decentralization of powers, and especially of media policies, should be included in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) conceptual framework. Previous critiques to Hallin and Mancini's analytical categories pointed out they should include in their comparative framework the categories of 'Ethnic/Linguistic Structures (homogeneous, regionalised, sub-state nationalism)' and 'Majoritarian or Consensual on Federal/Unitary Dimension (unitary, decentralised, federal)' to acknowledge the existence of sub-state nations (Humphreys, 2006 p.165). While this is a good starting point, this proposal has some limitations. The concept of ethnic/linguistic structures is problematic because the mere existence of ethnic or linguistic diversity does not indicate the existence of sub-state nations. Sub-state nations are characterised by having distinct political claims and constitutional aspirations (Keating, 1996; Tierney, 2005), which might or might not be associated with ethnic or linguistic diversity. The

concept of a unitary dimension of the state is useful to identify the wider structure of the state, but it should incorporate what degree of decentralization or what powers operate at the sub-state level, with a special focus on media policies.

2.4.2 New(s) media, professions and nation-building

The other element missing in Hallin and Mancini's analytical framework is the role that the media plays in nation-building projects both at the state and sub-state level. One might argue that in a globalized media context with a strong influence of social media and online news media, national boundaries are no longer a relevant category to explore media systems (Hepp and Couldry, 2009; Hardy, 2012). Nowadays, political public relations opperate in a similar media-saturated system dominated by technological expansion and a 24/7 news cycle (Stromback and Van Aelst, 2013). There is a transnational context related to the phenomena of mediatization of politics, understood as the adoption of media logics in political organizations, that affects the political public relations occupation (Stromback, 2008). Professions interact with transnational contexts –and start processes of internationalization- at the moment when the structures of the institutions that surround the profession, along with political and social contexts, are reproduced on an international scale (Fourcade, 2006). Nevertheless, both public and private media are still rooted in specific visions of nationhood despite the emergence of transnational news platforms such as google news (Flew and Waisbord, 2015).

Hallin and Mancini only observe that media markets have a series of aims, such as 'the maintenance of national language and culture' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004 p.84). However, the maintenance of national language and culture is in itself a project of nation-building (Keating, 2008). This nation-building dimension seems to be a relevant dimension that might play a role in the relationship between political powers and the media in any level of politics. Without this dimension, it cannot be explained why Catalonia created its own communicative space and public broadcaster (Guimera and Fernandez, 2014) while Scotland continues to use the BBC's structure and has no competences over media policies (Keating, 2010).

2.4.3   Revisiting the features of political parallelism

Political parallelism is the analytical concept that explores how political parties or governments and the media (traditional and online) align themselves according to similar political, ideological or cultural views (Mancini, 2012; Ciaglia, 2013; Artero, 2014). It is argued here the concept of political parallelism is a key element to explore the role that political public relations play in media systems. This concept is also key to understanding the similarities and differences between the Scottish and Catalan media systems (see Chapter 3). However, Hallin and Mancini's (2004) original definition of the term and its features have some limitations. Their definition did not include online media and televisions. Their definition of political parallelism also implies that Southern European cases are the deviation of an ideal model represented by Anglo-Saxon countries (de Albuquerque, 2013). The argument unfolds as follows.

The concept of political parallelism offers a convenient tool to contextualise the strategies and tactics described by political public relations practitioners. Political parties and governments need to get their messages across and the media needs to adopt a position around current policy issues, parties' candidacies, elections and so on (Artero, 2014). When these positions coincide, political parallelism occurs (Mancini, 2012). However, for these interests to coincide, political parties and governments need to deploy a series of efforts, techniques and strategies, such as promoting consensus/disagreement around policy issues, or rewarding/ignoring supporters (de Albuquerque, 2013). Do political public relations practitioners, as media relations managers, play a role in political parallelism?

In one of the later revisions of media systems theory, Mancini (2012) explains that political parallelism can be observed through: bias in the selection and treatment of news; journalistic political affiliations or credos; and ties between parties and newspapers in terms of similar views; and membership of owners or journalists in the same elitist circuits as politicians. In this revision, he also included online media – missing from the first conceptual framework- as an element that contributes to political parallelism. Posterior redefinitions of political parallelism added to this list the existence of media coalitions in favour of specific policies or party (Artero, 2014) and

new forms of political control over broadcast governance (Ciaglia, 2013). Both categories seem quite relevant to explore the referendum/post-referendum scenarios in Catalonia and Scotland and the debates around public broadcasting in each case.

The concept of political parallelism comes associated with certain normative views that make it complex to handle. Hallin and Mancini use the concept of political parallelism as the core axis to differentiate between low political parallelism, i.e. public spheres associated with the liberal model of watchdog media, and high political parallelism, i.e. public spheres that divert from this model (Mancini, 2012). They use the categories of internal and external pluralism to define the different characteristics of political parallelism in each public sphere. In contexts of high political parallelism, each news media adopts specific political views –external pluralism. Hallin and Mancini see high political parallelism as related to the existence of clientelistic ties between parties and newspapers (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002), and to political polarization and the social marginalisation of groups that do not fall within existing political cleavages. However, in low parallelism, news media do not stick to one political cleavage but represent an internal plurality of views: news media act as independent institutions that watch political powers. While Catalonia –as part of Spain- belongs to the first category (Humanes *et al.*, 2013), Scotland –as part of the UK- is usually associated to low levels of political parallelism. Therefore, do political public relations play different roles depending on the features of political parallelism?

2.5 Conclusions and research questions

Chapter 1 demonstrated that existing studies on spin doctors and political public relations practitioners offer a limited image of communication experts working in parties and governments. There is a lack of rich empirical data. This chapter demonstrates that, in addition to the lack of rich empirical data, there is a lack of conceptual frameworks that could explain the existence of similar practitioners in different contexts. This chapter argues that there are gains to be made if political public relations practitioners are conceptualised as a professional group and examined in a comparative perspective, taking into consideration the wider media-political system in sub-state nations. These gains are as follows.

To approach and conceptualise political PR practitioners as a professional group, this thesis offers a systematic and theoretical framework to explain the existence of similar practitioners in different contexts. Section 2.1 shows that there is a lack of relationship between current understandings of the professionalization of political communication (Mancini, 1999; Negrine *et al.*, 2007; Strömbäck, 2009) and the emergence and consolidation of occupations within the political communication sphere. Neo-institutional theory on professions (Suddaby and Viale, 2011) provides a framework to overcome this conceptual gap in the field of political communication. The neo-institutional framework provides a more dynamic and flexible approach to understand professional groups that do not follow traditional pathways of professionalization – namely the creation of trade bodies or codes of ethics. Professions are understood as dynamic social institutions constructed by their own practitioners and their environment (Scott, 2008). Neo-institutional theory and its subsequent application in the sociology of professions makes a strong case for understanding institutions –such as professions- and contexts as a whole (Kuhlmann, 2013): hence, the comparative framework proposed.

Chapter 1 shows that there is a lack of comparative studies on communication experts working in political parties and governments. This chapter argues the media system models theory (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) can provide the conceptual basis to articulate a comparative study on political public relations practitioners. The main reason is because Hallin and Mancini (2004) offer a comprehensive framework to analyse the relationship between media and political systems. The relationship between media and political systems is the context in which political PR practitioners operate. This chapter also argues that there are gains in using sub-state nations as the contextual frame for the comparative study. Although Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework was conceived with the state as the only political unit, decentralization and globalization processes (Keating, 2001) bring forward other political units of analysis such as sub-state nations.

The conclusion of this chapter leads to the two research questions of this thesis. The first one relates to the conceptualization of political PR practitioners as a profession. If political public relations is conceptualised as a profession, what are the constitutive

elements of the performance and practice of political public relations? The second one relates to the comparative dimension. If media and political systems are taken into consideration, how do media systems impact the political public relations profession?

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH CONTEXT: MEDIA SYSTEMS IN SCOTLAND AND CATALONIA

This chapter examines the relationship between the political and media systems in Catalonia and Scotland. The aim of the chapter is to outline the political and media systems where political public relations practitioners operate. Political public relations work for the formal institutions conforming the political sphere: political parties and governments. However, these professionals are situated in the interactions between the political and the media sphere (McNair, 2011). Therefore, both spheres or systems are of equal importance to understanding the profession. More generally, the chapter examines the most important similarities and differences between the two cases, paving the way for the empirical analysis provided in the next two chapters.

The main argument of the chapter is as follows. Both Catalonia and Scotland are living crucial political moments that generate a fertile political landscape for political public relations. Scottish and Catalan parties require strong communication efforts to put across their different views on the respective debates about constitutional change and independence at the top of media's day-to-day agenda (Breeze *et al.*, 2015; Elias, 2016). However, Catalan practitioners operate in a large pluralist and differentiated Catalan media market, with strong interventionist media policies (Gifreu, 2012) and in a political system characterized by a quasi-state structure and a pluralist polarized party system. Scottish practitioners operate in political system with less powers devolved to Holyrood and a moderate pluralist party system (Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010), with a tradition of non-interventionist media policies, and a media system where Scottish news media are gradually declining (Schlesinger and Benchimol, 2014) and UK-wide news media dominate the landscape.

The analysis is driven by according to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) theory of media system models and the dimensions that they created to explore the relationship between media and political systems. This chapter focuses on three out of the four dimensions of the media system model's conceptual framework: state intervention in media policies (adapted to sub-state nations), political parallelism, and structure of media markets (including social and online media). As explained in Chapter 2, the

fourth dimension –professionalization of journalists- is adapted to the professionalization of political public relations and examined in the data analysis because of its central relevance to this thesis. This chapter focuses only in the contextual elements that are relevant to political public relations in Scotland and Catalonia.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The first section explores the characteristics of the sub-state political system, and the role of the sub-state in media policies. It explores how the different media policies relate to projects of nation-building in Scotland and Catalonia. The section also reflects on the impact of media policies on the structure of media markets in both contexts. The second section also explores political parallelism in the context of the independence referendum debates in Scotland and Catalonia. The focus is on the elements that influence news media political orientation and party loyalties. I use Hallin and Mancini's dimensions to highlight the differences and similarities between Catalonia and Scotland's media systems, and not to test the adequacy of their three media system models –Liberal, Corporativist and Polarized Pluralist.

3.1 The characteristics of the political system at the sub-state level

This section explores the different configurations of the political system at the sub-state level in Catalonia and Scotland. More precisely, it explores the main characteristics of key political actors and institutions involved in the production and dissemination of political communication (Mazzoleni, 2010) in the two contexts.

The political configuration of Scotland and Catalonia is brought to the attention because political PR practitioners interact with and work for two key institutions of the political system: governments and political parties. Nevertheless, the cases of Scotland and Catalonia exemplify an alternative territorial and institutional configuration that does not correspond with the traditional conception of the nation-state (Keating, 2001). Political PR practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia operate in a political system that has not only a differentiated nation-building project but also dedicated political institutions and its own party system (Swenden and Maddens,

2009). The following lines will explore these political institutions focusing on the models of government and party systems in Scotland and Catalonia.

3.1.1 The model of government

The main difference between traditional conceptions of nation-states and sub-state units is the multilevel dimension of their political systems. Both in Spain and the UK political power is not distributed in homogeneous ways neither it is centralised in one political institution, both countries have an asymmetrical constitutional design (Keating, 2001). The political system is organised in terms of 17 autonomous regions in Spain and 3 devolved nations in the UK with different levels of power and different government systems in each of them. Scotland and Catalonia have not only their respective parliaments but different models of government structure that are of relevance to the study of political public relations in these contexts. Different models of government and democratic authority legitimation explain some of the differences encountered between Catalan and Scottish practitioners working in government settings –see Chapter 6. While the Catalan government has the power to appoint most management positions inside government agencies and institutions, Scotland relies on a professionalised and politically impartial body of civil servants that work along few politically appointed special advisors.

Scotland's political system structure is that of a Cabinet government that follows the Westminster model (Keating, 2001), one parliament elected by a mixed system of proportional representation and first past the post, and a moderated pluralist party system. This political configuration was adopted after the first devolution process of powers from Westminster to Scotland in late 90s. Scotland, despite its union with England in 1707, has remained institutionally distinct thanks to its unique education, justice, and religious systems (McCrone, 2001) and a distinct Scottish press (Schlesinger, 1998). Nowadays Scotland's devolved powers are health, transport, local government, justice, agriculture, sports and arts (Scottish Parliament, 2016).

In relation to the research project here undertaken, one of the most important characteristics of Scotland's political design is the Westminster model of cabinet government (Birrell, 2012) . Scotland's government structures have been associated

to a rational-legal authority model (Keating, 2010) where the bureaucratic apparatus of the state is independent from particular parties and social groups, and acts accordingly to clear established procedures (Guzmán, 2014). This model explains, amongst other factors, the fact that the figure of 'spin doctor' that became famous in late 90s in the UK (Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2001) is reproduced in a similar way at the Scottish level. In the cabinet model, the prime minister and the group of cabinet ministers are served by body of professional and politically neutral civil servants and a group of politically appointed special advisors in different areas, communication amongst one of them (Fawcett and Gay, 2010). The special advisor in charge of communication is the one identified in the news media as the government's 'spin doctor' (McNair, 2000; Schlesinger, David and Dinan, 2001). Special advisors are regulated by a Code of Special Advisors (Scottish Government, 2017) that limits some of their tasks and roles –see Chapter 6. This model diverges from Catalonia's government structure.

Catalonia is amongst the 17 Spanish autonomous regions considered one of the 'historical nationalities' because Catalonia, along with the Basc Country and Galicia, had lost its political institutions during Franco's dictatorship and also, because Catalonia had remained a separated kingdom –The Crown of Aragon- until 1710. Guibernau (2004) argues Catalonia acts as a 'quasi-state' since the majority of powers are devolved to its regional parliament. Catalonia's dedicated powers are agriculture, language policy, radio and television services, healthcare, urban planning, culture, local government, territorial organisation, education and civil law (Flores, 2013). As part of the political contest between Spain and Catalonia, Catalonia's legal-authority model has been accused of letting particular party interests dominate policy making (Keating, 1996). For instance, policies have been criticised for promoting clientelism, specially in relation to those considered to be essential elements of their nation-building project such as the creation of the Catalan Broadcasting System or the system of public subsidies to Catalan news media (Fernandez, 2013).

 Catalonia's government is organised under the structure of the 'Generalitat' where a President of the Generalitat is elected by the Catalan Parliament formed through a system of proportional representation (Pallarés and Keating, 2003). The President of

the Generalitat elects its government members or 'consellers'. The government executive has the power to appoint not only special advisors but most management level positions in government agencies, amongst those the entire government communication team (Marin, 2016). Unlike Scotland, civil servants in Catalonia are not usually found in government communication departments. Neither is there a code of conduct for politically appointed special advisors. In that sense, there are no similar conflicts to those experienced between Alastair Campbell and UK civil servants working in government communication departments (McNair, 2004).

3.1.2 Party systems in sub-state nations

The main difference between Scotland and Catalonia's party systems is that in Scotland the pro-independence issue is usually associated with centre-left parties (McCrone, 2001) while nowadays in Catalonia there are pro-independence parties ranging from centre-liberal to radical left positions (Martí and Cetrà, 2016). In both cases, the main political change in the first decade of the 21st century is that parties that had historically supported more powers being transferred to Scotland and Catalonia have moved their political positions to a clear support for the independence of both nations (Keating, 2014; Serrano, 2014). The characteristics of party systems are of relevance for the study of political public relations because these can help understand, for instance, the different patterns of mobility of professionals from one party to another (see Chapter 5).

In sub-state contexts with very active projects of nation-building party systems have one additional characteristic: in addition to the traditional left-right political spectrum, parties also position themselves along the pro or more sovereign/ anti-independence or less self-rule positions (Andre, Depauw and Deschouwer, 2016). Because of the multi-level political design previously explained, parties compete at the sub-state level for seats in the Catalan or Scottish parliament, they compete to represent Catalan or Scottish voters at the respective state-wide parliaments, and they also take part in the European elections. In both cases the party system is constituted by a wide range of sub-state parties only and federal branches of state-wide parties –see Chapter 5.

Both Scotland and Catalonia have had a distinct party system even before their political institutions were formally devolved in late 90s and late 70s respectively (Keating, 1997). For instance, the Scottish National Party – the government party at the time of writing these lines- was founded in 1934 and some of Catalonia's historical pro-independence parties such as Esquerra Republicana (Republican Left) were founded in 1931. Not only pro-independence or pro-sovereignty parties have a sub-state agenda, in both cases federal branches of state-wide parties have adopted Catalan or Scottish agendas that sometimes differ from the party's position at the state level (Hepburn, 2010). From a communication perspective, this sub-state agenda implies that all parties need to invest and create dedicated communication strategies and communication teams to compete in the Scottish or Catalan political arena.

Scotland is characterized by a dominant social-democratic tendency (Keating, 2010) with a strong recent awakening of pro-independence support. There are two main parties in the pro-independence dimension: centre-left Scottish National Party –the government party at the moment of writing these lines-, and the more leftist and sometimes SNP's ally Scottish Greens. On the anti-independence axis there are three federal branches of state-wide parties: centre-left Scottish Labour, more centrist Scottish Liberal Party, and centre-right Scottish Conservatives. UK's Labour party has been traditionally considered the model of a catch-all marketing-oriented party (Savigny, 2009). However, in the Scottish context some scholars relate SNP's behaviour to the model of a catch-all party (Bannon and Mohrie, 2005; McTavish, 2016). The underlying idea is that SNP uses centrist policies combined with pro-independence stands traditionally associated to left positions to attract a wide range of voters.

Catalonia is usually classified as a moderate pluralist party system (Requejo, 2006). However, the last Catalan elections and political developments surrounding the independence debate have contributed towards a stronger polarization of Catalan parties on the pro-anti independence axis and the fragmentation of parties on both sides of the debate (Martí and Cetrà, 2016). Some of the political parties included in the sampling of this thesis no longer exist or they have been disintegrated in coalition platforms. The independence issue has become the polarization axis between Catalan

parties and the cause for the changes experienced in the party political system (Elias, 2016). The debate around Catalonia's independence has two elements: the claim for an independent Catalonia, and the demand for an independence referendum. There are parties that support the demand for a referendum but not independence itself. The vast majority of state-wide parties are against independence and against the demand for a referendum on independence (Olivieri, 2015).

After the last 2015 election, the Catalan parliament has three pro-independence parties (one liberal Convergencia, one centre-left ERC, one radical left CUP), one centre-left coalition party that supports the independence referendum but not independence (Catalunya en Comú and Iniciativa), and three anti-independence federal branches of state-wide parties (PSC centre-left, PP and Ciutadans centre-right). One of the major changes in Catalonia's political landscape is the disappearance of CiU. CiU governed Catalonia for more than 20 years and supported more powers being devolved to Catalonia (Dowling, 2009) moved to pro-independence positions resulting in the break up of the party in early 2015. The remaining members of pro-independence CiU are nowadays part of the pro-independence coalition 'Junts Pel Sí' (together for Yes) with ERC (Republican Left Party) that won the 2015 Catalan elections. CiU was considered the catch-all political marketing-oriented party of the Catalan landscape (Madí, 2007). It remains to be seen whether the remaining members of the party in the large coalition Junts Pel Sí would adopt some of these communication and strategy approaches.

3.2 Media policies in the context of self-governing institutions and nation-building projects

This section explores how the characteristics of Catalonia and Scotland as sub-state nations relate to different media policies and eventually different media markets. This dimension of the relationship between political and media systems explores the attempts of formal political institutions –governments and parliaments- to intervene in the media sphere. As such, this dimension outlines the institutional framework of the media and politics relationship in which political public relations operate. It is important to draw a comparative analysis of the role of the state in media policies

because 'there are considerable differences in the extent of state intervention as well as in the forms it takes' (Hallin & Mancini, 2004 p.41).

As explained in Chapter 2, Hallin and Mancini's (2004) conceptual framework was originally designed and applied to nation-states or to plurinational countries, like the UK and Spain, while ignoring territorial diversity within these cases (Humphreys, 2012). This section brings the analysis to the sub-state level of intervention on media policies. In order to do so, the analysis incorporates two elements characteristic of sub-state nations (Ghai, 2013): features of the nation-building project and the degree of decentralised state powers. The features of the nation-building project refer to those symbolic and identity elements that constitute Catalonia or Scotland as distinct polities (Bechhofer and McCrone, 2009). The analysis of this section also examines the degree of power that Scotland and Catalonia have claimed and received from Spain and the UK in terms of media policies. The final part of this section links these two elements with a general overview of the structure of media markets in Scotland and Catalonia.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004) there are three main forms of state intervention on media policies: public broadcasting, press subsidies and media content regulations. The following examines each of these elements in Catalonia and Scotland.

3.2.1   The relevance of nation-building strategies in the media system

There are elements that indicate that Scotland's nation-building project does not operate the same way as Catalonia's identity and devolved statehood dimensions. While in Catalonia the Catalan and the Spanish identity have been in constant conflict and understood as incompatible national projects (Guibernau, 2013), Scottish identity is understood as less conflictive and sometimes compatible with British identity (Mccrone, 2001).

Guibernau (2004) argues Catalonia acts as a 'quasi-state' since its devolved powers include the right to introduce socio-cultural policies aimed at regenerating the Catalan nation' (2004, p.75). Catalonia is one of Spain's 17 Autonomous Communities. However, the main difference between Catalonia and other Autonomous Communities in Spain is, as Guibernau points out, the existence of a Catalan nation-building project.

Garcia (2013) demonstrated in his study of Catalan governmental communication strategy that 'Catalan governments have made intensive use of mass media campaigns and other soft power methods to enhance Catalan identity' (García, 2013 p.558). Therefore, there are elements to affirm that media plays an important role in Catalonia's nation-building project.

Successive Catalan governments used these devolved powers on culture, education and media as the keystone of the Catalan nation-building project (Keating, 1996; Guimerà and Fernández, 2014; Cetrà, 2016). Catalonia's nation-building project is based on the existence of a separated Catalan language, the historic memory of independence and the development of a strong industrialization process (Keating, 1996). As part of their nation-building project, Catalonia created: a Catalan-based education system (Clots-Figueras and Masella, 2013); cultural policies aimed at promoting Catalan-language and Catalan-based cultural productions (Villarroya, 2012); and a Catalan communicative or media sphere with a Catalan public broadcaster and Catalan-based news media (Guimerà and Fernández, 2014). Strategies of Catalan nation-building have been identified in other areas such as sports (Xifra, 2009) and art (Johnson and Cester, 2015).

One of the main explanations for the centrality of media and cultural policies in Catalonia is the clash between this project of Catalan nation-building and Spain's own nation-building project (Guibernau, 2013). This clash between the two nation-building projects is key to understanding some of the differences between Scotland and Catalonia. Some comparative studies between Scotland and Catalonia point out that 'the ruling class never wanted to identify United Kingdom with England whereas in Spain there was a clear identification between Spain and Castilla [old Spanish-speaking kingdom]'[1] (Solano, 2007:66). Spain's nation-building project has historically questioned, and still questions nowadays, the legitimacy of Catalonia's

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[1] The old kingdom of Castilla comprised the Spanish-speaking central territories of the Iberian Peninsula. Catalonia as well as Valencia and Aragon were part of the Catalan-speaking Kingdom of Aragon. The two kingdoms signed a declaration of union in 1469 but their respective self-governing institutions remained independent until 1713 in the aftermath of a succession civil war. Castilla represents the backbone of the Spanish nation-building project. Spain's unification process was a 'process of incorporation into an essentially Castilian state and law' (Keating, 2001, p. 41)

separated identity (Guibernau, 2013). For instance, in 2012 the Spanish Constitutional Court declared Catalonia's recently-approved new home rule (Statute of Autonomy) illegal. Prior to this court ruling, the Spanish conservative party –Partido Popular- had promoted a signature campaign against Catalonia's new Stature of Autonomy and a boycott campaign of Catalan products. As explained in the following section, this tension between the two nation-building projects has escalated over the past few years with the emergence of the independence movement and the institutional conflict around the independence referendum (Martí and Cetrà, 2016).

There are no strong language or religious elements in Scotland's differentiation process, but instead 'a historic and institutional frame and a focus of identity for the construction and reconstruction of a spatially focused political community' (Keating, 2009 p.vi). Scotland's nation-building project is based on the idea of an autonomous civil society with its own institutions, myths and historical memories. However, these distinct institutions are not as strongly focused on the media sphere as the Catalan project is.

Scottish identity was not overtly contested by UK's nation-building project but relegated to 'the non-political spheres of sport, culture, and religion' (Keating, 2009 p.1). This coexistence of both nation-building projects might be related to the fact that Scotland has not generated as many cultural and media policies as Catalonia did. For instance, in areas that could be considered as essential in the nation-building project, such as film and cultural production, the Scottish Government 'does not to be seen as overly interventionist' (Munro, 2015 p. 279) and their funding policies remain vague and undefined. The majority of media policies remain in Westminster hands. The post-independence referendum seems to be changing this scenario (Keating, 2014) and, as explained in the following section, some media powers are being transferred to Scotland. Nevertheless, these media powers are still limited compared to those of Catalonia.

3.2.2   Interventionist media policies in Catalonia

One of the most significant differences between Catalonia and Scotland's media system is the degree of sub-state intervention in media policies. Catalonia has powers

over broadcast control and regulation, language policies and public subsidies to private news media (Guimerà and Fernández, 2014). These powers have been used to: create their own separated Catalan Public Broadcaster (CCMA); their own system of public subsidies to private news media; their own news agency (Agència Catalana de Notícies); and the creation of the Catalan Audiovisual Council (CAC), a regulatory body in charge of monitoring service quality of Catalan broadcasters. Policy-makers used these tools to create what they called the Catalan Communicative Space that aimed to promote national identity, increase home cultural production and promote the Catalan language in media products (Prado, 2014). The idea of the Catalan Communicative Space exemplifies a strong interventionist tradition and a strong relationship between Catalonia's intervention in media policies and their nation-building project.

Catalonia's interventionist attitude over media policies can be observed in their system of public subsidies to private news media. Spain transferred to almost all Autonomous Communities the power to create and establish public subsidies for private news media after their integration in the European Union (Fernandez Alonso and Blasco Gil, 2014). These public subsidies can be found in almost all levels of government inside Autonomous Communities. Consequently, autonomous governments, sub-regional entities such as Diputaciones, and local councils can allocate public funds to be distributed to private news media based on their discretional criteria (Fernandez and Blasco Gil, 2005).

These public subsidies are of special relevance in Catalonia because Catalonia is the Spanish Autonomy that spends the highest amounts on public subsidies to news media (Fernandez Alonso and Blasco Gil, 2014), and these funds are used as part of their nation-building project (Garcia, 2010). For instance, successive Catalan governments allocated funds to promote Catalan-language publications, to facilitate the process of digital migration, or simply as an emergency fund during the hardest periods of the economic crisis. Recent research has found that there are almost no impartial actors playing a role in the distribution of public subsidies to news media in Catalonia (Fernandez Alonso and Blasco Gil, 2014). Garcia (2010) argues that the Catalan Government uses the allocation of subsidies to control private media in order to

promote a nationalist agenda. However, any party in local governments or regional institutions can access these subsidies, not just nationalist parties.

3.2.2.1 Public broadcasting in Catalonia

Catalonia and Scotland differ strongly in their public broadcast structures. While Catalonia's public broadcast system has six exclusive television channels and four radio stations (CCMA, 2015), Scotland is dependent on dedicated BBC channels and radio stations. In addition, the model of governance of Catalonia's public broadcaster allows for a higher degree of political interference (Fernandez and Fernandez, 2012) than the UK's model.

Catalonia's nation-building project is linked to its public broadcast structure because successive Catalan governments regarded the creation of their own public broadcast system, separate from Spain, as a tool to guarantee the 'survival' of their own language and identity (Guimerà and Fernández, 2014). For instance, the Catalan public broadcaster (CCMA) not only reports in Catalan but it also offers ' a Catalan view of the world' (CCMA, 2015 p.17) with extensive international news coverage. Regional public broadcasting powers were initially conceded to the Basque Country and Catalonia during the democratic transition and were later extended to all 17 autonomous communities in Spain (Fernández *et al.*, 2011). Nevertheless, since its creation, the Catalan public broadcaster has generated heated political debates around its legitimacy (Terribas, 1994; Garcia, 2010; Guimerà and Fernández, 2014). Nowadays, because of the current independence debate, the political debate around Catalonia's public broadcaster is focused on the supposedly pro-independence and pro-nationalist bias of its content (Durán, 2015).

Catalonia's public broadcast governance system corresponds with what Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe as the 'government model'. In this model, control over the broadcast system is in hands of the parliament, and eventually of the party that has the majority of seats in parliament. The members of the Board of Directors (Corporació Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals, CCMA) of the Catalan Public Broadcaster are appointed and selected by the members of the Catalan Parliament: initially members need 2/3 of the votes to be elected and their mandate is for six years – two longer than

political mandates. The content of the public broadcast channels is supervised by the Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya (CAC-Broadcasting Council of Catalonia) that is also selected using the same governance model. The Broadcasting Council is in charge of monitoring levels of plurality and content balance in any Catalan broadcaster, both private and public.

In this system of political influence, political intervention happens for two reasons: when the first vote fails to achieve 2/3 of the chamber's support, members can be selected with simple majority vote in the second round of votes. As a result, the party that holds the majority of seats in parliament (and usually the government) can nominate their own candidates without the need to reach any agreement with other political forces in the parliament (Fernández *et al.*, 2011)[2]. The second case of political intervention happens because of the links that the members of the Board of Directors have with political parties. As their candidacies are nominated directly by each political party, it is usually the case that the appointed person is a trusted representative of the party's interests –this was widely accepted as a routine practice by most of the interviewees[3].

3.2.3 Media policies in Scotland

Scotland and Catalonia differ strongly in the structure and characteristics of their media policies. There are two main characteristics of media policies in Scotland: media policies in Scotland are mostly operated on a UK basis (Hutchison, 2016), and Scotland has developed a less interventionist and hands-off policy over those areas with devolved powers on media (Keating, 2010; Schlesinger, 2009).

At present, Scotland does not have differentiated and devolved legislation from the UK in terms of broadcasting impartiality and newspaper partisanship despite possessing press regulation as a devolved power (Hutchison, 2016). In that sense, one

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[2] This situation has changed because of the fragmented result of last Catalan elections, when none of the parties achieved the majority of seats. As a result, the 12 memebers of the Board of Directors have been distributed amongst the parties in parliament; each party has appointed one or more members according to their number of seats.

[3] For instance, the Head of Communication of the Partit Popular de Catalunya –interviewed for this research- has been recently appointed Director of RTVE (Spanish Broadcaster) for Catalonia. This appointment is made by the Board of Directors of the Spanish Broadcaster, the board is *de facto* controlled by the majority party in the Spanish Parliament - that in this case is the same Partido Popular.

of the most significant differences between Catalonia and Scotland's media system is the existence of impartiality norms that limit partisanship to newspapers and oblige all UK broadcasters to offer balanced reporting of politics and current affairs (McNair, 2009). In the aftermath of the Scottish independence referendum, the Scottish Parliament gained some control over Ofcom, the institution that controls and supervises impartiality regulations in private broadcasting (Scottish Parliament, 2016). Holyrood can now appoint one of the members of the Ofcom board; however, scrutiny over the BBC and its two Scottish channels and radio stations remains in Westminster hands. However, this can be considered as a small step compared to some of the recommendations of the Expert Group on the Leveson Report in Scotland. This parliamentary group recommended all news producers in Scotland –both print and broadcast- should be controlled by the same regulatory body (Sinclair *et al.*, 2013). Nevertheless, the Scottish Government did not create new media policies out of this expert report (Hutchison, 2016).

 Holyrood seems to be embedded in a hands-off policy over the devolved media policy areas (press regulation and film funding). In that sense, Schlesinger and Benchimol (2014b), comparing Catalonia's system of public subsidies to news media, argue that 'it would be unimaginable for such a policy to be applied to the (Scottish) press' (2014 p.3) despite the strong economic crisis of most Scottish newspapers. Nowadays, the Scottish Government only funds part of BBC Alba as part of their policies to promote the use of Gaelic (Azurmendi, 2013), and also fund the cultural and film industry through Creative Scotland (Munro, 2015). It could be argued that the hostile attitude of most newspapers towards the SNP's independence stance is behind the Government's reluctance to offer funds to newspapers. However, new online media such as The Common Space or Bella Caledonia, more favourable to the independence movement, also demand some sort of public funding to survive (McAlpine, 2016). The role of media policies in Scotland's nation-building project does not seem to be as relevant as it is in Catalonia's case. As explained in the following section, the debate around devolved broadcasting policy in Scotland also exemplifies some of these issues.

3.2.3.1 The debate for a public broadcaster in Scotland

One of the most interesting elements of Scotland as a sub-state nation is the lack of a separated Scottish public broadcast system. The ongoing debate about the public broadcast system in Scotland and its reliance on BBC structures exemplify some of the most significant differences with Catalonia. It might be argued that the absence of a separated language is behind some of the differences here analysed; however, there are other elements that explain the differences between Catalonia and Scotland's public broadcast structures. Nowadays, Scotland's public broadcast structure is dependent on the BBC's larger structure. BBC has three television channels that produce dedicated but not full-time Scottish content: BBC One, BBC Two and the Gaelic channel BBC Alba - plus one radio station, BBC Radio Scotland.

The restoration of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 did not include the creation of a separated public broadcaster as it did in Catalonia's case. It was not until 2007 that the first pro-independence SNP Government created the Scottish Broadcast Parliamentary Commission to explore the possibility of a separated Scottish TV and radio channel. Although the commission recommended the creation of a separated Scottish digital channel and all parties agreed initially, no funds were allocated for such purpose and the project was abandoned (Lynch, 2009a). The demand for a separated broadcaster remained a minority demand amongst some members of pro-independence parties – SNP and Scottish Greens- until the referendum campaign, when strong accusations of bias in the BBC's coverage triggered the debate again (Greig, 2016). There are two distinct voices amongst those who call for a different public broadcast structure for Scotland: those who want to create an independent network, and those who call for BBC Scotland to produce more Scottish-based content and transfer its control to the Scottish parliament. This last option is currently the Scottish Government's official position on the matter (Minister, 2015).

One of the main characteristics of the BBC, and subsequently BBC Scotland's governance structure, is that it is considered to be an effective system with low political interference and low political parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Technically, there is low political interference on BBC's governance because the governing board is not dependent on Westminster Parliament: the members of its board are appointed by the

Queen in Council following the UK government's recommendations after an open public call to select candidates (Department for Culture, 2006). However, this system does not stop UK politicians from complaining or 'threatening' the BBC and its journalists. For instance, during the 2015 UK election campaign, BBC's political editor Nick Robinson announced David Cameron, the Conservative Party candidate, threatened to close down the BBC (Robinson, 2015). Impartiality regulations technically prevents the BBC from adopting official editorial stances on current affairs (McNair, 2009). Nonetheless, during the Scottish referendum campaign, pro-independence activists complained the BBC showed bias against the pro-independence campaign, Yes, Scotland. Greig (2016), after analysing some of BBC's coverage during the Scottish referendum, argues that 'BBC's coverage, on the whole was more favourable to the No Campaign' (2016, p. 419).

As previously explained, the aftermath of the independence referendum has revitalised the debate around public broadcasting in Scotland. At the time of this writing, the public broadcast debate in Scotland is focused on the possibility that BBC Scotland will produce the first prime time news show that includes both Scottish and international affairs. This change of broadcasting policy is opposed by the Conservative Party in Westminster because they see it as a threat to the BBC's role in promoting the union of the United Kingdom. Also, the Smith Commission, in charge of debating the new powers to be transferred to Scotland after the referendum, has once again addressed the issue of public broadcasting. However, this time the commission does not advocate for the creation of a separated Scottish channel but for scrutiny powers over BBC Scotland to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament. It also recommended that the Scottish Government should have a voice in the BBC's charter renewal when the BBC's budget and overall governance guidelines are discussed.

3.3 Political parallelism in the context of the independence referendum debates

This section explores the ideological affiliation and subsequent parallelism between parties and news media in Scotland and Catalonia. The second key element to understand the eco-system where political public relations operate is the structure and

characteristics of media-politics alignment, also known as political parallelism. This concept is key to understanding the relationship between political actors and news media in the context of the independence referendums in Catalonia and Scotland.

Political parallelism is the analytical concept that explores how political parties or governments and the media (traditional and online) align themselves according to similar political, ideological or cultural views (Artero, 2014; Ciaglia, 2013; Mancini, 2012). During the referendum campaigns, communication strategies become central because the framing of a key issue 'by political actors and key information sources may therefore be unusually important to a referendum outcome' (Vreese, 2007 p.2). Therefore, political parallelism between parties and news media becomes central. Catalonia and Scotland were no exceptions in this case.

3.3.1   The influence of the independence referendum debates

At the point when this thesis started in late 2012, the Scottish and the Catalan projects for an independent future were commencing and, by the time I started my fieldwork in early 2014, those projects were already in place. In late 2012, the Scottish Government had just signed the Edinburgh Agreement with the UK's Government that allowed Scotland to conduct an independence referendum in 2014. The two official party campaigns for the yes and the no vote (Yes, Scotland and Better Together) began work in June 2012. At the same time, Catalonia's parliament was debating the 'Declaration of Sovereignism and for the right of Catalonia's people to decide' (approved in January 2013). This declaration gave the Catalan Government permission to start the process and demand an independence referendum from Madrid's Government.

Events unfolded as expected in Scotland, and by 2014 both campaigns and parties were actively promoting their arguments for the independence referendum that was held on September 18th. The Yes, Scotland campaign developed a strong online and social media campaign (Baxter, Marcella and Varfis, 2011; Quinlan, Shephard and Paterson, 2015) while the Better Together campaign had the support of all UK-based and Scottish-based newspapers except for the *Sunday Herald* (Dekavalla, 2016). This media division between the two campaigns became part of the confrontation between

the two sides that, for instance, resulted in pro-independence campaigners protesting outside BBC Scotland's building for its alleged bias against the Yes, Scotland campaign. Voters rejected Scotland's independence (55.3%), but the Yes, Scotland campaign successfully managed to increase support for independence from 35% in July 2012 to 45% in September 2014 (Curtice, 2015). As professor Keating argues, 'the referendum may have buried the issue of Scottish independence for the time being but it has radically altered the internal politics of Scotland and the relationship of Scotland to the United Kingdom' (Keating, 2014:19). As shown in Chapter 7, political public relations practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia contend that the referendum context altered their relationship with news media.

The independence issue in Scotland has been associated mostly with the SNP as it has been the party's key issue and they were the ones to promote and advocate for an independence referendum as the government party in 2012 (Flamini, 2014). Scotland is a multi-party system with a diversity of left-right parties, and along the pro-independence/ anti-independence axis there are positions that range from supporting independence or more devolution powers for Scotland or federalist options (Hepburn, 2010). However, the sovereignist and pro-independence parties in Scotland are situated in the centre-left axis with the SNP and the Greens. Only one Scottish newspaper had openly declared its support for a yes vote –the Sunday Herald- and one pro-independence newspaper was created in October 2014, The National (Hutchison, 2016). Until then, independentist and sovereignist positions did not have the support of Scottish or British newspapers (Hazel, 2001).

In sharp contrast to Scotland, Catalonia faced several legal restrictions, until finally there was no agreement with Madrid's Central Government to authorise an official independence referendum. The Catalan Government, with the support of pro-independence parties, decided to set up an unofficial consultation that took place in November 2014 with a 35% turnout and 80.8% support for Catalonia's independence (Elias, 2016). However, because it was an unofficial consultation, there were no official campaign structures, only pro-independence parties that actively campaigned for a yes vote in the referendum. Although anti-independence parties rejected launching an official campaign, it could be argued that the battle between the two sides

happened in the media sphere. Recent studies have demonstrated that almost all Madrid-based newspapers framed the consultation negatively, blaming the Catalan government for breaking the law, while Catalan-based newspapers presented a positive image of the consultation (Ballesteros, 2015). It has also been demonstrated that both Catalan and Spanish newspapers acted as political actors in determining the framing of the independence debate (Lejarza *et al.*, 2015).

In Catalonia, the current political debate on its future as an independent nation has two elements: the independence referendum and the independence itself of Catalonia. These two elements are of significance because there are Catalan political parties that advocate for an independence referendum but not for the independence of Catalonia (Podem En Comú, former ICV) and parties that advocate for both the referendum and Catalonia's independence from centre-right to radical left positions (Esquerra Republicana, Convergència, CUP). On the other extreme of the debate, there are anti-independence and anti-referendum parties in centre-left (PSC) and centre right positions (Ciutadans, PPC). This ideological pluralism can be found as well in the ideological distribution of news media (see the next section).

The last Catalan elections in 2015 and the political developments surrounding the independence referendum have contributed to a stronger polarisation of Catalan parties on the pro-anti-independence axis and the fragmentation of parties on both sides of the debate (Martí and Cetrà, 2016). Polarisation between the two sides of the debate is reflected in the bilateral opposition between pro- and anti-independence parties that cannot reach agreement with the other side while they manage to form coalitions amongst themselves (Elias, 2016). The emergence of the independence movement has altered Catalonia's party system. For instance, CiU, the ruling party of Catalonia for 25 years, changed its core policy from a sovereignist vision of Catalonia inside Spain to defending the independence of Catalonia (Elias, 2016).[4] As a result of this change, the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia,* once the unconditional supporter of CiU

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[4] At the time of writing, CiU as such no longer exists. The coalition that originally formed the party officially broke their relationship in 2015. The pro-independence party, Convergència, lost a significant share of votes but is still in government as part of the larger coalition of pro-independence parties Junts Pel Sí (Together for Yes).

(Chaqués-Bonafont, Palau and Baumgartner, 2015), no longer supports the party's pro-independence stance.

As it can be observed, the independence context in Catalonia and Scotland altered the media and party landscape. Despite this similarity, next section explains their differences in terms of political orientation and party loyalties in the Scottish and Catalan news media.

3.3.2 News media political orientation and party loyalties

There are significant differences between Scotland and Catalonia in terms of how the different news media align themselves with different political ideologies, cultures, and in some cases with political parties. The association between political parties and news media is of special relevance in Catalonia (Baumgartnet and Chaqués Bonafont, 2015), where the media mimics quite closely political parties' framing of different policy issues. By contrast, in Scotland, the editorial positions of indigenous newspapers do not always reflect the different political viewpoints and ideologies found in Scottish political parties (Hutchison, 2008; Dekavalla, 2016). These differences between the two sub-state nations can also be observed in the content of news media, journalistic cultures and the partisanship of media audiences.

One of the most significant elements that needs to be taken into consideration when using sub-state nations as units of analysis is that 'in addition to ideological positioning on economic and social stances, centre-periphery issues add a third ideological dimension' (Medeiros, Gauvin, & Chhim, 2015:14). Political actors, and subsequently the media, operate in a two-dimensional sphere: left-right, centre-periphery. In addition, both Catalonia and Scotland are multi-party systems that operate in the context of a larger state –Spain and the UK- that is characterised by having a strong two party system (Hepburn, 2010; Requejo, 2006). Similarly, Catalonia and Scotland's media system coexist with Spain and the UK's media systems. As a result, news media in both cases have a multi-layered and complex scenario to navigate to define their editorial stances.

Relationships of political parallelism in Catalonia are of special relevance because Catalan news media (radio, television and newspapers) are considered to have a very important role determining the national agenda, which is especially prominent in the current sovereignty process (Prado, 2014). The closeness between political parties and news media is exemplified, for instance, in the use of editorial pieces that have been traditionally directed towards influential elites, as was the case in November 2009 when twelve Catalan-based newspapers published a common editorial piece to give their support to the new Catalan Statute of Autonomy and against the Spanish Constitutional Court (Lopez and Barrero, 2012). This closeness is something characteristic of the wider Spanish media system where links between political parties and news media have been of strong significance since the start of the democratic period in the late 1970s (Gunther, Montero and Wert, 2000).

The Spanish media system is considered to have high levels of political parallelism because 'each party clearly (is) allied with one of the major news outlets' (Chaqués-Bonafont, Palau, & Baumgartnet, 2015 p.114) along the left-right political spectrum. Catalonia mimics this alignment between parties and media outlets, but reflects the double division (left-right and pro-anti independence) (Canet, 2011). These relationships of parallelism are usually described in the literature as external pluralism because each media outlet represents a different point of view or political cleavage (Mancini and Hallin, 2012; Artero, 2014). Mancini (2012) contends external pluralism 'often does not foster the integration of different points of view' because there are no common points for encounter and debate in the media sphere. Several studies have contradicted Mancini's assumption (van Kempen, 2007; Artero, 2014; Brüggemann, 2014) and, for instance, Vaccari (2011) demonstrates that relationships of parallelism foster online activism and participation.

As previously explained, one of the most important characteristics of Catalonia's media system is the existence of public subsidies to private newspapers and broadcasters. There is empirical evidence that suggests successive Catalan governments used these subsidies as a tool to influence relationships of political parallelism (Fernandez and Blasco Gil, 2005; Fernandez Alonso and J. J. Blasco Gil, 2014). For instance, the media group Grup Godó -owner of the newspaper *La*

Vanguardia- received the largest amount of subsidies over the 25 years CiU was in government (Fernandez and Blasco Gil, 2005). Nowadays, although the newspaper does not support Catalonia's independence as CiU does, the Grup Godó owns RAC1 a pro-independence radio station with the largest number of listeners in Catalonia (EGM, 2016). Similarly, the newspaper Ara (left and pro-independence) received almost one-million euros from the left wing coalition government between PSC (now anti-independence), ERC (main pro-independence party) and ICV (now part of the coalition Catalunya Sí Que Es Pot).

Catalan news media, as well as the Spanish ones, usually express their editorial support through the general framing of news and, most importantly, through the topics selected (Baumgartnet and Chaqués Bonafont, 2015). Media consumers do not need open editorial pieces to identify those frames with specific political parties. One of the features of Catalonia's media system is the strong tendency for voters to consume the news media that shares their same political views (Capdevila Muntadas, 2014). Consuming news media on the basis of political preferences is more accessible in polarised, pluralist contexts such as Catalonia because the ideological spectrum of news media tends to mimic the party ideological spectrum (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Relationships of political parallelism in Catalonia are also related to the so-called advocacy journalistic culture of southern European countries (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002). Advocacy journalism refers to the use of journalism to promote specific causes (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). The concept of advocacy journalism is the result of comparing different traditions of journalism against the normative liberal model of objective journalism (Jensen, 2008). In Catalonia's case, this advocacy tradition is related to the process of nation-building. Catalan news editors working in bi-lingual or Catalan language-based media, as do Basque editors, see news media as 'natural vehicle through which to reach and unite that community, harmonizing a region of shared language, culture, and ethnic ancestry' (Lewis, 2008 p.420). Around 56% of journalists working in this news media regard their professional role as that of a supporter and activist for Catalan language rights (Zabaleta *et al.*, 2010). However, it should be noted that this percentage is the lowest one when compared to journalists working in other minority language news media: for

instance, 80.2% of Scottish-Gaelic journalists declare themselves as activists over strict professional journalists (Zabaleta *et al.*, 2010).

The difference is that in Catalonia these professional attitudes go hand-in-hand with a general media landscape that considers political elites as in control of the news media's agenda (Van Aelst, Sehata and Dalen, 2010). Spanish journalists and news editors complain that politicians have a strong influence over the news agenda (Casero-Ripollés, García-Santamaría and Fernández-Beaumont, 2015). More precisely, in 2006, 92% of Catalan journalists considered the dominance of political and economic interests over journalistic criteria one of journalism's major problems in Catalonia (Alcala *et al.*, 2006). In that sense, there is a wide-spread belief that these journalistic advocacy orientations in Catalonia, and in Spain, respond to political pressures rather than to journalists' choices (García-Avilés and Fuente-Cobo, 2014).

Relationships of political parallelism are not unique to Catalonia and can also be found in Scotland's media sphere. Scotland's media sphere is different from that of Catalonia because the political dominance of the pro-independence SNP is not paralleled with a significant pro-independence printed media. Pro-independence media can be found in a newly-emerging Scottish online sphere. In addition, there are no institutional features like press subsidies that affect these relationships, as previously explained. Political parallelism is restricted to national and online newspapers because local newspapers, which still enjoy some substantive readership shares, remain politically impartial and do not offer their support to specific parties or candidates (Hutchison, 2016).

 Scottish newspapers are considered one of the pillars that distinguish the Scottish from the UK public spheres, along with the Church, education and the Scottish legal system (Hutchison, 2008; Mcnair, 2008). However, the restoration of the Scottish Parliament and the emergence of a defined Scottish party system did not generate a context of external pluralism where Scottish media outlets became associated with different social visions (Dekavalla, 2009). As Keating (2009) notes, the relationship between Holyrood and the Scottish press is not an easy one. Scottish newspapers were editorially supportive of the restoration of the Scottish Parliament and contributed to the demands for more powers for Scotland in the early 2000s (Dekavalla, 2009).

Nevertheless, most Scottish newspapers have been hostile to Scottish nationalism and to the idea of an independent Scotland (Hazel, 2001b), with the exception of the *Sunday Herald*. In addition, during the post-devolution years, the Scottish press was mainly interested in covering political corruption and scandals in the new parliament (Mcnair, 2008) and Scottish newspapers lost its leadership in the market.

Scotland's printed media sphere has, at the same time, strong relationships of political parallelism and newspapers that offer selective support to the SNP. For instance, the *Daily Record*, once the most read newspaper, is not only editorially pro-Scottish Labour but there is 'a revolving door between newspaper staff and Labour personnel' (Hassan, 2014 p.78) as several *Daily Record* journalists became Scottish Labour spin doctors. At the same time, the nowadays most read newspaper, the Scottish edition of the *Sun*, supported the SNP in the last three elections but does not support to SNP's pro-independence stance. Similarly, the *Herald* used its parent title, the *Sunday Herald,* to officially support a Yes vote during the independence referendum (Hutchison, 2016).

The overall UK press has one of the highest levels of political parallelism in Europe (Popescu, Gosselin and Pereira, 2010). However, its journalistic culture is usually associated with the liberal model of public sphere (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), where journalists differentiate between facts and opinions in contrast to advocacy journalists who participate in advocating for certain ideas (Hanitzsch, 2007). Scottish journalists have been found to romanticise notions of 'ideal' newsrooms where journalists fight to obtain hard-news as differentiated from producing commercially-oriented news content (Frith and Meech, 2007). Nevertheless, as Hassan (2014) points out, Scottish journalists take an active part in relationships of political parallelism as demonstrated in the aforementioned case of the *Daily Record*. Furthermore, at the beginning of the devolution years journalists regarded Scottish political life as mediocre in contrast to major political developments happening in London (Mcnair, 2008). During these years, Scottish journalists also declared that being too invested in Scottish nationalism limited their career options in London, where they considered to be better professional opportunities (Hazel, 2001). This attitude goes in line with the Scottish press strongly

focusing on corruption and scandals during the first years of the Scottish Parliament (Dekavalla, 2016).

Scottish quality newspapers –and wider UK titles- usually express their political parallelism through editorial pieces published during election campaigns, and these pieces are considered to be significantly influential amongst voters (Cairney and McGarvey, 2013). However, there is little data on media audiences' partisanship in Scotland as a separated unit of analysis from the whole UK. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that it might be harder for Scottish audiences to find their exact political views reflected in one newspaper because, until very recently,[5] the newspaper ideological spectrum did not include, for instance, pro-independence or nationalist options (Blain and Hutchison, 2008). On the basis of the limited data available, it is known that in the last 2015 UK general election, SNP voters referred to the *Daily Record* as their most-read newspaper, followed by the *Scottish Sun* (YouGov, 2015). However, the *Daily Record* has been traditionally a strong supporter of Scottish Labour Party (Mcnair, 2008) with a centre-left political orientation that declared its opposition to Scotland's independence during the referendum. According to YouGov's political attitudes database, readers of *The Herald* (a left wing, anti-independence newspaper) are also predominately SNP voters[6].

3.4 Conclusions

This chapter compared Catalonia and Scotland's political and media systems. Using some elements of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) conceptual framework, the aim was to provide a general overview of the media and political institutions where political public relations operate. The central idea of the chapter is that Scotland and Catalonia are fertile political and media landscapes for political public relations practitioners. The central element of this fertile landscape is the existence of multi-level territorial politics, the recent emergence of the independence debates in Scotland and Catalonia and the salience of nation-building projects in the media-politics relationship. In

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[5] After the Scottish Independence reteréndum, four new pro-independence news media have emerged: the newspaper *The National*, the online magazine CommonSpace, the news blog Bella Caledonia and Newsnet.
[6] https://yougov.co.uk/profileslite#/Scottish_National_Party/media

addition this chapter argues that different projects of nation-building have generated different configurations of the relationship between political and media systems in Catalonia and Scotland.

More specifically, the relationship between political and media systems in Catalonia is characterised by a strong political interventionism and a structural dependency of media outlets on political powers. News media are central in Catalonia's nation-building project and successive Catalan governments have promoted the creation of a Catalan media system –the Catalan Communicative Space- through different media policies and public broadcast structures. Some of these media policies include a system of public subsidies to private news media that operates both at the Government and local council level. Catalonia also has its own public broadcaster, public news agency and a broadcast regulatory body. These policies respond to Catalan identity being historically incompatible or in conflict with Spain's nation-building project and the need to protect and promote Catalan language. News media in Catalonia and Spain are powerful political actors strongly aligned with the different political viewpoints, in addition to their structural dependency over media policies. The emergence of the pro-independence movement and the conflict over the independence referendum contribute to the polarisation between Catalan pro-independence news outlets and Spanish anti-independence news media.

The relationship between political and media systems in Scotland is characterised by low interventionist media policies, restricted political parallelism, and a smaller Scottish media system with a long-standing Scottish press that is struggling to survive in the post-referendum context. News media play a significant but different role in Scotland's nation-building project. The long-standing existence of a separated Scottish press that was not threatened by Britain's nation-building project might explain the low interventionist media policies in Scotland. The demand for a separated public broadcaster, despite being more significant in the post-referendum context, is not a consensus demand amongst all political parties as was the case in Catalonia. Political parallelism is restricted in Scotland because impartiality regulations apply to broadcasters and because, until very recently, the Scottish press did not reflect the different political viewpoints in Scotland's political system. The emergence of the pro-

independence movement and the referendum campaign have activated and translated part of the political-media relationships to the online sphere.

This chapter has provided the basis to start the empirical analysis of this thesis. The next three chapters aim to place political public relations professionals in the context described above using data obtained from in-depth interviews.

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research approaches the study of political public relations. More specifically, this thesis examines political public relations using a framework chosen from the sociology of professions and applied in a comparative study. The main unit of analysis is political public relations practitioners. This is not a study of how these practitioners are perceived by neighbouring professions, such as journalists or politicians, as previous studies have done (e.g. Atkinson, 2005; de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2009; Frenkel-Faran & Lehman-Wilzig, 2006). Neither is it the aim of this study to assess whether political PR practitioners fit into a categorical idea of profession. The aim of this study is to examine how these practitioners conceive of their own practices and identities, and how these reflections relate to the wider media and political contexts. In line with the aim of this thesis, the research design places political public relations practitioners as the core data source and their reflections as the data to be examined from a qualitative comparative perspective. In the following sections, I discuss the research questions and the rationale for the research design.

4.1 Research questions and aims

The starting point of this thesis is that the concept of spin doctor needs to reconceptualised. As demonstrated in Chapter 1 and 2, there is a need to develop new conceptual frameworks to understand communication experts in political parties or governments beyond the notion of spin doctors. Furthermore, it seems necessary to develop empirically-based studies on these experts, who are labelled in this study as political public relations practitioners. For these reasons, the unit of analysis of this thesis is the group of political public relations practitioners. This thesis approaches the study from a comparative perspective. The approach combines actor-behaviour centred analysis with a structuralist analysis of macro-level institutional arrangements (Esser and Hanitzsch, 2012). In line with this approach, there are two research questions and three main aims:

Q1: What are the constitutive and characteristic elements of the performance and practice of political public relations?

Q2: How do specific national media systems impact the political public relations

practice?

Related to these two research questions, this thesis has three main aims:

A1: Outline the elements that characterise the group of political public relations.

A2: Explore the practice of political public relations and determine the main tasks, functions and roles of its practitioners.

A3: Outline the elements of the media system that influence the practice and profession of political public relations.

The underlying idea is to build knowledge about political public relations in three levels: the inner dynamics and professional practices; the profession within particular institutional settings such the party or government; and the profession within the media system context. These three aims also give the underlying data analysis structure. Data analysis will move from a micro-level to a macro-level following this path with three corresponding chapters: profession, party and government, and media system. The final aim of the data analysis is to offer a comprehensive picture or complete portrait of political public relations practitioners.

The two research questions aim to articulate the relationship between profession, professionalism and larger institutional contexts. I approach the relationship between these three elements, firstly, from the assumption that professions are constituted by shared practices and perceptions of professionalism and identity (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). Secondly, professionalism is examined as an identity element based on those 'experiences, understandings and expertise, shared ways of perceiving problems and their possible solutions' (Evetts, 2003 p.799). Finally, the comparative approach of the research questions derives from the assumption that professions are part of a larger ecological system that influences and shapes its core characteristics (Abbott, 1988). This larger ecological or institutional system is better observed from a comparative perspective. In this case, the larger ecological system refers to the relationship between political and media systems –as defined by Hallin and Mancini (2004)- where political public relations operates.

Q1: The first research question derives from a descriptive need. This question seeks to explore the main characteristics and defining traits of the political public relations profession as conceived by its own practitioners in two different contexts. This question stems from the lack of studies that have addressed political public relations as a profession and, consequently, the lack of empirically-based knowledge about the core functions, activities and professional profiles of its practitioners (Davis, 2000). As can be observed in Table 3.1 the analysis of the profession is focused on two interrelated analytical concepts: practice and performance. This thesis understands practice and performance using Pentland and Feldmand's (2005) interpretation of Latour's (1986) theory of performativity. Practice in this case refers to the daily performance of routines of political public relations practitioners in governments and political parties. Therefore, the focus is on the main tasks, functions and roles undertaken by these professionals. Performance, on the other hand, refers to those norms, distinctive characteristics, basic principles and ethical standards that guide or shape practices (Pentland and Feldman, 2005). The analytical concept of practice is rooted in the idea of actions, and the second concept of performance reflects identity. Both concepts of practice and performance are understood as mutually constitutive even though they are treated in separated chapters.

Table 4.1 Elements explored at the micro-level analysis of the political public relations occupation

Performance: professionalism and professional structures (Chapter 5)	Practice: jurisdictional boundaries and roles (Chapter 6)
Professional norms	
Ethical principles	Daily routines
Professional role models	Main professional tasks
Professional requirements: expertise and knowledge	Assigned roles in the party/government
Routes of access to the profession	

This question explores, on the one hand, the elements that practitioners consider to be essential to enter the professional group (professional background and career requirements), and what norms they consider to be applied to the practice of the profession (ethical principles and norms). On the other hand, this sub-question examines the tasks and functions claimed to be exclusive to the occupation, and how those functions and tasks are transformed into specific roles within political organisations. This question constitutes the basis for the articulation of the wider comparative study of the two media systems.

Q2: The second research question examines the impact of media systems on the practice of political public relations. It examines how practitioners perceive their profession and strategies of media relations in relation to the wider media-system contexts in Scotland and Catalonia. To answer this question (see Table 1.2), the analysis focuses on three specific elements of media systems that articulate the relationship between the political and the media sphere according to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) media system models: practices of political parallelism, structure of media markets, and the role of the State in media policies. As explained in Chapter 2, Hallin and Mancini's conceptual framework is adapted to sub-state nations, and it also includes social and online media. This question originates from the need to incorporate larger institutional structures, such as media systems, in the analysis of political actors' behaviour (Benson, 2010). There is a lack of studies that reflect on the impact that larger media and political structures have on political communication processes (Brown, 2003b).

Table 4.2 Analytical tools used to explore the influence of media systems on the practice of political public relations (macro-level)

Elements to examine	Analytical tools used for the examination
Conceptualizations of professional power	*Media systems dimensions:* Political parallelism

| *Strategic thinking in the management of media relations* | The role of the State in media policies (decentralization and media policy power) |
| | Structure of media markets (including social and online media) |

This second research question requires data on Catalonia and Scotland's media systems that cannot be obtained from practitioners' responses only. For that reason, Chapter 3 uses existing research to outline the main characteristics of Catalonia and Scotland's media systems on the basis of the three analytical concepts described in Table 3.2. This data on media systems is then compared with practitioners' perceptions on the political and media environment (see Chapter 7). The analysis does not aim to test the validity of the three models developed by Hallin and Manicin (2004), but to use their two most important analytical categories to examine the interaction between media and political systems in Scotland and Catalonia. The following section examines how these two questions respond to specific ontological assumptions and how, on the basis of that ontological assumption, I can generate knowledge using specific methodological approaches.

4.1.1 Key concepts and terminology

There are three key concepts in this thesis –institutions, profession, political and media systems- and one terminological issue with the term 'spin doctor' that need clarification. These three concepts emerge from the different theoretical frameworks developed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 1. The concepts are exposed here for the sake of clarity and to provide a clear rationale for the research design.

The concept of institution is the overarching concept of this thesis. The elements explored in this thesis (political PR practitioners, media and political systems) are approached as institutions and the relationship between these two institutions is explored. Exploring these elements as institutions implies recognising them as distinctive types of social forms with their own governing mechanisms in constant interaction with their wider context (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Amongst the

different types of institutions, political PR and its practitioners is approached as a type of professional institution. Media and political systems are explored as the wider institutional context where political PR is practiced. The concept of institution provides this thesis with an overarching analytical category. It allows the researcher to interpret the results of the data analysis according to the characteristics and dynamics of certain type of societal structures. Chapter 2 explained this thesis approaches the concept of institutions and more precisely, professional institutions from a neo-institutional perspective.

The concept of profession is used in this thesis to explore political PR from an alternative framework to existing studies in this area. There are two reasons that underpin the use of the concept profession. Chapter 2 demonstrated that the use of the term profession, professional and professionalization is problematic in existing studies on the professionalization of political communication. The idea of professionalization is used to describe how political organisations mimic media routines to become better competitors (Gibson & Rommele, 2009; Mancini, 1999;Strömbäck, 2009). In addition, as explained in Chapter 1 and 2, previous studies do not provide an explanatory framework to the fact that there are a series of communication practices in the political sphere and people whose main employment is to manage and design these communication practices. The concept of profession provides a link between a series of communication practices in the political sphere and the people who design, coordinate and execute these practices.

The concept of profession serves in this case as a tool to generate new knowledge about political PR practice and its practitioners. As previously stated, it is not the goal of this thesis to determine whether political PR can be categorised as a profession but to systematically approach the object of study and generate empirical data. To do so, as explained in Chapter 2, this thesis approaches the concept of profession not in a close categorical sense but as a socially constructed institution whose distinctive traits are dynamic and constantly evolving (Noordegraaf, 2007).

The concepts of political and media systems provide the conceptual framework to explore the context where political PR practitioners work. The term 'system' is adopted from Hallin and Mancini's (2004) theory of media system models. In the context of Hallin and Mancini's theory and in this thesis, the term 'system' is not used to indicate a functional system theory approach. As Mancini explains 'system' is a general category that for the purposes of their theory and also the purposes of this thesis, serves to contrast two aggregates of institutions (Mancini, 2015). The concept of system is used as a synonym or general category for a group of institutions belonging either to the political or media spheres.

The concept of political system refers in this thesis to the political institutions involved in the production and dissemination of political communication: governments, political parties and parliaments (Mazzoleni, 2010). The concept of political system serves to englobe patterns of similarities and variations between Scotland and Catalonia. Media system refers in this thesis to the aggregate of news media and core political communication channels.

4.1.1 Terminology

One of the key elements of this research design is the use of the different terminologies that exist to refer to the communication expert working in political parties or governments. Particularly, the use of the term spin doctor in this thesis needs to be included as part of the research design because of the complexity and connotations associated to it(McNair, 2004; Hobbs, 2015) –see Chapter 1.

This thesis will use the term spin doctor as a synonym for political public relations practitioner. There are two main reasons to do so. First, this is a conscious decision of the researcher in an attempt to remain closer to the object of study. As demonstrated in the data analysis –see chapter 5, practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia use the term 'spin doctor' as an informal label to designate their equal counterparts in other parties or governments. The use of the term 'spin doctor' is one of the traits that indicate the existence of a sense of common identity amongst practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia. In that sense, the researcher embraces the informal definition offered by interviewees as a valid categorical term.

The second reason is the underlying idea that the concept of 'spin doctor' needs to be reconceptualised. This reconceptualization starts by setting aside traditional negative connotations of the term – manipulative, liar, political control, see Chapter 1 for more details- and exploring practitioners' view of the term 'spin doctor'. This is not to affirm that practitioners' views are accepted uncritically rather these views are used as the starting point to explore the 'spin doctor' phenomena from alternative perspectives to existing academic knowledge in this area. Therefore, the use of the term spin doctor as a synonym for political public relations in the context of this thesis aims to bring new empirical-based knowledge about these popular figures.

4.2 Combining micro and macro-level approaches

This section explains the conceptual rationale that underpins the object of study and the methodological choices explained in the following sections. The first part outlines the ontological approach to the relationship between professionals and media systems. The second section justifies from an epistemological perspective the use of practitioners' reflections and testimonies to explore the purpose of this thesis. As Patomaki declares, being explicit with the ontological and epistemological foundations of research is the key to generate 'more adequate sets of empirical evidence' (Patomaki, 2002:99). In that sense, these three items –epistemology, ontology and methodology- should be dependent and linked by a conceptual rationale (Stanley, 2012).

4.2.1 Ontological implications

This thesis combines micro- and macro-level analysis. To do so, the thesis needs to give ontological and epistemological account of three interrelated elements: individual agents (political public relations practitioners), an institution (profession of political public relations), and the wider eco-system (media and political systems). From an ontological perspective, these three elements are constitutive of a reality that is socially-constructed (Burr, 2003). This argument derives from the assumption that 'the construction of reality is an active process of creating the world. The reality people experience everyday life is a constructed reality' (Sarakantos, 2005, p.37). Institutions such as a profession or a media system are not independent entities that exist separated

from individual agents. Both individual agents and institutions are mutually constituent of a reality constructed by both actors. This ontological stance relates to the sociological dilema between agency and structure (Giddens, 1984). However, in this case, this thesis does not explore whether agency shapes structure or vice versa. The thesis explores how actors and structures co-construct each other.

This thesis approaches the tension between agency and structure from a revised neo-institutional approach. As explained in Chapter 2, the concept of the profession is viewed in this thesis from a neo-institutionalist perspective. This neo-institutional perspective has ontological implications that extend to the entire thesis. Classic neo-institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995) overlooks the role of individual agents in institutions (Hay, 2009). However, the proposed neo-institutional approach combines both the macro-level interaction between different institutions and the role that individual agents play in these institutions (Scott, 2008; Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). This theoretical framework provides a basis to explain the mechanisms of influence of media systems over political PR practitioners.

From this perspective, professions and media systems are dynamic, socially-constructed institutions (Scott, 2008). Institutions are maintained and reproduced in society through the routines and habits of both individual agents and other organisations in the environment. Individual agents –political public relations practitioners- have the capacity to 'interpret, translate, transpose, edit, and recombine institutions', and at the same time 'actors reflect on and strategically operate within the institutional context where they are embedded' (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, p. 55).

4.2.3 Using political public relations as a main data source

The objects of study in this thesis are the reflections, actions, ideas and assumptions that political public relations practitioners have about their own profession and the structural media system context in which they operate. This methodological choice poses some epistemological questions. One might argue that the study of individual agents limits the results of this study to a micro-level dimension. For instance, most

studies on the relationship between politicians and journalists limit their analysis to the internal dynamics of the relationship (Örebro, 2002; Stromback, 2006; Ross, 2010; Van Aelst, Sehata and Dalen, 2010). In this thesis, actors' testimonies and reflections are seen as sites to explore the wider context where these relationships happen. This a-contextual epistemological approach can be challenged.

Despite the above-mentioned differences between neo-institutionalism and structuration theory, Gidden's (1994) approach is of use in this case. Macro-level systems can be explored through the eyes of individual agents because 'systems are grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors' (Giddens, 1984:25). Neo-institutionalists in the sociology of professions also agree that institutions are enacted through the roles, rites and rituals of actors that 'at the same time challenge, modify, and disrupt them (institutions)' (Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca, 2011, p. 57). Following this reasoning, I argue the study of individual political public relations agents can shed light and generate valid knowledge of the wider political and media systems where they operate. As explained in the following section, this epistemological approach requires a qualitative research design.

4.3 Qualitative approach to the study of political public relations practitioners

This section explores the two main reasons that underpin the qualitative approach of this thesis and the limitations implied in the use of this approach.

The first reason for using a qualitative approach emerges from the complex and subjective nature of the object of study (Flick, 2009): the construction of a profession from a comparative perspective. Experiences, shared practices and meanings of an occupational group and its practitioners can hardly be treated as isolated or specific causes of a certain phenomena as is commonly assumed in quantitative perspectives (Williams and May, 1996). It is not the goal of this thesis to seek specific causes and variables of the political public relations phenomena, but to explore and understand 'how social experience is created and given meaning' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005:10). This thesis aims to generate knowledge on the active role that practitioners have in the

construction of their own practices, shared values and how these relate to larger social and economic structures.

The second reason lies in the fact that there is scope to add new knowledge from a different methodological perspective. Quantitative approaches have historically dominated the field of political communication (Graber and Smith, 2005; Karpf *et al.*, 2015), and it is a growing tendency in public relations (Jain, De Moya and Molleda, 2014). For instance, there is a strong need for qualitative data to explore the so-called professionalization of political communication (Tenscher *et al.*, 2015). Existing studies have quantified the use of new communication practices as an indicator of an ongoing process of professionalization (Gibson & Rommele, 2009; Strömbäck, 2009). However, very few studies (Plasser, 2001; Tenscher *et al.*, 2016) use qualitative data -such as interviews with experts or politicians- to explore and analyse the process of professionalization of political communication.

Political communication scholars are concerned about the lack of methodological innovation (Vowe and Henn, 2016) and the inability of the field to to keep pace with 'a world that looks radically different today politically, socially, and technologically' (Karpf *et al.*, 2015, p. 1889). Precisely Karpf *et al.* (2015) highlight that the field of political communication has not been able to explain the fast professionalization of political communication. These scholars argue political communication research needs to invest in the use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviewing or observation, to overcome these limitations. However, there are other voices in the field that find the way to move forward is to develop 'more formal, variable-based, and causality-seeking approach that includes larger samples in order to allow for generalizations' (Esser, 2014, p. 26). This thesis sits within Karpf *et al.'s* (2015) position. There are certain phenomena in the political communication sphere, such as the emergence of professions, that cannot be explained through clearly-delimited variables and cauality-seeking approaches.

Qualitative approaches have long been portrayed as limited because of the subjectivity of the data (Hammersley, 2008). As Maxwell & Chmiel (2011) argue, it would be naïve to deny that researchers' subjectivity and their objects of study play a central

role in the design, analysis and interpretation of the data. For that reason, one of the strategies to overcome these critiques is to embrace both the subjectivity of the researcher as an analyst of a certain reality, and the subjectivity of the object of study: political public relations practitioners as definers of their own reality. This is not to deny the need for accuracy and reliability in the data, but rather to recognise the closeness between the researcher and the object of study as an enriching experience that generates meaningful knowledge (Flick, 2009). Qualitative methodological approaches derive from a commitment to understand 'social phenomena from the actor's own perspective and examining how the world is experienced' (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016:3).

The validity of qualitative studies is to be found in the 'usefulness of concepts and frameworks' (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2011:507) that contribute to theoretical generalizability and transferability of concepts. In this case, it is only through the qualitative study of experiences of political public relations practitioners that conclusions can be drawn – for instance, about how political actors make sense of the wider (media) structures in which they operate. The role of qualitative studies is to embrace the diversity and complexity of the social life as a whole, setting aside attempts to discount the subjectivity of those involved in the research process (Flick, 2009).

To conclude, it can be stated that a qualitative approach is not only adequate for the 'subjective' character of this research, but it also contributes to generating new perspectives in areas of knowledge dominated by quantitative approaches.

4.4 Comparative approach

The main reason to adopt a comparative approach is because 'only through comparative research will it become possible to identify and understand the structural and semi-structural determinants and factors that shape the practice of political public relations' (Stromback and Kiousis, 2011, p. 320). There are almost no comparative studies on the practice of political public relations. In addition, there are almost no comparative studies between sub-state nations in terms of media systems and political communication practices (Terribas, 1994; Castelló and Capdevila, 2013). This thesis

aims to overcome the gaps in the academic literature by comparing political PR practitioners in carefully-structured conditions.

This thesis compares political public relations in the context of each of their media systems in two sub-state nations. The goal of this double comparison is to explore the elements that shape the practice of political public relations both at the micro- and macro-level. I articulate the comparison by contrasting practitioners' testimonies and reflections in Catalonia and Scotland against two backdrops: the configuration of the political public relations profession and the characteristics of each of their media systems. Precisely, Pfetsch and Esser (2011) find that comparative methodology offers good potential when the focus of the research is on the interplay of the political actors' behaviour and the structural context. National media and political contexts are in this case considered essential elements in the configuration of the political public relations occupation and used as the explanatory framework for patterns of similarities and differences.

The comparative approach of this thesis is based on the assumption that, on the one hand, political communication practices and media structures are no longer limited to nation-wide or state-wide contexts (Swanson, 2004). Comparative approaches also facilitate the examination of transnational trends that directly impact the configuration of professions that are no longer restricted to the boundaries of the state-nation (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012). On the other hand, it is also assumed that despite the existence of transnational political communication practices, these practices are still influenced by the peculiarities of each media and political system (Flew and Waisbord, 2015).

Comparative perspectives are necessary because research on political public relations so far has been dominated by mono-cultural approaches, with a special focus on Anglo-Saxon contexts (i.e Atkinson, 2005; Brown, 2003; Moloney, 2001; Stockwell, 2007). There is also a lack of comparative perspectives in public relations, which is traditionally focused on analysing individual cases rather than looking for transnational similarities and differences (Jain, De Moya and Molleda, 2014). While

comparative approaches are dominant in the field of political communication (Pfetsch, 2004; Ciaglia, 2013; Canel and Voltmer, 2014; Esser and Pfetsch, 2016), these tend to overlook political public relations as significant actors in media systems. As explained in the next section, the vast majority of comparative studies in political communication focus their analysis on state-nations (Hepp and Couldry, 2009). The growing descentralization of state-nations and the emergence of sub-level territorial units with distinctive political claims are largely ignored.

4.4.1 Using sub-state nations as units for comparison

This thesis uses sub-state nations as the unit of comparison. This section argues that sub-state nations are valid units of analysis, and are potential explanatory frameworks to better understand the role that communication plays in politics. There is a strong normative bias against sub-state nations in comparative political communication studies (Chakravartty and Roy, 2013). The vast majority of comparative studies in political communication use nation-states as the basis for their comparison (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Stromback and Dimitrova, 2011; van Dalen, Albaek and de Vreese, 2011; Esser *et al.*, 2012; Pfetsch, 2013). However, nowadays nation-states are no longer the only referential framework as 'states must share their prerogatives with supra-state, sub-state and trans-state systems' (Keating, 2001 p.ix). While there are some comparative studies focused on the supra-state level of political communication, such as the European Union (Cornia, 2010; Tenscher, Mykkanen and Moring, 2012; Valentini, 2013), there are almost no comparative studies on the political communication features of sub-state nations.

Sub-state or stateless nations are 'territorial communities with their own identity and a desire for self-determination included within the boundaries of one or more states' (Guibernau, 2004 p.9). These territorial communities are significant political entities with their own party system (Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2010), executive and legislative institutions (Keating, 2010), and therefore their own media systems (P. Schlesinger and A. Benchimol, 2014). Some political communication scholars descredit what they label as regional variations because they regard them as non-representative cases

(Hallin & Mancini, 2012). However, the lack of a state status does not seem a strong reason to descredit the explanatory force of sub-state nations.

These territorial communities –such as Quebec, Basque Country, Flanders, Catalonia or Scotland- have generated a significative body of comparative studies in the field of territorial politics (Keating, 1996; Stolz, 2009; Swenden and Maddens, 2009; Hepburn, 2010; Liñeira and Cetrà, 2015). These studies contribute to understanding the relationship between language and nationalism (Cetrà, 2016), new forms of multi-level political competition (Hepburn, 2010) or issues in globalization and identities (Fletcher, 1998). There are no elements that might indicate sub-state nations are not suitable explanatory frameworks to understand the profession of political public relations.

4.4.1.1 The comparison between Scotland and Catalonia

Catalonia and Scotland are relevant cases for the study of political public relations practitioners because of both their similarities and differences as sub-state nations. There is a long tradition of comparison between the cases of Catalonia and Scotland because of the similarities in their nationalist movements and independence processes (Solano, 2007; Greer, 2007; Keating, 1996; MacInnes, 2004; Moreno, 1988; Paquin, 2001). This thesis contributes to overcome the gap of comparative knowledge between Scotland and Catalonia in regards to their political communication spheres.

There is a significant body of research on media systems and political communication features in Catalonia (San Eugenio, Ginesta and Xifra, no date; Xifra, 2009; Fernández *et al.*, 2011; Carrillo and Ferré-Pavia, 2013; Guimerà and Fernández, 2014) and in Scotland (Dekavalla, 2016; Frith & Meech, 2007; Larrondo, 2014; Mcnair, 2008; Schlesinger, David, & Dinan, 2001). Nevertheless, there are very few studies that compare the political communication dimension of these two sub-state nations where significant differences between the two cases emerge (Castelló & O'Donnell, 2009; Fernández, 2016; Terribas, 1994) . Furthermore, not only are these sub-state nations are ignored as valid units of analysis by political communication and public relations scholars, but they are barely mentioned when the UK or Spain's media systems are

explored in the literature (i.e. Franklin, 2003; Freedom, 2009; Hawes, 2012; Jackson, 2004).

Background similarities between Scotland and Catalonia are the basis for a comparative framework that enables this research to claim extensive conclusions. When comparing two different political systems, some kind of equivalence needs to be established (Van Deth, 1998). In this case, the work of political public relations practitioners can be framed in equivalent terms because of the similarities in the political context. According to Geer (2007:15), these two sub-state nations 'are often presented as easily comparable'. The main political reasons for this easy comparison are: they are both middle-sized sub-state nations; their political autonomy is relatively recent; and they are both exponents of civic nationalism (Greer, 2007). Therefore, political public relations operate in a similar multi-level political context with a national dimension where sovereignist movements are emerging, and a state-wide dimension where political institutions retain competences over certain powers and policies (Fabre, 2011). Sub-state nations as units of analysis have been largely ignored in political communication studies (Fernández-Quijada and Sellas, 2013).

In addition, the work of political public relations can be framed in equivalent terms because of the emerging independence referendum debates in Catalonia and Scotland. In September 2014, Scotland held an independence referendum and, just two months later, Catalonia held a symbolic non-binding consultation. Political agendas became similar in both contexts with parties and civil society being immersed in the pro- vs. anti-independence debate (Liñeira and Cetrà, 2015). However, it is not the aim of this thesis to examine the consequences of the referendum campaigns: these are only taken into consideration as part of the wider political context.

One of the main reasons for a comparative study between Scotland and Catalonia lies in the assumption that 'even similar phenomena are never identical' (Van Deth, 1998:4). Despite the similarities between Scotland and Catalonia, some of the most interesting elements of this comparison are the differences in their respective media systems, the articulation of the relationship between the media and the political sphere,

and the public visibility of political public relations practitioners. While Catalonia has a strong level of political autonomy on media policies (Guimerà, 2013) and its own public broadcaster, Scotland's parliament has no media policies, devolved powers and no separate public broadcast system from the wider UK (Keating, 2014).

Furthermore, according to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) models of interaction between political and media systems for modern democracies, Scotland (as part of the UK) belongs to the Liberal Media System Model and Catalonia (as part of Spain) to the Polarized Pluralist System Model. The first one is described as a context with a strong commercially-oriented press, a politically-independent public broadcast system and liberal media policies. However, the Polarized Pluralist context is characterised by strong levels of state intervention in media, the economic dependency of private news media on state subsidies, and highly-politicised public broadcast systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). As responsible for the articulation of the relationship between the media and political spheres, political public relations in Scotland and Catalonia operate in different political and media structures. In that interaction, within the UK and Scotland, 'spin doctors' are portrayed by the media and known by the general public, whereas in Catalonia and Spain, 'spin doctors' remain outside the focus of the media and the public is not generally aware of their existence.

To conclude, it can be stated that Catalonia and Scotland are relevant cases for the study of political public relations practitioners because they offer the opportunity to compare how the political public relations occupation is articulated in a similar political contexts but in different media system structures.

4.5 Interviewing as a main data collection method

The data collected for this thesis is based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the Heads of Communication of political parties in Scotland and Catalonia. This section will first elaborate on the rationale for this methodological choice and then will describe how the method was put in action.

The use of interviews as a data collection method derives from the lack of methodological diversity in the field of study, and the ontological and epistemological approach to the method. I argue that the use of in-depth interviews for the study of political public relations contributes to original knowledge because it provides a different perspective from previous studies and it reflects, for the first time, how political public relations practitioners portray themselves. As previously stated, this thesis aims to overcome the dominant methodological approach to the study of political public relations or 'spin doctors' based on quantitative content analysis of media representations of political public relations practitioners (Frenkel-Faran, 2008; Atkinson, 2005; Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; De Vreese and Elenbaas, 2009; Esser et al., 2000). These methodological perspectives have generated limited knowledge on 'spin doctors' as these are only viewed through the eyes of a neighbouring (and also main competitor) profession, the journalists.

Interview methodology has been absent in most of the research done on the area of political public relations (Davis, 2002; Castello, 2010; Gaber, 2004; Serazio, 2014). In-depth interviewing has been used as a data collection method for very few studies on US political consultants (Dulio, 2004; Magleby & Patterson, 1998; Medvic, 2004). However, as explained in Chapter 1, US political consultants are not entirely equivalent to political public relations practitioners in the European context. There seems to be some reticence amongst political communication scholars to use in-depth interviews as a stand-alone data collection method (Serazio, 2014). For instance, Graber (2004), in her review of political communication research methods, only considers in-depth interviews as a tool to 'broaden the insights gained from larger surveys' (Graber, 2004:64). However, interviewing data can offer more than just complementary data.

Beyond these considerations, the use of in-depth interviewing is also the most feasible data collection method. It could be argued that ethnographic approaches with participant observation methods are also adequate data collection methods. Nonetheless, I disregarded ethnographic and participant observation methods because of the difficulties in accessing political spheres. Access to political spheres is usually restricted because political parties and governments are fearful of unveiling their

tactics and strategies to the wider public and particularly, to their political counterparts (Harvey, 2011).

4.5.1 Using self-reflection to generate new knowledge

The use of interviews in this thesis is based on the idea that self-reflection can produce knowledge about the phenomenon here explored (Roulston, 2010a). Certainly, the process of interviewing is "inextricably and unavoidably, historically, politically and contextually bound"(Fontana and Frey, 2005, p. 695). However, this thesis embraces the subjectivity and contextual character of the interviewing process.

The aim of this thesis is to generate knowledge about a group of practitioners and the political and social context of their practice. To obtain this data, professionals need to engage in a reflexive process with its own profession and the system in which they operate. Interviewing facilitates this process of reflexive engagement (Roulston, 2010b). The aim is not to obtain simple descriptions of daily routines that could be obtained, for instance, through online questionaires. In this case, the aim is to engage practitioners in offering more than simple descriptions. This requires a process of feedback between the researcher and the source of data that can only be achieved through direct questioning (Roulston, 2010a).

The underlying idea is that interviewing facilitates the process of story-telling. The process of story-telling is a process of meaning-making (DeMarrais, 2004). Interviewees make sense of their own experiences by "selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them" (Seidman, 2006, p. 7). From an epistemological perspective, actors not only put in practice a series of actions –in this case occupational tasks and functions- but they are constantly monitoring and discursively reflecting on them as part of the way of enacting them(Giddens, 1991). Social actors' knowledge is not incidental but integral of the systems and structures in which they are embedded (Giddens, 1984). In other words, researchers can get to know the social world through people's responses because these reflect people's role in constructing their own social environment. However, the following section explains there are some restrictions, and advantages at the same time, in the case of political PR practitioners as they are elite members of

the political and media sphere.

4.5.2 Interviewing elites

This section explores the challenges and advantages involved in interviewing an elite group such as political PR practitioners. This thesis interviews members of an elite group to obtain information to finally make generalizable claims about political PR practitioners' characteristics (Goldstein, 2002). In addition, this elite interviewing happens at the sub-state level of politics, Scotland and Catalonia. In this context, elite interviews are considered of special utility because they can capture the different characteristics of political actors at this level of politics (Beamer, 2002).

This thesis is one of the first studies to categorise political PR practitioners as political elites. Practitioners are an elite because formally, they occupy powerful managerial positions within political institutions (see Chapter 6). Political PR practitioners are considered political elites because they are directly involved in the political process (Beamer, 2002), they are involved in the communication dimension of the political process.

Interviewing elites implies additional challenges for the researcher (Desmond, 2004) and the data analysis (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). The main challenge for the researcher when conducting elite interviews is the power dimension that appears when interviewing political elites (Smith, 2006). The previous section highlighted the relevance of the researcher stimulating interviewees' self-reflection through questions and observations. Nevertheless, in the case of elite interviewing the relationship between the interviewee and the researcher is more asymmetrical than in non-elite interview settings (Desmond, 2004). In the context of this thesis the asymmetrical relationship is related to two elements: the position political PR practitioners occupy in parties and governments, and the gender dimension.

During the interview, and specially during the first minutes, the researcher and the interviewee construct and establish the role and identity they will adopt in the exchange of information (Kezar, 2003). Chapter 5 explains political PR practice is a male-dominated professional field. There are very few female practitioners and part of

the professionally accepted behaviours relate to sexist attitudes. In this context, the female gender and young age of the interviewer plays a role. However, I did not become aware of this limitation until I got the chance to interview female practitioners and they exposed their ideas on the gender dimension of the profession. Reflecting on my own practices I realised some of my interviews might have been affected by this dimension of the profession.

The role and position of political PR practitioners in political institutions is a challenge both for the interview process and the data analysis stage. One of the paradoxes of interviewing political PR practitioners is that they are experts in preparing their candidates for media interviews –see Chapter 6. In that sense, the researcher faces an additional challenge because practitioners feel they can control the interview format, despite academic interviews differ from journalistic ones (Harvey, 2011). In this context, having a background in journalism allowed me to identify when interviewees behaved in a media-like attitude. My role in those cases was to remember the exploratory and non-political dimension of the interview.

Finally, the role and position of political PR practitioners is also a challenge for the data analysis stage. Beamer (2002) recommends the researcher should be particularly cautious when assessing interviewees' responses about their roles and contributions as they might have been overstated. The following section explains that this challenge was taken into consideration during the interview process and it shows the different strategies adopted by the researcher to guarantee the validity of the data.

4.5.3 Operationalization

In line with this rationale, I operationalised the method in the following way. I opted for in-depth interviewing with open-ended questions to allow the participants to reconstruct their experiences (Seidman, 2006) and to avoid imposing any previous categorizations of the phenomena studied (Fontana and Frey, 2005). However, these individual experiences are not to be framed as a single item but as a 'patchwork quilt' (Saukko, 2005) or as a constructed and flowing narrative of a complex image of what these practitioners are. I established two main areas of inquiry related to the research goals:

- Micro-level, definition of the profession. Practitioners were asked to describe their daily routines; their career paths; what they considered to be the ethical norms of the occupation; and their relationship with the political organization.

- Macro-level, contextualization of political public practitioners within the political and media sphere. Practitioners were asked to describe their relationships with journalists, editors and politicians. I insisted on getting details about their strategies. They were asked to evaluate the consequences of the current political panorama (independence referendum) for their occupation and their relationship with news media.

During the interview process I used the following strategies to encourage participants to reflect on their work and contrast elements of bias in their answers:

- *Interviewing setting. The interviews were conducted as close to the working scenario as possible in order to contextualise and observe some real interactions. For instance, when interviews took place in the Catalan and the Scottish Parliament, respectively, I was able to observe encounters between practitioners and parliamentary journalists who sometimes interrupted the interviews or walked around the building in their news-gathering daily routines.*

- *Stimulating competitiveness. One of the main characteristics of the political field in democratic societies is its competitive nature (Mazzolenni, 2001). As a consequence, political actors like to comment on each other's point of view, statements or actions. Thus, this can be an alternative path to contrast and compare different points of view. For example, it is quite common among political public relations practitioners to constantly compare and contrast their work in order to develop better communication strategies.*

- *Referencing hypothetical scenarios. In order to analyse the degree in which the speaker is describing actual situations or idealistic ones, the interview guidelines include a series of questions that refer to hypothetical scenarios. The goal is to force the interviewee to describe how he/she would operate in alternative situations. These alternative situations can be historical and well-*

known scenarios such as Tony Blair's period.

- *Contrasting opinions with written sources. These written sources referred to both monographs written by former political public relations practitioners (Sellers, 2010; Johnson, 2001; Prince, 2005) or opinion articles written by journalists about the work of political public relations. The goal is to stimulate the interviewee to express his/her point of view from different perspectives.*

4.5.4 Sampling

The sampling criteria is of high relevance for the purposes of this thesis. By selecting specific interviewees, this thesis establishes the frameworks of who and who cannot be considered a political public relations practitioner. Also, by restricting the nature of the political organizations included in the sample, this thesis pre-defines the organizational context of my definition of the political public relations occupation. The process of sampling started after this thesis was granted ethical approval by the Department of Media, Communication and Performing Arts at Queen Margaret University.

As it can be deducted from the previous statements, political public relations practitioners constitute the key informants of this research. This research understands political public relations practitioners as the person in charge of the communication strategy of a government, political parties and/or political campaign platforms. The criteria for sample selection was to refer to those practitioners that held or were in the past Head of Communication for Catalan and Scottish political parties or governments. I selected practitioners that worked for the two main political institutions involved in the production and dissemination of political communication (Mazzoleni, 2010): sub-state governments and political parties –see Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Political institutions included in the sample

	Government institutions	Political Parties

Scotland	Scottish Government: *Head of Communications. Senior Political Spokesperson for the First Minister (Special Advisor in Communication)*	Scottish National Party *Director of Strategic Communications*
		Scottish Labour *Head of Strategy and Communications*
		Scottish Conservatives *Communications Director*
		Scottish Greens *Head of Media*
		Scottish Liberals *Communications Director*
Catalonia	Catalan Government, Generalitat de Catalunya: *Secretary of Government Communication and News Media*	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)
		Convergència i Unió (CiU)
		Partit Popular de Catalunya (PPC)
		Partit Socialista de Catalunya (PSC)
		Iniciativa per Catalunya
		Ciutadans

Practitioners occupying the positions described in Table 3.4 have 'the special knowledge, status or communication skills' (Wellington, 2007: 95) needed to become key informants. Through a snowballing process, I gained access to these practitioners and I also identified potential interviewees that had not been included in my initial list. In that process, I decided to include former practitioners as part of the sample because, once liberated from their contractual obligations with the party, these practitioners were keen to explain more insightful details than those who practiced the occupation at the time of the interview.

To better reflect the contextual determinants of the two cases, I expanded the scope of the sampling to referendum campaign platforms because at the time of the interviews both Scotland and Catalonia were getting ready to set up independence referendums. From a broader point of view, 'the defining characteristics of political actors are not their inherent nature but either if they have political agendas and are trying to influence the political process' (Stromback & Kiousis, 2011:10). However, eventually Catalonia was not allowed to set up an official referendum campaign and only Scottish referendum campaign platforms (Better Together and Yes Scotland) were included in the sample. As it can be observed in Table 4.4, a total of 23 practitioners and former practitioners from 13 political parties were interviewed. All participants were given a consent form.

There are two key elements that were excluded from the list provided in Table 4.3 that need to be justified. The first one is the exclusion of a key political institution in Scotland: the Scottish Office. The main reason is that there is no Catalan institution equivalent to the Scottish Office. The relationship between the Spanish Government and the Catalan Government is not articulated through a dedicated office but through a second parliament chamber –Senado- based in Madrid. The focus of this research is limited to the sub-state level and for practical purposes, the Scottish Office is a relevant institution for future research that explores the political communication dimension in the relationship state- sub-state. In terms of the political parties sample, I opted to limit my sample to those parties with parliamentary representation at the moment of

conducting the interviews.

The second element excluded from the sampling reflected in Table 3.4 is the civil service body and its corresponding head that is in charge of communication at the Scottish Government. As explained in Chapter 3, there are no civil servants involved in communication departments at the Catalan government. There are civil servants dealing with administrative tasks but all management levels, the one this research is interested in, are politically appointed. In that sense, some of the very interesting debates that happen in the Scottish and also, UK context between the professional body of civil servants doing non-political government communication and special advisors in communication providing the political intake are non-existent in the Catalan case.

Table 4.4 shows the names of each interviewee and the political institution they were working for and/or worked in the past. The aim of Table 4.4 is to explain that the same interviewee sometimes had worked for different political institutions. Most cases that related to the party's position (government or opposition) but in Catalonia's case there were two interviewees that had worked for more than one party –see Chapter 5 for more information.

Table 4.4 List of interviewees and political institutions they worked for

INTERVIEWEES	POLITICAL INSTITUTION	
	Political Party	**Government**
John Fellows	Scottish National Party	-
Kevin Pringle	Scottish National Party Yes, Scotland	Scottish Government (SNP)
Stuart Nicholson	-	Scottish Government (SNP)
Simon Pia	Scottish Labour	-
Rami Okasha	Scottish Labour	-
John Mclellan	Scottish Conservatives	-
Ramsay Jones	Scottish Conservatives	UK Government (Special Advisor on Scotland)
Susan Stewart	Yes, Scotland	-
Rob Shorthouse	Better Together	-
Jason Rose	Scottish Greens	-

James Mackenzie	Scottish Greens	-
Adam Clark	Scottish Liberals	-
David Madí	Convergència i Unió	Catalan Government (CiU)
Francesc Sanchez	Convergència	-
Veronica Fumanal	Ciutadans + Partit Socialista de Catalunya	-
Eladio Jareño	Partit Popular de Catalunya + Partit Socialista de Catalunya	-
Toni Bolaño	Partit Socialista de Catalunya	Catalan Government (PSC)
Victor Francos	Partit Socialista de Catalunya	-
Pep Taberner	Partit Socialista de Catalunya	Catalan Government (PSC)
Marc Rius	Iniciativa per Catalunya	-
Jordi Trilla	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	Catalan Government (ERC)
Sergi Sol	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya	-

This list of participants does not aim to be exhaustive, but rather a representative sample of the wide range of practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia. As observed in Table 4.4, I successfully managed to interview at least one practitioner from each political party in Scotland and Catalonia. However, because of the snowballing process, participants influenced the selection of interviewees through their recommendations and suggestions (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault, 2016). At least five more practitioners were contacted but most of them rejected my interview offer because of confidentiality issues.

4.6 Qualitative data analysis

This section provides a rationale for the qualitative data analysis method deployed and a detailed account on how the data analysis was carried out. The data is systematised through thematic analysis and data coding. The data analysis and the process of conclusion-drawing are underpinned by the concept of discourse and social practice (Fairclough, 2001).

Amongst the biggest challenges in the interviewing process are data analysis and data interpretation (Gibson and Brown, 2009). The researcher needs to be forefront and

transparent in the use of methods of data analysis to claim the validity of the results and the subsequent generation of knowledge (Roulston, 2011). For that reason, this section explains the approaches taken to each one of the concurrent steps in qualitative data analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusion-drawing (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The approach taken to conclusion-drawing determines previous steps in data reduction and data display (Gibson and Brown, 2009). In this case, the data analysis and conclusion-drawing stems from the assumption that practices and discursive resources are interconnected (Fairclough, 2001). This thesis draws conclusions on the characteristics and practices of a professional group using interviewees' responses. The underlying idea is that interviewees 'interpret and represent to themselves and each other what they do, and these interpretations and representations shape and reshape what they do [social practices]' (Fairclough, 2001, p. 4). From that perspective, interviewees' responses are not only isolated discourses, but are constitutive elements of their daily practices, actions and reflections. This thesis draws conclusions in trying to establish a nuanced explanation of how political public relations practitioners reflect on their own practices and wider social systems. The final aim is to generate knowledge on both the practitioner-level and systemic-level elements that build the political public relations occupation.

The data analysis process starts with the transcription of the material as the researcher has to make a series of decisions that can eventually discriminate, vary or expand the empirical data available for analysis (Roulston, 2011). At this point, I opted for a verbatim transcription respecting the original language of the interviews: English, Spanish and Catalan, despite knowing that might limit the accessibility of the transcripts. However, political public relations practitioners, as experts in the use of the language, were keen on using games of words, metaphors comparisons and bad language that only made sense in the original language and that enlightened my understanding of the phenomena. Only those quotes used in the data analysis chapters have been translated to English.

The data is analysed following thematic analysis in three steps: examining commonalities, differences and relationships (Gibson and Brown, 2009). In this case, the data is coded combining a series of deductive *a priori* categories with inductive empirical codes. This data analysis method derives from the use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Pre-established areas of inquiry in the interviews –see section 4.5- were transformed into *a priori* general categories to locate these themes in the data (examination of commonalities; see Table 4.5). These categories were then combined with inductive codes that indicated how these general themes were expressed in the data. For instance, the relationship between the interviewee and a journalist is coded using the double label 'relationship with journalists: conflictive'. Or when significant elements of their professional identity were detected I would signal them as 'professional identity: ideological boundaries' (examination of differences). As observed in Table 4.5, five general codes emerged (these are only the most significant and common empirical codes.

Table 4.5 List of data analysis codes

General theme- *a priori* codes	Specific issue- empirical codes
Professional identity	Background experience
	Evaluation of colleagues
Media relations	Ethics
	Issues in the relationship
	Independence referendum
	Media subsidies (Catalonia)
Strategy	Social media
	Role in the party

Job descriptions

Tasks

Daily routines

These codes were transferred to NVivo to facilitate the process of identifying patterns and differences. NVivo proved to be a useful tool to store data and codes. Nevertheless, patterns of relationships and differences were best observed with manual analysis of codes. Table 4.5 shows that coding demonstrated interesting relationships between the general topics and specific issues (examination of relationships). For instance, ethical considerations only emerged as related to the interviewees' relationships with news media and not with their job descriptions or professional identity. The following data analysis chapters will explore the relationships between the five big categorical codes above and the empirical data.

4.6.1 The theoretical framework and the data analysis

The analysis of the data is structured in three chapters. Each chapter (see table 4.1 and 4.2) explores a different dimension of the data starting from the micro-level dynamics of practitioners' professional identity (chapter 5); to the immediate macro-level of practitioners' role in political institutions (chapter 6); to the wider macro-level context of practitioners' interaction with the media and political spheres (chapter 7). This structure not only reflects the different levels of analysis but it is supported by the theoretical framework previously described.

Chapter 5 is supported by the concept of hybrid professions and hybrid professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2007; Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011). The chapter assumes that identities in workplaces are not restricted to the existence of formalised professional structures but shared values, ideologies and approaches to work routines also play a relevant role. In that sense, the chapter explores formalised professional structures such as career paths and professional knowledge, along with shared values and ideologies.

Chapter 6 explores the relationship between institutions and political PR practitioners. The chapter is supported by the concept of institutions as dynamic social constructs (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) . The chapter explores how practitioners make sense

and describe their routines in the context of different political institutions (parties and governments). In that sense, it explores how individual agents can make sense of the institutional environment where they operate.

Chapter 7 analyses the data underpinned by the media and political system concepts. The chapter explores how practitioners understand and perceive they play a role in the relationship between these two institutional spheres. The analysis is based on the idea that political institutions (in this case, parties and governments) form a distinct sphere from that of media institutions (news media, online platforms) but there is a constant relationship flux between the two of them. The political PR practitioner is in this chapter assumed to have a key influential role in this relationship. The relationship between the two spheres is analysed taking into consideration the elements outlined by Hallin and Mancini (2004) in their theory of media system models.

To conclude, this thesis approached the analysis of empirical data combining qualitative analysis with a thematic analysis approach to coding. Relationships between codes and categories are understood as a discursive construction of practices and reflection of the wider systemic structures (i.e. media systems).

4.7 Conclusions

This chapter has presented the two main research questions and the methodological design of this thesis. There are two key elements in this chapter. The first is the unit of analysis, and therefore the main perspective of this thesis, is that of political public relations practitioners. These practitioners' reflections and testimonies –carefully obtained through in-depth interviews- are the core data this thesis works with. The second element is the dual analysis that runs through this thesis. This thesis explores political public relations practitioners by combining micro- and macro-level analysis from a comparative perspective. Two main research questions lead this combined analysis: what are the constitutive elements of the performance and practice of the political public relations profession?; and how do specific national media systems impact the political public relations profession? The analysis of the data –through thematic coding- builds up from the constitutive elements of the profession to the role

and functions in political parties and governments, to finally explore the impact of the wider media system on the profession.

CHAPTER 5 THE POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER: PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

This chapter focuses on the performance of political public relations. The chapter examines the main characteristics of the individual political public relations professional and the core elements of their professionalism. This chapter is the first of the three chapters that analyse the data obtained from in-depth interviews with political public relations professionals. As explained in Chapter 4, the data analysis is structured in three steps and three corresponding chapters that go from the micro-level dimension to the macro-level.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the performative aspect (Feldman and Pentland, 2003) of the daily routines and actions of political PR practitioners. The goal of the chapter is to explore what norms, values and professional profiles relate to the professional group of political PR. In order to do so, this chapter draws from the analysis of the socio-demographic characteristics of the interview sample, and from the analysis of professional identity elements found in the interview responses. The analysis is based on the assumption that professional structures are not necessarily linked to formal structures, such as having a certified body of scientific knowledge (Noordegraaf, 2007). Professionalism is understood as emerging from a defined professional identity (Evetts, 2013) based on a series of professional norms and professional (ethical) principles.

The main argument of the chapter is as follows. Practitioners identify themselves as part of a specific social group restricted to those with previous experience in media or party politics management, and with a good network of contacts within the party. The ideal practitioner is presented as someone who remains in the shadows, combining exclusive dedication to serving the needs of the media with loyalty to party or government's interests.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The chapter is divided in three sections. The first section outlines the main socio-demographic characteristics of the interview sample to explore the profile of political public relations practitioners. The second section examines the career paths and entry requirements for the profession as understood by practitioners. The final section analyses principles and the ideal type of

the political public relations practitioner. This section outlines interviewees' beliefs and values related to the norms and occupational behaviours that characterise the 'ideal' spin doctor.

5.1 The socio-demographic profile of political public relations

This section examines the demographic profile of the interviewees. The aim is to explore whether there is a common profile of a political public relations practitioner and, in that case, to determine its distinctive elements. The data gathered for this section combines interviewees' biographical data with descriptions of their working experiences. At the beginning of each interview, each participant was asked to elaborate on what career choices lead them to become the Head of Media of a political party.

As observed in Table 5.1, it seems clear that the most dominant profile is a male aged between 40 and late 50s. Regardless of the political and the national context, these practitioners are senior professionals in the sense that they all have long previous careers in the fields of media and/or politics. According to these descriptions, most of the interviewees developed large or substantial professional careers before joining their position as communication directors. They all describe periods of 7-20 years of previous experience in related fields before they moved to work as political public relations professionals.

Table 5.1 Professional background of interviewees

NATION	PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE	GENDER	FORMAL EDUCATION	POSTERIOR JOB
SCOTLAND	+5 years internal positions within the party	Male		PR practitioner
	+15 years internal positions within the party	Male	Political Science	Lobbyist
	+10 years as a Journalist	Male	Journalism	Still in the same position
	+20 years as a Journalist	Male		Media pundit/lecturer
	+5 years internal positions within the party	Male		PR practitioner

	Experience	Gender	Degree	Current/Later role
	+15 years as a Journalist	Male	Journalism	Director of newspaper trade body
	+10 years Journalist	Male		Special advisor on Scottish affairs (UK government)
	+20 years internal positions within the party	Male		
	+20 years as civil servant/public relations	Female		
	+10 years Civil Servant/ public relations	Male		PR practitioner
	+15 years as Journalist/ public relations	Male	No degree	Still in the job
	+ 10 years public relations/internal positions within the party	Male	Anthropology	PR practitioner
	+5 years internal positions within the party	Male	History	Still in the job
	+10 years internal positions within the party	Male	Law	Consultant
	+ 10 years local politician and internal positions within the party	Male	Law	Still in the job
	+5 years public relations	Female	Political Science	Current head of comms for another party
CATALONIA	+ 20 years public relations	Male	Pedagogy	Director of RTVE in Catalonia (Spanish broadcaster)
	+ 10 years Public Relations and internal positions within the party	Male	Journalism	Media pundit
	+5 years internal positions within the party	Male	Law	Not known
	+10 years as a Journalist	Male	Journalism	Head of Comms for local

			politicians (same party)
+10 years internal positions within the party	Male	Philosophy	Still in the job
+ 10 years Public Relations and internal positions within the party	Male	Publicity	PR practitioner
+5 years as a journalist and internal positions within the party	Male	Journalism	Still in the job

5.1.1 Formal education

In general terms, 95% of the interviewees had a university degree connected with their previous professional experience. In both Scotland and Catalonia, these practitioners primarily hold university degrees in Politics, Sociology, Anthropology, Journalism and Law. According to the data, formal education, understood as a university or graduate degree, is not considered essential to obtain the job position and/or practice the occupation. However, two changes can be observed in this area: some practitioners in Catalonia and Scotland recognise that there is an increasing professionalisation as more university diplomas are 'helping' the profession; and in Catalonia it seems to be common practice to attend a short diploma course on Strategic Campaigning at George Washington University (USA) either before or after accepting the job position.

Interviewees described the profession as not requiring a certified university title. They justified this professional norm because the knowledge required for the profession emerges from the daily practice of journalism or politics:

> 'My training back then was irrelevant – what they were interested in was my knowledge of the media scene and my understanding of personalities' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'I have no formal training in politics or communications, I was interested in politics. Actually I didn't find that [formal training] was an important element but I found the most useful thing was understanding politics' (Scotland, February 2014).

University degrees' lack of relevance was a common feature in Scotland and Catalonia. However, two spin doctors in Catalonia and Scotland recognised that the occupation is becoming 'professionalised' in a positive way thanks to the emergence of new university degrees:

> 'There is an increasing professionalisation in political PR. I think a lot of courses at Queen Margaret University and Stirling and elsewhere are really helping' (Scotland, February 2014).

> 'I think that nowadays in Spain there must be six masters and consequently there are lots of professionals with these diplomas. This is an increasing tendency and more and more political consultancies are being created' (Catalonia April, 2014).

Despite the strong similarities in terms of the academic background of the Scottish and the Catalan practitioners, as shown in table 5.1, the Catalan case has some singularities. During informal conversations I had with people connected to the Catalan political sphere, I was told that most Catalan practitioners before or after joining their employment usually attend a short diploma course in Strategic Politics at the George Washington University (USA). Only two of the interviewees admitted their parties had paid for the short course, but it was quite relevant the way they described the course as the 'famous forum' where all the spin doctors met. One of the spin doctors not only had attended the course but he spent several months in the USA following Obama's 2009 election campaign to 'learn and observe some of the most modern election campaign technique' (Catalonia April, 2014).

5.1.2   A male-dominated occupation

The data demonstrates that political public relations is a male-dominated occupation both in Scotland and Catalonia. There are two elements in the data that indicate the existence of a male-dominated occupation: the number of male practitioners is overwhelmingly superior to female practitioners (see Table 4.1); and interviewees describe sexist attitudes as something common in the occupation.

Table 5.1 clearly shows that Communications Directors are usually male practitioners. Female practitioners have been the exception in both nations. Gender imbalance is not only a matter of numbers but it is also characteristic of the nature of this role. For

instance, interviewees admit that there are fewer women than men practising the occupation:

> 'In this profession, there are few women and a lot of men' (Catalonia April, 2014).

Some interviewees, specifically female practitioners, went beyond the debate on numbers and associated the occupation of spin doctor with a series of masculine attitudes. As recognised by the only Scottish female spin doctor interviewed, there are a series of male attitudes and behaviours that have been traditionally accepted in the occupation:

> 'I think that the political spin doctor has been very much a male dominated domain. I think that is worth examining in terms of the conduct of the debate and the way we treat each other'(Scotland, February 2014).

Male-dominated attitudes are associated with managing relationships with colleagues and journalists. This interviewee describes the profession as a 'contact sport', making a clear reference to rugby as a sport associated with roughness, brutal force and non-feminine attitudes. Similarly, another interviewee describes these 'macho' attitudes as:

> 'You know, the best kind of spin doctors was the kind that shouted out people in a really aggressive and macho manner' (Scotland interview data, February 2014).

Aggressive language and manners are described as the 'macho' spin doctor attitude. These 'macho' attitudes and conducts were also recognised by the Catalan female counter-part, though from a more personal perspective. It is worthwhile pointing out that the Catalan female practitioner, when asked about the gender imbalance situation, requested an off-the-record statement. However, as the conversation developed and we changed the topic, she again approached the imbalance from the perspective of the personal obstacles she faced everyday at work. She connected her feminine physical appearance with her struggle to obtain professional prestige due to a series of typically masculine attitudes:

> 'I am a reactive person and I need to be more aggressive than the others to get people's respect… If people believe that because I am blonde or because I am a woman, then I am more stupid I can play with that and surprise them. That is an opportunity for me' (Catalonia April, 2014).

As also shown in the previous quote, the issue of aggressiveness emerges as a necessary attitude for the occupation. Interviewees considered aggressiveness as something related to male practitioners or something female practitioners need to demonstrate more than their male counterparts, as observed in the quote above. Gender imbalances have been reported in those professions that serve as entry careers for political public relations practitioners, such as public relations practitioners working in corporate settings (Grunig, Hon and Toth, 2013); politicians (Folke and Rickne, 2016; Greene and O'Brien, 2016); and journalists (Byerly, 2013).

It is worthwhile to note that in some of the informal conversations that took place during the fieldwork, some of the people that are working or worked for political parties also pointed to the existence of a 'macho' spin doctor culture. In a very casual way, the 'macho' spin doctor culture was described as a working environment dominated by elevated levels of alcohol consumption, as a normal practice to formalise some of the agreements and encounters with journalists; and also as a working environment where impoliteness and strong reactions that included harmful language happened quite often. However, as is explained in chapter 7, when the interviewees were asked about these attitudes in their daily relationships with journalists, these experiences were constantly denied and they accused other practitioners of behaving in such inappropriate ways.

5.1.3 Experts in Scotland and Catalonia

According to the data, political public relations practitioners developed their previous careers within the political and media spheres of each small nation. Amongst the data, there are no cases of former London-based journalists that are offered positions as Head of Communication in any Scottish political party in the sample. Equally there are no former Catalan journalists that obtained their media expertise in Madrid-based media. Similarly, those practitioners that are former party employees described their previous positions as always being related to Scotland and Catalonia. For instance, they would work in Madrid or London parliaments but dealing with Catalan or Scottish issues.

5.1.4 Career-paths

This section combines the demographic data described above, along with interviewees' descriptions, to describe the two main career paths that exist in the profession. The aim is to explore whether these two career paths have wider consequences for the profession or whether they are just established routes of access. As demonstrated in Figure 5.1, political public relations are either former journalists or PR practitioners (media route); or they are former party employees (political route).

Figure 5.1 Career paths
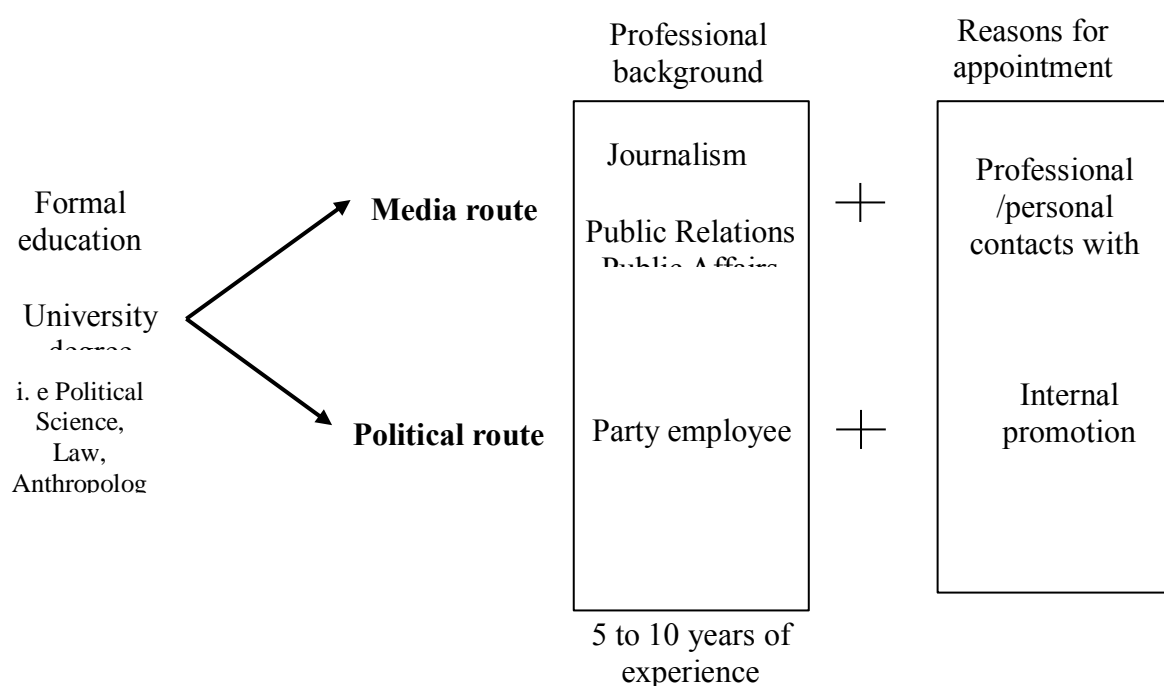
The number of interviewees that came either from a political or a media route is quite similar in Scotland and Catalonia:

Table 5.2 Interviewees' career routes

	Political route	Media Route
Scotland	39%	61%
Catalonia	40%	60%

As it can be observed in Table 5.2, practitioners coming from the media route seem to be the dominant in Scotland and Catalonia. However, as a word of caution, the dominance of one route over the other might just be because of this specific sample of professionals. Practitioners refer to these two routes as the traditional path to access the profession:

> 'Most people would obviously come through either journalism or politics as their career to end up what I am doing, that would be far more traditional. A lot of my contemporaries might well be in journalism or something like and then cross the line to political communications' (Scotland, February 2014).

By describing these two routes as 'traditional', the interviewee is indicating the existence of a established system of informal credentialism in the profession –similar quotes were found in almost all interviews. The system would require the practitioner to have a career in media or politics as his or her credential to then, as the interviewee above describes, cross the line to the new profession. Despite both routes being described as traditional, there seems to be a significant identity variation between the two routes. Practitioners defend their professionalism as being better because of their background either in politics or media. Edwards (2014) identified similar systems of informal credentialism in the UK's public relations industry. In this case, public relations trade publications create a system of informal credentialism by promoting ideal models of professionals that exclude working class practitioners and members of minority communities. The following sub-sections examine the differences found amongst practitioners in each route.

5.1.4.1 Political career route: working for the party

The so-called 'political' route is one of the two ways of achieving the expertise and knowledge regarded as essential to become part of the political PR professional group. In this case, political means that the professionals that are hired as communication heads of a political party have previously developed their careers working in different positions within the same party. Commonly, following this route implies that the practitioner starts working for the party from a low level position –compared to the management position of a head of communication- such as researcher for an MP or MSP; campaign manager; aide to ministers; or, in some cases, they start working for their juvenile or student branches. According to their descriptions, being appointed

Head of Communication was similar to an internal promotion that in most cases happened because of a combination of different circumstances. There are two main circumstances that were described as catalysers of the promotion: changes in the leadership of the party and electoral outcomes.

The notion of a political route is firmly recognised by the same practitioners:

> 'It was kind of a political route...So it wasn't that long going ambition of mine thinking one day I will work in Scottish politics but I just like the way things have turned out.' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'I think that my background was not from a professional communication background, it was from a political background' (Scotland, February 2014).

As can be seen in the quotes above, practitioners label themselves as belonging to one of the two routes. The step towards achieving the Head of Communication position usually relates to changes in the leadership of the party:

> 'I went to work with the Catalan Economy Minister and he named me his Chief of Staff. I started doing communication stuff when there is a change in the minister's political career. He was named party's spokesperson and he named me Director of the Office of the Spokesperson' (Catalonia April, 2014).

Being promoted to the position of Head of Communication is also connected with electoral outcomes:

> 'At the end of 2006 I got asked to go back to work for the SNP for the next year's election… When we won the election I went to work in the Scottish Government as the First Minister's Special Advisor focusing on the media' (Scotland, February 2014).

In the above case, the interviewee was promoted from campaign manager to Government Special Advisor because of a successful campaign. One of the peculiarities of the interviewees that followed this route is that they felt in the need to justify that they had good knowledge of the media environment despite being an internal party employee:

> 'I didn't have a media role directly but it was largely about generating information, briefing documents. Those things would be useful in a media context ideally, in terms of an argument that you want to pursue in a press release' (Scotland, February 2014)

As it can be observed, some of the practitioners felt the need to justify the legitimacy of their career path. One of the interviewees explained that practitioners that come from a political route are sometimes questioned:

> 'Sometimes journalists think that I am a shit and lazy because I have always worked in politics and I don't have the capacity to work outside my party doing something else. You can say that when you know it's true. However, the journalist doesn't know that I have worked in a bar for many years, also at the university, I was an intern, I worked as a lawyer' (Catalonia April, 2014).

The perception of why they are promoted is a sensitive point. Practitioners feel they are accused, in this case by journalists, of being promoted because of their political alliances and not their communication expertise. Trying to challenge these accusations of a lack of professionalism, another interviewee argued that spin doctors who followed the political route have better skills than the 'others' that are former journalists and PR practitioners:

> 'The best ones were the ones that came from a political background, the ones that came from a journalistic background might have some technical skills or some interesting insights to the production process. But the most valuable thing was just a good political sense of what it is wrong or right, what people want to know and if you don't have that, you better don't work in politics then' (Scotland, February 2014).

Their main argument is that they possess better knowledge of the internal functioning of the party than those who come from an external context. The underlying idea is that of transferable skills from one position to another. As demonstrated in the next section, media route professionals also justify their role because of their transferable skills. The next section demonstrates that, despite the apparent differences between the two sets of professions, these two career paths signal very similar elements.

5.1.4.2 Media career path: journalism & public relations

Having a career in journalism or public relations is also an access route to the profession of political PR. Table 5.3 shows that more than a half of the practitioners interviewed for this research who were hired as heads of communication were previously journalists or public relations practitioners. Practitioners who followed this route of access to the occupation identify themselves as different and better suited for the occupation because of their media skills. However, the data also points out that

personal networks between these practitioners and politicians play a very significant role in the selection process.

Former journalists and PR practitioners contend they have the right set of skills to generate messages, as well as useful personal connections with journalists and newspapers editors:

> 'What they were interested in was my knowledge of the media scene and my understanding of personalities. Journalists understand more what is going to work as a story and not going to work, how things are going to play out in the media or not. So they are basically buying media expertise when they appoint people like me' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'I would never hire a spin doctor that has never worked before in news media. There are plenty of reasons: firstly, because you know people; secondly because the profile is less aggressive for journalist; and thirdly you are an outsider and you have external points of view – this is quite important because when you have been in a party for a long time you only see the internal point of view' (Catalonia April, 2014).

They consider themselves to be external experts that can bring specialised skills and contacts to the party. Interviewees describe how they transfer skills from journalism to political public relations. As previously explained, those experts coming from a political route also referred to their capability of transferring skills from party politics to political public relations. Therefore, it can be assumed that political public relations is a profession partly constituted by knowledge generated in other professions, namely journalism and public relations.

Practitioners coming from a political route transferred to political public relations because of internal promotions. However, personal networks with the party seem to be the key for former journalists to enter the political public relations profession:

> 'I had a lot of contacts in the political world from all sites of the political spectrum. I had very good contacts with the Conservative Party, particularly in Scotland' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'I was not very keen on the Catalan Socialist Party. I did not plan to make a career in political communication. It was not an ideological decision, I was just thinking in my professional career… But I ended up accepting the job offer, the conditions were good and I am good friends with the person who made the offer. I knew we were going to get along' (Catalonia April, 2014).

These two quotes explain that ideological affiliation was less significant than personal and professional connections for employment. Interviewees also explained that job offers came at a moment that they were not necessarily looking out for new professional opportunities. Job offers reflected parties' communication needs and were not formally advertised. This feature indicates the profession's system of double closure: practitioners need a personal network of contacts, and a previous career in politics or media to access the profession.

Personal networks and political affiliations seem to be key not only in Scotland and Catalonia, but also in the US political consultant market (Bohne, Prevost and Thurber, 2009). Amongst all interviewees, only three former journalists or PR practitioners admitted they had joined the party as members or activists one or two years before being offered the job. However, almost all former journalists and PR had joined the party or became ideologically affiliated with the party after starting their job. There were some exceptions in Catalonia's case. Section 5.3.2 explores in detail the role of political ideology in the political public relations profession.

5.1.4.3 The timings of the profession

According to the data, political public relations professionals get in and out of political public relations positions. The high demands of the job, in addition to political tempos, as explained by interviewees, make it almost impossible to remain in the same position and in the profession for a long time. The analysis of the data shows that both Scottish and Catalan practitioners become media pundits, lobbyists, news media directors or public relations professionals in big corporations (see table 4.1). Practitioners explain one of the main difficulties of the profession is the 24/7 work routine and the subsequent feeling of burn out:

> 'The thing is that you burn out. It's literally seven days a week, the only time I switched off my phone is when I was on an airplane. Sometimes even at half-past six in the morning until midnight seven days a week, that was what it was like. Even at weekends, Saturday is actually really busy because all the Sunday papers were preparing their stories and Sunday was really busy because all the Monday newspapers were following up what was on the Sunday newspapers. You can't do that forever. I did it for five years and it was a long time and most people probably do it for less' (Edinburgh, February 2014);

'I can completely understand why people do certain things. After the campaign I was exhausted, it was three years non-stop specially the last three months so it's tiring. So you understand why people would do big campaigns or one term of government and then leave and do something else' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

The political public relations profession is highly demanding; however, these former journalists and party employees are the only ones that handle the pressure of 24/7 news cycle. Therefore, the difficulties of the job are, at the same time, the reason why these professionals are needed. The underlying idea is that only an exclusive group of people, with the right skills, can handle the high levels of responsibility, pressure to perform and manage critical or tense situations:

'It's a difficult job because you are constantly under pressure to perform so people will always look to you to fix it' (Edinburgh May, 2015);

'The job implies a lot of activity; many worries, a lot of pressure and a lot of critical moments. If you let yourself go with all that, then you have a bad time and you are in a very tense situation that doesn't let you think properly' (Catalonia, April 2014).

The above quotes start to outline the performance of the political public relations identity. Practitioners see themselves as the 'fixers' because their role is to provide creative solutions to communication issues.

5.1.2 Key findings

The analysis of the interviewees' socio-demographic characteristics indicates that:

- *The profession has a system of closure based on two elements: personal networks and a previous career in politics or media. Classic credential elements such as university degrees are not required.*

- *Professionals' careers are usually restricted to the boundaries of the sub-state dimension.*

- *The profession is associated with aggressive male attitudes and female practitioners are the exception.*

- *The two routes of access to the occupation –media and politics- show practitioners diverging on what skills are mostly needed for the occupation. These disputes indicate that the profession is based on a constant balance between party politics and media services.*

- *The profession's knowledge is based on transferable skills from politics, journalism and public relations.*

5.2 The principles of the professional political public relations: the ideal practitioner

This last section of the chapter is focused on examining the portrayal of the ideal political public relations professional. This section focuses on 'the constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role' (Schein, 1978 in Ibarra et al., 1999 p.764). This section explores professionalism in the political public relations profession by looking into what norms and occupational behaviours characterise the ideal practitioner. To that point, four elements are analysed in this section: ethical norms; sense of public service orientation; ideological identification with the party's principles; and public notoriety.

This section demonstrates that despite the absence of formal institutions that dictate professional norms and ethical codes, practitioners share common perceptions of what norms and occupational behaviours are to be expected within the occupation. It also reinforces the idea that the political public relations profession is constantly framed by the tensions occurring between the media and the political sphere. Practitioners consider the space between the media and the political sphere their professional jurisdiction.

5.2.1   The negotiation of the professional identity in the public forum

Public exposure seems to be key in crafting the identity of the political public relations professional. The professional practitioner remains in the shadow of the party or political leader. The good professional should never be more visible than the politician either in the media or inside their own organisation. This is certainly important because it emerged in both cases, considering that Catalan practitioners have never been in the media's focus as the Scottish ones have. There is no tradition in Catalan media to portray political PR practitioners or use the term 'spin doctor': they might appear as unattributed sources, but they do not have the media visibility that, for example,

Scottish practitioners have. Despite this, the data shows that the idealised image of an invisible practitioner can be found in the two cases. This conceptualisation of professionalism is linked to the debates that surround the figure of 'spin doctor' (see also section 5.3.2).

Interviewees argued that the ideal practitioner remains behind the scenes, understanding that his or her role is always to generate visibility for the political leader or the party and not for his or her own interests. The underlying idea is that the professional practitioner understands his or her role is not a political one. Politicians need public visibility to gain electoral support and to construct their role as party leaders. However, political PR practitioners do not need public visibility to succeed in their workplace, and they do not need to be considered party leaders. Consequently, the professional practitioner is someone 'humble':

> 'I think the best spin doctors remain in the shadows… You need a spin doctor because there are a lot of news media, but if you are a good politician you will be really dictating what is being -- it's not the spin doctor telling you what to do… It's not your own ideas and your own policy. You have to work with the politician and it's they who are supposed to deliver what the policy is and you have to craft out the best way to deliver that through the media' (Edinburgh, April 2014);

> 'The success of my work would always be for the party, not for myself. It is not in my interest to be publicly known as the person who made the party succeed because one day I won't be there' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Catalan practitioners reflected on the need to remain 'in the shadows' in the sense that they should not take ownership of the party's success. In a very similar way to Catalan practitioners, Scottish practitioners affirmed that the spin doctor is a managerial position in the shadows to deliver what the politician demands. In that sense, those practitioners that seek public visibility are criticised:

> 'Such spin doctor [names a specific person] is the anti-spin doctor. If you look closely to any of the President's television shots he is always at the back wearing this unique glasses, you can always identify him. They are people that are looking for media attention' (Catalonia, April 2014);

> 'You are dead if you become the story in the news. Spin doctors should never become the story; there are too many big egos who want to be the story' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

As it can be observed, seeking media exposure is regarded as lacking professionalism. However, in the Catalan case media exposure is limited to being physically in a photo opportunity, whereas in the Scottish case media exposure refers to the spin doctor becoming the story. The main difference between the two cases is that of the dangers of media exposure. In general terms, Scottish practitioners were much more assertive when analysing the implications and consequences of media exposure because it is common practice for them to become the centre of a news story.

> 'It was career damaging if you become the story -- that is fatally how it can go. So it is really important not to. But you really try and work in the shadow sense sinister. Your job is to get a story for the politicians and if you can't do that, and if you are getting into the story, then you are getting into your own way, so it was really dangerous to do. We would try not to do it' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

They consider that being exposed in the media is career damaging because the reason for becoming a news story is usually a negative issue that will eventually damage the politician's public image:

> 'I wouldn't see a spin doctor in the news for a very positive story. I think the best is not to be in the news and, if you are in the news, try and get out very quickly. The reason is because you are not there to be in the news – that is what politicians or politicians are there for. I think there is something going wrong basically if you are in the news. It has happened in one or two occasions and in my case as well. The best thing is to not basically feed whatever has caused that and if there is a problem, try and solve that, but basically to come out of that public domain'(Edinburgh, February 2014)

One of the most revealing things, when talking about media exposure with some of the interviewees, is that this is not only a matter of journalists quoting them or using them as a news story; it is also a strategy that the same practitioners use to diminish and attack political opponents:

> 'One of the things we were trying to do, when they were doing that to us, then we would try and get other spin doctor from other parties named in the news. We would always demand investigations on what the spin doctor has done or things like that or we had FOI direct correspondence between special advisors, so with everyone working in the government there. And likewise, they did the same to us. I lost track the number of times people demanded my resignation from other parties' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

This reinforces the idea that is an occupational principle not to be exposed to the media: it is not a consequence of misunderstandings with journalists, but it is regarded as an occupational duty. Overall, Scottish practitioners were reluctant to use any of their personal stories to exemplify the consequences of media exposure; instead, some of them referred to what happened to their colleagues. There was one case that constantly emerged because it had happened around the same time the interviews were being conducted:

> 'But you cannot afford to become the story. Two weekends ago Paul Sinclair, who works for the Scottish Labour, he is in the press because he is on twitter saying 'we have a cancer diagnosis' relating to the independence referendum outcome and parodying the SNP. He became the story and that is ridiculous, it is so stupid. You can't afford that for the case. Howeve,r as soon as he does that, he is legitimate to argue it. I thought the SNP were entirely in their right to have a go with it because he said something properly insulting, weird and inappropriate. Then if you can make him the story and destabilise them when he is done something that stupid in public, then go for it. You are fair game but you have to be aware that even someone says it's just background and it is off the record, everything you do, you are accountable for' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

In this case, a spin doctor, at that time for the Labour Party, tweeted comparing the independence movement with cancer. He was reported in the media as the Labour spin doctor, not as a member of the party or an individual citizen. The underlying idea is that their professional status should not be discussed in the public sphere. Following this assumption, another Catalan interviewee compared himself to a football coach that does not play in the field:

> 'I am like a football coach…I am not the one who gets out there to score goals, I have a team… But in the end I don't go out there to play, it's my team and my team in this case are the two leaders of the party' (Catalonia, April 2014).

It could be assumed that the lack of a formalised code of practices or any kind of professional regulation 'forces' practitioners to constantly compare themselves to other colleagues as a way of defining what practices are accepted or not within the occupation. In that sense, this is linked to the public image of the 'spin doctor'.

5.2.2   The spin doctor's collective identity

The starting point for the analysis on professionalism is the debate that surrounds the figure of the spin doctor. Chapter 2 explained that there is an extensive body of academic literature dedicated to examining what Anglo-Saxon media named the 'spin doctors' (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; Franklin, 2003; Charon, 2004; Ribeiro, 2015c). However, the important element for this analysis is the public debate that emerged after the public exposure of political public relations, mainly in USA and UK media (Jones, 1994; Marr, 2001), and television series (Holbert *et al.*, 2005) that were later exported to other contexts such as Catalonia. In a context where there are no institutions regulating practices and identities, these media representations and public debates seem relevant to explore professionalism and professional identity in political public relations.

The analysis of the data indicates that the concept of spin doctor is an informal identity label contested by practitioners and understood differently in Scotland and Catalonia. In Scotland's case, the term 'spin doctor' still goes back to Tony Blair's media advisor Alastair Campbell, though some practitioners argue this understanding of the term is fading away. In Catalonia, practitioners connect the term 'spin doctor' to famous US experts and politicians. Catalan practitioners explain the term denotes a sort of prestigious status. This is strongly influenced by the fact that Catalan practitioners are not publicly exposed in the media. The spin doctor label also indicates the existence of a sense of community common to practitioners in both contexts. Practitioners use the label 'spin doctor' to informally designate their colleagues and to describe the profession – but never to introduce themselves. These are some of the examples found in the data:

> 'Somebody like [name of individual] very much wanted to be a Spin Doctor but they approached me because they had a minor crisis at the time' (Edinburgh, 2014);

> 'In the end they [the spin doctors in Catalonia] are [name of spin doctors]; [name of a spin doctor I am not sure if he is a spin doctor because he does more analysis; [name of spin doctors is a spin doctor as well; [name of spin doctor] is also one of them but he is an idiot; and [name of spin doctor] was clearly one' (Catalonia, 2014).

The term 'spin doctor' is linked to how practitioners construct the image of their profession. For instance, Scottish practitioners were able to build on a sort of professional history distinguishing between a past where they remained in the shadows and the current context where they are publicly exposed:

> 'I would actually argue that the role has always existed. It is perhaps more in the public eye than it was before… I think actually that spin doctors have become more important in recent times. There have always been people that carried and delivered the message when that was in the gentleman's clubs in London when you were surrounded by people dinning with editors of newspapers as it might have been done by then. Now it is by telephone, it is always going on quite frankly' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

Practitioners are able to differentiate between public discourse regarding their occupation and the practice of their occupation. Section 5.4.1 demonstrated there is a connection point between Catalan practitioners and American campaign techniques. This connection also emerges when Catalan practitioners reflect on the use of the 'spin doctor' term:

> 'There is some kind of magic discourse surrounding spin…they just use four strategies from some book and use four of Obama's slogans and there you go, the big strategy of the spin doctor' (Catalonia, April 2014).

The interviewee criticises precisely those Catalan practitioners that had attended campaign strategy courses in the USA (see section 5.4.1). However, he is also indicating that the term 'spin doctor' has an element of prestige for some Catalan practitioners. The data also shows that the meaning of the term 'spin doctor' has not been fixed yet and some practitioners question the applicability of the term. There were two interviewees, one in Catalonia and one in Scotland, that questioned if they ought to be labelled as spin doctors:

> 'I didn't sell day to day stories. I remember I never saw myself as a spin doctor because I never tried to sell stories, which is what spin doctors do. I was more of an adviser to the leader' (Edinburgh, February 2014);

> 'I don't consider myself a pure spin doctor, I have never been and I have never pretended to be one of them. My role is more in the front line answering the phone and spend the day talking to journalists… I don't know if my profile is that of a spin doctor per se. I say that because I remember when they were printing my business cards and Gemma wrote 'Deputy Director' and I told her write down journalist or public relations but she said no, only your position she said...In the end the spin doctor are the big brains behind all this but I was the

one in the first line trying to put out the fires they had started with the news media' (Catalonia, April 2014).

One could argue these two quotes might correspond to two different national views of the term 'spin doctor'. However, that is not the case. Other Catalan and Scottish practitioners described the two above interviewees as spin doctors and equally labelled other practitioners playing similar roles to the ones described in the two quotes as spin doctors. The two quotes above indicate two things: one, that the term 'spin doctor' has no fixed meaning, and, second, the existence of different types of professionals (see Chapter 5).

5.2.2.1 Scottish professional identity and the figure of Alastair Campbell

One of the main differences between Scottish and Catalan practitioners is that the occupational identity of the former is clearly influenced by Alastair Campbell as the most famous spin doctor in the history of British politics (Gaber, 2004). There is no such strong cultural and political figure in the Catalan context. Catalan spin doctors have always remained outside the media focus and therefore these kind of popular and demonised figures never emerged. Nevertheless, in the Scottish case, because of its proximity to British politics, the influence of the popular and demonised Alastair Campbell is quite strong, as the data shows. This influence is due to the fact that Campbell was part of the Labour Party that dominated the Scottish political scene for many decades (Keating, 2010) was the first elected Scottish government for two legislatures. Consequently, that implied a strong influence on coetaneous Scottish Labour spin doctors and to any practitioner that entered British or Scottish politics after him. One of the former Scottish Labour spin doctors describes Campbell as a mentor:

> 'But from the way that I know what he did (silence) he was a good mentor to us. He was asked to come and talked to our staff in Scotland and discuss needs and tactics…He invented the grid (media planning tool) and we are still using it…. He also had a clear sense that you have to be in touch with what real people were thinking' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

Former Scottish Labour spin doctors regard Campbell as a very good strategist that created some of the basic strategic and tactical tools used in Scottish politics. However, not only Scottish Labour spin doctors used Campbell as a professional model. With no exception, the name of Alastair Campbell and the influence that he had and still has

on spin doctors emerged in all the conversations with Scottish practitioners. Alastair Campbell has become the referential figure against whom Scottish spin doctors compare themselves. Campbell's figure is used by interviewees to reflect on how they perceive the consequences of being exposed in the media; the tone of their relationship with news media; and detrimental professional behaviours.

Campbell's media exposure caused a demonised image of the profession to emerge that practitioners feel needs to be avoided. Practitioners recognise the dissonance between the media discourse and the 'reality' of an occupation that existed long before these discourses emerged. Almost all Scottish interviewees affirmed that the media created the myth around Campbell by misunderstanding his role and exaggerating some of his traits:

> 'I think that some people make the mistake of thinking that the only thing that Alastair Campbell ever did was to shout at people and that is misunderstanding his role, and that is a big mistake because that is not the way you work' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'I think Alastair Campbell and the consequence of that such as 'The Thick of It', like everything else a situation tends to get exaggerated beyond what it really is… I think in some of the caricatures, in some of the spin offs, they showed some personal things and I don't think that was actually the case' (Scotland, February 2014).

They recognise the dissonance between the media discourse and what they perceive to be the reality of an occupation that existed long before these discourses emerged but had never been exposed before. Therefore, Campbell's myth reinforced the idea that avoiding media exposure should be one of the strongest principles amongst all practitioners because of the dangers that it implies:

> 'Campbell became a victim of his own success. He became the story whereas as a spin doctor you really want to be in the background' (Scotland, February 2014).

Campbell is an example of how aggressive media relations are not useful. Conflictive relationships with journalists are considered self-defeating. Campbell was constantly used by Scottish interviewees to reflect on the dangers of media exposure. In addition, he was also presented as the counterexample for how relationships with journalists should be managed. In some cases, not only was Campbell used as an example for

having aggressive manners with the media, but he is seen as the cause for some spin doctors behaving in obnoxious ways:

> 'A lot of less able spin doctors are kind of modelling themselves on Alistair Campbell or in the comedy 'The Thick of It'. People walking about thinking that they are Malcolm Tucker and behaving in a similar rude and obnoxious kind of way, especially men' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'But basically what he was saying and I strongly believe and I see a lot of younger people, I am not going to mention any names, I have seen younger spin doctors working not for Labour but for other parties and they think they are players. They want to think of themselves of an important figure and they watch programs like 'The West Wing' and things like that. And Campbell becoming such a figure in the media and they think they are more important than they are. Like the media is the message not their own market. They think they are players at a very much large degree' (Scotland, February 2014).

As it can be observed, in this case the behavioural influence is not only attributed to Campbell but also to fictional characters such as Malcolm Tucker and the American television series 'The West Wing'. The underlying idea is that, in general terms, the media's portrait of spin doctors is not accurate and it can reinforce attitudes that are regarded as detrimental for the occupation. These two quotes draw a model of an anti-spin doctor by criticising existing occupational attitudes that, in the first quote, are associated with men specifically and, in the second quote, to younger generations of spin doctors. Those detrimental attitudes are an overstated, self-perceived importance and rudeness.

5.2.3 Consequentialist ethical principles

The data shows that one overarching and utilitarian principle was described by all the interviewees as the ethical principle of the profession: the professional practitioner should never lie to journalists. Practitioners described this norm as the ethical principle of the occupation. However, the norm is rather a mutually-beneficial, non-written contract between the journalist and the practitioner. Practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia claim this norm guarantees and protects their relationships with journalists and eventually their jobs:

> 'You can never lie to the media and if you are caught up lying, then you are in big trouble. I know personally myself never did it but people, yes, I have seen them being dishonest' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'You can never try to lie to a journalist, they are smart people! You lose your credibility, here they try to fool journalists. I have never lied to the media - I might not say the whole truth. I would never do that, not because of my client (the politician) but because when I phone a journalist if they don't trust me, I am professionally dead. I don't do it for them [politicians], I do it for myself' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Practitioners affirm they are obliged to follow the no-lying principle because otherwise it puts their credibility and their job at risk. However, they never mention that politicians are also part of this equation. If professionals are caught lying to the media, this damages the politicians' credibility. Practitioners accuse journalists of imposing their concept of truth:

> 'I always complain a lot about that. Journalists always tell me that I should not lie to them, fine' (Catalonia, April 2014);

> 'The rules of the game are: don't lie and that is the most important rule for journalists. However, the most important rule is that you cannot lie and expect to get away with it' (Scotland, February 2014).

As observed in these two quotes, not lying to journalists also forms part of the normative dimension of the profession. Not lying to journalists is part of the rules of their daily exchanges with journalists. Almost none of the practitioners admitted they ever breached this supreme norm but they were eager to point out fingers to those who have. They only admitted they use the concepts of lying and truth to their own advantage:

> 'I don't lie, I might not say something because it's not in my interest and then just say it whenever it's best for me. Not lying it's a very important thing because the day you lie to a news media then you have lost all your credibility in front of that specific news media or journalist' (Catalonia, April 2014);

> 'The political culture here in Scotland and in the UK for politicians and for those who speak on behalf of them is that you never ever say anything but the truth' (Endiburgh, February 2014).

For the above interviewees, withholding information is not lying. In this context, lying means releasing false information and getting caught doing so. It was difficult for the interviewees to articulate any other 'ethical' principle beyond the attitude of not lying to the media. These results seem to be in line with existing research that demonstrated that professionals working in persuasive communication areas have difficulties

expressing their ethical perspectives and they constantly assume means and end are the same thing (Baker and Martinson, 2001).

The no-lying principle is based on consequentialist and self-interested approaches to the profession. It reinforces the idea that ethical principles are 'better seen as a symbolic vehicle which supports the political interests of the profession' (Alvesson, 1993 p.999). In this case, the no-lying principle serves to maintain a good relationship with journalists and eventually to influence the outcome of the news cycle. These results also point out that the considered ethical principles of the occupation are determined by media routines and journalistic professional ideologies (Deuze, 2005; Hanitzsch, 2007; Sanders, 2011) that go beyond specific national contexts.

5.2.4   The public service approach

This section focuses on practitioners' reflections about the public service of their profession. Two elements are analysed here: the role practitioners believe they play for the democratic system, and how they establish connection with the voters and the wider public.

Despite describing a very consequentialist approach to professional ethics, interviewees were able to articulate and reflect on the implications that their daily job has on the democratic system and on the wider society. Interviewees describe idealised conceptions of the public sphere wherein political public relations professionals guarantee the flow of ideas between parties, news media and citizens. These reflections are important because, according to the functionalist perspective, a sense of public service is one of the traits of a classic profession (Wilensky, 1964). As previously mentioned, there are no formal ethical codes in the profession but, based on the data, that is not an obstacle for practitioners to reflect on their contribution to the society. It is also important to examine these public service-orientated reflections because previous studies questioned the role of political PR practitioners or spin doctors in the democratic system (Gaber, 2004).

According to the data, both Catalan and Scottish practitioners understand their role as making sure political parties have the right tools to communicate their ideas to the

voters. Therefore, they see themselves as the ones who guarantee the existence of an informed citizenship:

> 'It is an important part of the democratic process. You want the public to be informed and make informed decisions. That means the public needs to know what parties stand for' (Edinbugh, February 2014);

> 'It is not an NGO but I think they contribute with some kind of benefit for the society. You have that interruption (the media) and we help, if we do it right, to communicate the political action. Therefore, we contribute to make the system stronger…I think within the democratic system it should add transparency. In the end the practitioner is the person that bridges the relationship between news media and the society, so doing a good job is being able to communicate your message' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Practitioners find the role of professional political public relations within the democratic system is to connect news media, the larger society and political parties. They argue that an informed public happens when citizens are aware of what parties stand for and it is the role of the spin doctor to communicate what this is. They consider the good professional to be one who bridges the gap between the politician and society:

> 'A good strategist or a good spin doctor is the one that brings politics closer to the social reality as a result of his or her work because he is translating it and packaging it in the best way possible' (Catalonia, April 2014).

None of the interviewees reflected on the fact that having a communications director as a member of staff requires having large party budgets that are not available to all political organisations. Therefore, it can be argued these conceptualisations are based on liberal ideals of a public sphere where all actors can freely access the public debate (Habermas, 1991). However, in spin doctors' conception of the public sphere, citizens are just the passive receiver because, in the end, their client is the party or the government. During the interviews I asked practitioners whether voters or citizens had any relevance in their daily tasks. Responses ranged from some practitioners affirming the news media is the party's communication channel with voters to some practitioners claiming they had informal systems to connect with voters' views and opinions:

> 'I don't have a direct communication with the citizens; normally that contact is done through the opinion I generate through published opinion and through news media' (Catalonia, April 2014);

> 'Yes, you have to (incorporate any feedback). You engage, you take into account what the media are saying about you. Something I used to do in

government was to go to the press tower on a fairly regular basis. You will get some feedback there because those visits will help inform what you say or sometimes even it will help you inform how to say it. If you know that saying a particular thing in a particular way would generate negative audience, they will dismiss it or laugh at it. It will influence how you say things' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

The above interviewees consider the news media to be representative of the views and opinions of the wider society. Therefore, the news media provides a channel of communication with citizens and voters. However, some interviewees explained news media is not their only channel of communication with voters. They described informal systems of gathering opinion using party members and party activists around Scotland and Catalonia:

'What really matters to us is the opinion of our party members that are out there. The party's viewpoint, our people, the people that are in little towns and villages. They tell us 'be careful what you are doing is not ok with people, people tell me that is not going well'. The fact that our people tell us those things is really important because that means we are in contact with the day-to-day reality' (Catalonia, April 2014);

'We have a wee analysis of what kind of media coverage we are getting; feedback that we get from our constituents; what the wider party is saying, and then we think if we focus more on one thing or less on other things. We have that kind of adjustment every now and then' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

As it can be observed in these two quotes and the ones above, practitioners do not mention social media or political marketing techniques (polling, focus groups) being their main channel of communication with voters. It can also be observed that networking is a very important tool of work for political PR practitioners. They network with journalists and party activists to evaluate the impact of their work. Chapter 6 explores in-depth the relevance of networking and the role that new media and social media platforms play in the political PR profession.

Findings in this section are in line with a previous study on Australian journalists moving into political public relations (Fisher, 2015). Fisher (2015) found that Australian journalists moving into political public relations shared with journalists their concern for 'whether their practices are helping to facilitate or restrict the free flow of information to the public' (2015 p.1). Practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia operate without codes of ethics that dictate how the profession serves the public

interest. In that sense, it can be assumed that the public service conceptualisations found in Catalonia and Scotland also relate to journalistic influence. This journalistic influence is not only due to their past as journalists, because not all of them are, but likely to their constant daily exchange with journalists. However, political public relations practitioners do not work for journalists; their employers are political parties and governments. The next section examines the relationship between practitioners and political parties in terms of professional identity.

The idea of a dominant, unilateral model of communication amongst political parties has also been confirmed by a previous study that tested the suitability of public relations models to understand communication strategies within Spanish political parties (Xifra, 2010). In his quantitative study based on questionnaires to the communication directors of each Spanish political party, Xifra confirmed that 'political parties did not use the public relations tools to increase dialogue between parties and citizens' (2010: 181), but they understood communication as a rather lineal and one-way process.

5.2.5   The ideological dimension of the profession

The findings of this section indicate that ideology plays a very relevant role in the political public relations profession. In general terms, both Catalan and Scottish practitioners consider being ideologically identified with the party's core principles to be a positive element that indicates professionalism. Nevertheless, the data indicates that, in Catalonia's case, there is a small but significant change of pattern in the relationship between ideology and the political PR profession. While none of the Scottish interviewees had ever worked for more than one political party, two practitioners in Catalonia had worked as heads of communication for more than one party. Only the two Catalan practitioners that had worked for several parties regarded ideological identification with the party as a barrier to their professionalism.

These findings are of relevance for two reasons. Firstly, it could be assumed that because of a stronger tradition of advocacy journalism in Catalonia, where journalists are ideologically aligned with the editorial lines of the newspaper they work for (Humanes, Martinez and Saperas, 2013), Catalan spin doctors would have a similar

ideological bond with their parties. Similarly, it could be assumed that because of a tradition of gatekeeping journalism amongst UK journalists (Deacon, 2004), it would be easier for spin doctors to feel detached from their party's principles. Nevertheless, the data indicates that ideological bonds between the spin doctor and the party are equally strong in both cases, and even less intense in Catalonia's case.

Secondly, the findings of this section are also relevant because they demonstrate that ideological identification with the party's principles is equally strong in those practitioners who followed the media route as it is in those who are former party employees. Being a former journalist is not related with lack of party membership or ideological identification. There are former journalists that became party members before or after they started working as the head of communications.

According to the data, interviewees regarded a spin doctor's ideological identification with the party's principles as something positive and helpful for their daily tasks. They consider that it is essential to believe in the core messages of the party to be able to give accurate responses to media requests:

> 'I would argue that actually you have instinctively agree with the political stand of the party you are working for because something I find about the job is at one side of the stage is the basic principles of conservativism as it applies to Scotland. Then when I got a query from a journalist, the right response to that answer is actually very simple to find - ''does this tax burden? Does it attack the freedom of the individual?'- ' these sorts of principles made it very easy to know the right place to respond' (Scotland, February 2014).

If the practitioner is ideologically identified with the party's basic principles, it is easier to design better messages that are in line with the party. The overall majority of interviewees considered that because of that ideological link between the practitioner and the party's basic principles, they could not work for other political parties:

> 'I could not be the campaign manager for another party. I think communication managers are still pretty much bonded to very precise ideological approaches' (Catalonia April, 2014);

> 'I don't think I could work for another party. One of the reasons I first applied for my first internship at the party was because I have always voted for the party. I believe you need to work for a party you believe in. If you don't believe in the party or if you spend your time promoting policies you disagree with, you'll end up burned out' (Scotland, February 2014).

Both quotes remark that the spin doctor occupation has a strong ideological dimension. To further investigate this dimension, interviewees were asked whether they were active party members. The results show that all practitioners that developed their career within the party admitted they were party members and some former journalists or PR practitioners had joined the party before or while working for it. This is how one former journalist explained his process of becoming a party member after being appointed Head of Communication:

> 'I have never been a member of any political party, I was never affiliated before I did this job. I had no party membership until 2008 when I started this job' (Scotland, February 2014).

In this precise case, the interviewee admitted he was not opposed to the party's core principles before starting the job, but it was not until the appointment that he decided to make his affiliation official and become a party member. This indicates that the political public relations profession is linked to political motivations. For instance, Bohne, Prevost and Thurber (2009) found that over 60% of US communication campaign consultants 'cited an ideological or partisan reason for becoming a professional consultant' (Bohne, Prevost and Thurber, 2009 p. 500). This is not to say that the profession is political activism, but certainly the data shows ideology and political motivation play a role in it.

5.2.5.1 Working for more than one party: Catalonia's case

One of the main differences between the Scottish and the Catalan case is that two of the practitioners interviewed in Catalonia had worked for two or more political parties as media experts, whereas none of the practitioners in the Scottish case had worked for more than one political party. It is not clear to what degree Catalan political parties are moving towards a context in which media practitioners are hired on the basis of their expertise and independently of their previous work for other parties, or if those two cases were exceptions. In the first of the two cases, the change from one party to another was not immediate, and in the second case, the spin doctor had created a Political Public Relations agency and had been working as an external freelance advisor for different Catalan parties.

The former case is Eladio Jareño, who has worked as a spin doctor for both the People's Party and the Socialist Party in Catalonia, right-centre and centre-left respectively but both anti-independence. He initiated his career in the political public relations world with the Socialist Party, where he occupied positions such as press officer for the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games and press officer at the Spanish Office in Catalonia. Then he became the Regional Director of the Spanish Public Broadcast Enterprise in Catalonia, a politically-appointed position. During this period, he became quite famous for creating a very successful children's television show. It was after this position that the People's Party in Catalonia requested his services as Head of Communication. He recognises the uniqueness of his career path:

> 'I come from a non-traditional route. It is not common that a communication professional worked 5 years with one Government and then 7 years with another one. I think that my professional profile helped because I was not affiliated with any party. Also the people that work in those institutions, they demand professional solutions' (Catalonia April, 2014).

He considers his career to be unique because he is not affiliated with any party. The second case is Veronica Fumanal, the only Catalan female spin doctor interviewed. Her career path is unique in this research sample. She became the Head of Media for Ciutadans of Catalonia, a centre-right wing unionist party, because they hired her services through her public relations agency. She had created her agency a few years ago and she had been involved in the design of political campaigns for Republican Left Party, Convergència i Unió and the Socialist Party in the Balearic Islands. However, Ciutadans was the only party that hired her services full-time and not only for one specific campaign. She is the youngest of all the interviewees and, unlike the rest of the sample, she had not developed a career in media or politics before creating her own political public relations agency.

It is worth mentioning that nowadays she is the Head of Communication for the Spanish Socialist leader Pedro Sanchez. She is also aware that her situation is unique in Catalonia, but she recognises that there is a growing market for political public relations agencies being hired by political parties to fully take charge of communications and not only small or eventual campaigns. In a similar way to Eladio Jareño, she claims that it is her expertise, professional values and the success of her

campaigns that 'validate' her to work with different parties, no matter their ideological position:

> 'Political parties demand my services and I accept on the basis of a minimal ethical standards that are non-negotiable. Those principles are: any idea can be defended as long as it is within the human rights framework… I don't care if I believe the party manifesto or not, from my point of view the most important thing is that the candidate trusts me in the sense that I can do whatever I think it's best and we have a good connection. If they think Spain is left or right, I don't care' (Catalonia April, 2014).

She considers her job needs to be a good personal connection with the leader rather than ideological identification with the party. However, her views, along with those of the previous case, seem to be an exception within the Catalan political sphere. When other Catalan spin doctors were confronted with these two cases during the interviews, they questioned if this could become a bigger trend in Catalonia because:

> 'The Anglo-Saxon model is more professionalised, here (Catalonia) and in Europe the spin doctor figure is still very much connected to the political party or to its ideology...Within the American context, that I know quite well, you have spin doctors in the Republican and the Democrat party but that is not fixed. The republican spin doctor might as well do the democrat campaign' (Catalonia April, 2014).

The influence of American political communication campaigns in Europe is a contested issue in the literature as it is not clear whether changes in political campaign models are the result of an 'Americanisation' or part of a global process of change (Xifra, 2011). Certainly, the model of external consultants is a US campaign feature (Plasser, 2001) and it is similar to Veronica Fumanal's political public relations agency. However, similarities with the American context need to be put in place as the assumption that American political consultants can easily work for different parties has been challenged by some studies (Kolodny and Logan, 1998; Bohne, Prevost and Thurber, 2009). These studies demonstrated that almost 40% of political campaign consultants had previously worked as external consultants for the same party that now employs them and 60% of all consultants considered their careers to be driven by their own ideological motives. The two cases analysed here are slightly different from the so called American model; however, the examination of this phenomena exceeds the limits of this thesis.

5.2.4 Key findings

The examination of the constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and professionalism of political public relations in Scotland and Catalonia indicates that:

- *There is a sense of collective ethical norms and sense of public service in Catalonia and Scotland despite the lack of international or national professional institutions –i.e., codes of ethics. Both ethical and public service notions are related to practitioners' daily interactions with journalists. Ethical practitioners never lie to journalists, and the professional practitioner facilitates the flow of information in the public sphere.*
- *The profession is related to a certain degree of identification with the party's principles. However, some Catalan practitioners challenge this notion of professionalism and there are examples of Catalan practitioners working for more than one party.*
- *Professionalism is also linked to levels of public exposure. The professional practitioner avoids public exposure of his or her professional status. Unprofessional attitudes include an overstated, self-perceived importance and rudeness.*

5.3 Conclusions

The aim of the chapter was to explore the main characteristics of the individual political public relations professional and the core elements of their professionalism. The main finding is that there are a series of basic professional structures and identity features that travel across Scotland and Catalonia. These professional structures and identity features outline a profession constantly shaped by the influence of journalism and politics.

This chapter finds the existence of informal professional structures in political public relations. Political public relations in Scotland and Catalonia has a defined system of

credentials based on identifiable patterns of employment practices (media and political route). The profession is restricted to former journalists or PR professionals and former party employees. The required knowledge to practice the profession is not a certified body of academic knowledge. The core knowledge of the profession is transferred from expertise in politics and journalism or PR.

Their professional identity and professionalism is constantly shaped by the need to serve the demands of the media, and the need to ensure the principles and aims of their political organisation are fulfilled. Practitioners see themselves as key players in the democratic debate, but their understanding of professional ethics is limited to utilitarian and consequentialist values. While overall professional identity and self-presentation of these practitioners seems to be quite similar in Scotland and Catalonia, a minority of Catalan practitioners seem to differ from the overall pattern as they have started working for more than one party. This is a significant finding in highly polarised media and political contexts such as Catalonia, where it might be expected that practitioners had a stronger ideological attachment to their political organisation.

The following chapter considers these professional structures and identity features in relation to their role and daily activities in political parties and governments.

CHAPTER 6 THE POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER IN THE POLITICAL INSTITUTION: ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

This chapter focuses on analysing the practice of political public relations inside the political institution. It explores the influence of the political system and its political institutions on the practice of political public relations. This chapter examines practitioners' sense of what their work is about, focusing on the roles, position, tasks and functions they claim to play within political organisations. These roles, functions and tasks are also placed in relation to the performance and identity elements identified in the previous chapter. The analysis is now situated at the level of the relationship between the individual practitioner and his or her most immediate institutional context: political parties and government. The subsequent chapter amplifies the focus of analysis by looking into the relationship between the occupation and the larger structure of the media system.

The aim of the chapter is to outline the role and position that political public relations practitioners have in the organisations they work for. One of the blind spots in the existing literature on spin doctors and political public relations practitioners is the position that these practitioners hold within the organisational structure of political parties and governments. As explained in Chapter 2, several studies describe what they consider to be the main activities and tasks of the spin doctor (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; Gaber, 2000a; Ribeiro, 2015a). Nevertheless, most of these studies do not use practitioners' testimonies to inform their descriptions. This chapter provides the empirical basis to overcome the described limitations.

The argument of the chapter is as follows. The role and position of political public relations results from the combination of political-related and communication-related functions and tasks. The balance between political and communication tasks generate variations in the managerial position and power that these practitioners claim to have in their organisations. There are significant differences between Scottish and Catalan

practitioners in government. Practitioners claim to be the experts in understanding and managing the balance between the political and the communication spheres.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The first section presents the basic characteristics of the three different roles played by political public relations practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia. Subsequent sections connect these three roles with their assigned tasks and functions. The second section focuses on the two roles restricted to the communication strategy area: the Head of Communication and the subordinated role of the press officer. This section provides in-depth detail of how practitioners understand communication strategy and its most relevant tasks. The third section explores the combined figure of the Head of Communication and the Chief of Staff. The final section gives account of some differences encountered in government communications in Scotland and Catalonia.

6.1 The relationship between roles, functions and organisational position

This section examines the main roles and tasks of political public relations practitioners. The data demonstrates that the assignment and distribution of tasks is key to understanding the three roles identified in the data. There is one basic role, that of the Head of Communication, and the other two are variations of it: the subordinate press officer, and the Chief of Staff (see figure 6.1). They are all referred to as spin doctors.

Figure 6.1 Job positions and distribution of roles

Communication + Political strategy	Head of Communication (+ Chief of Staff)
Communication strategy (design+ execution)	Head of Communication
Communication strategy (only execution)	Press officer
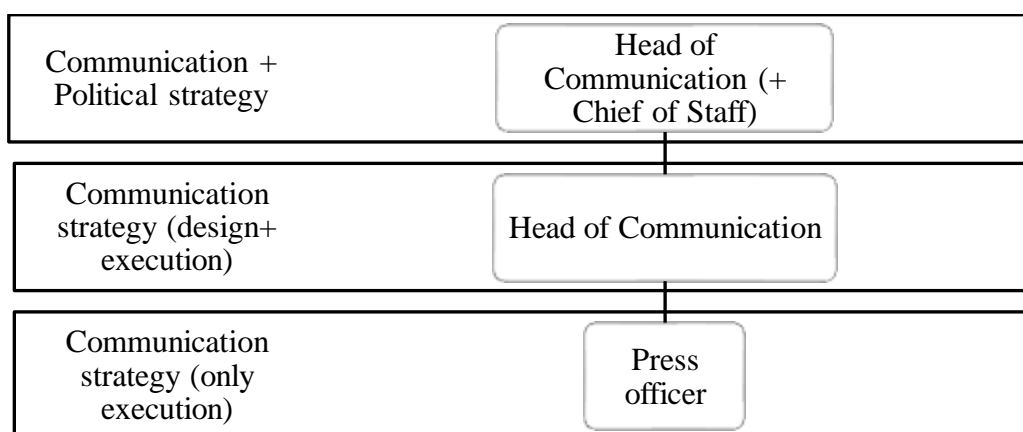
As observed in figure 6.1, related to the three roles are two different sets of tasks (communication and political strategy), plus two levels of practice (design and execution). On the basis of interviewees' descriptions, it seems clear that the core role of the political public relations practitioner is to manage the party or government's communication strategy. However, practitioners explain that, in some cases, they are also in charge of political strategy. These two areas of work relate to two types of organisational positions: Head of Communication and Chief of Staff. According to the data, there are practitioners who maintain the official position of Head of Communication despite also managing political strategy –usually within small parties. There are also professionals who identify themselves as both the Head of Communication and the Chief of Staff.

In addition, practitioners distinguish between the Head of Communication and the subordinate press officer. The Head of Communication designs the communication strategy and directs the Communication Department. The Press Officer executes the communication strategy –i.e. writing press releases- and he or she is a staff member of the Communication Department. However, these two roles can easily overlap in small parties because of lack of resources to hire more personnel – which was the case for most of the parties in the sample. The data also indicates that the roles also overlap when the Head of Communication feels he or she needs to intervene or control problematic issues.

As will be explained in the following sections, these three roles are linked to two different organisational functions and two different understandings of the communication strategy –see Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Relationship between roles, position and strategy

Role	Position	Function	Understanding of communication strategy
Manager of the communication strategy	Head of Communication/ Press officer (subordinate role)	Organisational-based	The communication strategy is about the form and channel of the message

Manager of the communication strategy + political strategy	Head of Communication (+ Chief of Staff)	Leader-based	The communication strategy includes the content of the message

One might question whether these types of positions, orientations and understanding of strategy are related to the practitioner's career path. However, there is no apparent relationship between these elements and career paths. The differentiation between leader-based and organisational-based positions can be related to Panebianco's (1988) classification of party bureaucracy into the executive model of party-bureaucracy and the model of representative bureaucracy. In that sense, those cases of leader-based positions can be linked to the executive model of party bureaucracy – practitioners form part of this bureaucratic body as experts and staff professionals- as their tasks are designated directly by the political leader. Representative bureaucrats, by contrast, 'must respond to his or her superiors for his actions and decisions but is also periodically judged by the rank and file' (Panebianco, 1988, p. 225). This role is more coherent with those practitioners who work for the whole party organisation and, therefore, their performances are subject to the evaluation of the party's committees and they do not only respond to tasks designed exclusively by the political leader.

Panebianco (1988) recognises that representative and executive bureaucracy models are often ambiguous and can be found interchangeably in the same party at different times. This could explain how the same party might appoint a leader-based political PR practitioner and, in the next electoral period, opt for a more organisational-based expert to deal with their communication strategy. The following sections will analyze each of the elements in Table 6.2, focusing on the tasks that are contained in each role.

It is important to build explanations directly from empirical data to define the areas in which these experts are involved. One of the most important reasons is because there are a series of myths that surround the political PR practitioner figure in terms of what they actually do within the party's decision-making machinery (Street, 2011). In addition, existing literature has defined the spin doctor's areas of work as media-

related areas and not-directly media-related areas (Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2000). However, the data shows that there is another important and more useful axis to consider, which is the degree to which their tasks can be included with the party's political strategy or communication strategy.

6.2 The role of the Head of Communication

The role of the Head of Communication is to manage the communication strategy. He or she might do it alone or with the support of press officers who execute his or her orders. It is by far the most common role found in the sample, and one played equally by former journalists and former party employees. Managing communications strategy is perceived as the core role of the political public relations professional. Practitioners use the term 'communication strategy' to refer to the management of the communication tools available to the organisation:

> 'Communication strategy refers to the communication resources and tools that I have to work with. A big part of the job is to think how to react and how to do things proactively with those resources that I have' (Catalonia April, 2014).

Communication strategy is perceived as a management function over one specific area. According to the data, political public relations is involved in the design of the strategy, but always as part of collective bodies of the party and in coordination with party or government leaders who make the final decisions:

> 'When it comes to design the communication strategy I am not the only one. Firstly, because I have a team of people that support me: the press officers, the journalists and the people that do the online stuff. Secondly, because at the top political level I am not the only one deciding but everything gets contrasted, validated and we work as a team' (Catalonia April, 2014);

> 'I don't design the communication strategy by myself. Despite the appearances, the party is constituted by collegiate bodies. I am under the supervision of the general secretary – he is currently out of the picture because of a corruption scandal so there are two people who have inherited his responsibilities now. Therefore, the three of us decide things in a collegiate way. In that sense, I don't design or define the strategy but it is done by the party's governing bodies' (Catalonia, April 2014).

As observed in these two quotes, practitioners make a clear distinction between designing and executing or managing strategies. These quotes also indicate that the spin doctor, despite not having the power to design strategies, are part of the top

management bodies in their political organisations. Interviewees claimed the spin doctor 'needs' a managerial position to access privileged information and knowledge:

> 'During the last years here in Catalonia and in Madrid, since 1995 when Miguel Angel Rodriguez became the Communications Secretary of the Government, he demonstrated something: the Director of Communications needs a managerial position, he needs to have power' (Catalonia, April 2014);

> 'Absolutely critical, and increasingly, communications person is in the top table when important decisions are made. I think that is true for all political parties. I think that has changed fundamentally when Alastair Campbell was in the Labour government; that was the absolute turning point' (Scotland, February 2014).

These claims for power are similar to those of public relations practitioners that have historically claimed that excellent PR can only be achieved when practitioners occupy managerial positions within corporations (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002). Both in Catalonia and Scotland, interviewees justify their calls for power by comparing themselves to those they consider to be examples of well-known spin doctors. Practitioners whose scope of power was restricted to the management of communication strategy justified their role by claiming professionalism:

> 'It is well-known that one thing is politics and another thing is communication. It's like when in government everyone gets pissed off with the Finance Minister because they want to spend money and he doesn't want to and then there is a confrontation. Similarly, the Secretary of Organisation (Chief of Staff) is there to think according to political criteria and the Head of Communication has to apply those political ideas to the communication strategy but not think in political criteria. If that is the case, things get messed up….It is impossible to coordinate all that' (Catalonia April, 2014);

> 'It was about putting a communication strategy alongside our manifesto. It wasn't me saying this is what we should be doing. The government is deciding what should be doing and people have voted for that. The job is to sell that message. I think when the political spokesperson is involved in the actual creation of that message you can create problems' (Scotland, February 2014).

This practitioner defined the function of the professional as to applying political ideas to the communication strategy, but not vice-versa. There are some exceptions to this function. Section 6.5 explains that the civil service code regulates Scottish practitioners in government.

6.2.1 The subordinate role of the press officer

One of the elements that emerged from the data analysis is the figure of the press officer as holding a different role from the Head of Communication. The press officer develops the technical side of the communication strategy. In other words, press officers write press releases, organise press conferences and respond to the daily requests of journalists. Some practitioners refer to the role of the press officer as being in the front line of the daily relationships with the news media:

> 'I didn't sell day-to-day stories… I operated at the editor level because they were Chief executives because those were the people I knew rather than in the reporter level which we had other people [press officers] to do that. I didn't deal directly that often with political reporters' (Edinburgh, February 2014);

> 'My role as a press officer is more in the front line answering the phone and spend the day talking to journalists… In the end the spin doctor are the big brains behind all this but I was the one in the first line trying to put out the fires they had started with the news media' (Catalonia April, 2014).

The figure of the press officer exists both in Catalonia and Scotland with very similar characteristics as the two quotes above demonstrate. The role could be understood as doing the 'dirty work' of media relations. One of the significant elements is that this dirty work partly refers to social media. Interviewees describe press officers as the ones taking care of the social and online media communication:

> I also have a broad remit overseeing the whole range of communication tools web positioning, social media and so on…We have someone young in our team that deals with these things (Scotland, February 2014).

Section 6.3 deals with the relevance of online communication for political public relations. Overall practitioners were quite sceptical about the use of these tools. The main variable that explains the existence of press officers is the party's economic resources:

> 'There is a small number of people so actually I would write press releases as well. I would have a different leading role, as well as strategic role, but we didn't have enough people to separate our office to say 'you do the tactical stuff and you do the strategic stuff'. We all did a lot and the staff varied significantly over periods of time. There were times or periods when I was the only person employed by the party' (Scotland, February 2014).

The interviewee uses the tactic-strategic dichotomy to explain the differences between the Head of Communication and press officers. However, public relations literature refers to this dichotomy of roles as the manager-technician division (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002; Diga and Kelleher, 2009). The figure of the press officer can be associated with the technician role, while the Head of Communication has some similarities with the manager role (Dozier and Broom, 1995). The technician executes tasks commanded by others related to 'reading and writing, as well as producing photos and graphics' (Dodd, Brummette and Hazleton, 2015, p. 471) in a similar way to the press officer in Scotland and Catalonia. The manager, as the quote above indicates, is instead a leading role, more involved in strategy and the decision-making process (Dozier and Broom, 1995). The following section explores the specific tasks associated with the communication strategies of political parties and governments.

6.3 Communication strategy management

During the interviews, I questioned practitioners on the specific tasks involved in communication strategies to clarify their distinction between political and communication strategies. The following Table 6.3 is the result of the compilation of all the responses given by the interviewees when they were asked to describe the tasks and roles involved in communication strategy management. It includes the common elements identified between Catalan and Scottish practitioners. There are a series of tasks that, because of the nature of the media system, are only related to the Catalan context and I have examined those separately in Chapter 7.

Table 6.3 Communication strategy: roles and tasks

	Media intelligence briefing
	- Prepare and rehearse interviews with the candidate
	- Control and report about other parties' media activities
Media relations	- Report on the latest changes and trends in the media sphere
	Daily relationships with journalists and editors
	- Acting as a liaison

	- Responding to daily media requests (press officer)
	- Generating content and messages for the media (press officer)
	- Generating events for the media
Coordination of the communication strategy	Coordinating - media events and parliamentary or government actions - media messages with the party federation or party coalitions - party manifesto with media messages - electoral campaigns Elaborate on the party's brand or Government's public image
Marketing research	Coordinating the use of polls and focus groups
Online communication	Coordinating and managing online communication tools (press officer)
Speech writing	

As outlined in Table 6.3, political public relations practitioners develop five core roles related to managing the communication strategy: managing media relations; coordinating online communication; planning marketing research; speech writing; and coordinating the communication strategy. However, the data demonstrates that these five roles are not perceived as equally important occupational elements. The perceived relevance of each of these functions is influenced by what communication channels the practitioner considers more convenient for the overall strategy. To that point, the following subsections demonstrate that managing media relations is perceived as the core function of this occupation. By contrast, marketing research is perceived as underdeveloped in most parties, yet is also portrayed as an indicative factor of professionalism. The management of online communication tools is regarded with scepticism, and is considered a necessary but minor function of the occupation by the majority of interviewees.

Practitioners had a very clear conception of what is involved in the management of the communication strategy:

> 'It is my responsibility, I have the press relations office, where we have a press relations officer. I am responsible for the corporate image of the party and the general communication area of the party. In this last part, my role goes from managing current corporate image campaigns, precisely election campaigns, to the party brand and the campaigns that the party can do. The area of communication is: the relationship with the media on the one hand; and corporate communication on the other' (Catalonia April, 2014);

> 'I had responsibility for a sort of different things: the classic media relations, I was in charge of that; also the marketing digital and online; I was responsible for organising polling and messaging, those kind of things' (Scotland, February 2014).

As found in the quotes above, Catalan and Scottish practitioners share very similar conceptions of the core tasks involved in managing communications strategy. These tasks are media relations, online communication, marketing and branding.

6.3.1 The relevance of media relations

The relevance of media relations in the political public relations profession can be observed in the descriptions offered by interviewees about the main characteristics of their jobs, and in the fact that occupational conceptions of professionalism are linked to the management of media relations (see Chapter 5). Practitioners perceive media relations to be their main role:

> 'My job was basically dealing with the news media, managing the relationship in behalf of the party' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'I was there, I suppose, for selling the interface with the media in behalf of the party' (Scotland, February 2014).

The importance of media relations as a function within the communication strategy is justified by interviewees for two reasons: it is the most demanding and time-consuming function; and news media are still considered to be the most important communication channel between political organisations and voters. According to the data, both Catalan and Scottish practitioners point out that, despite their 'efforts', the needs of the media can dominate most of their time and they are forced to adapt to the media's needs:

'Most of our activity is still dominated by traditional media. Newspapers dominate my day' (Scotland, February 2014);

'We are very conscious of media and we have to be because we have no option. We have to be both because we are in the hunt for opportunities and that is the nature of the media; it's 24/7 you know, satellite channels, news, BBC channels, Sky News, Aljazeera' (Scotland, February 2014).

As it can be observed, news media are regarded as some sort of 'eye of the hurricane' that absorbs their daily activities. However, managing relationships with news media is also their main activity because their communication strategies are strongly centred on broadcasters and newspapers. These are still regarded as the most important, effective and valid channels to disseminate their messages:

'In the end, politics is pretty much communicated through news media. Electoral campaigns are designed to go on television, specially television' (Catalonia, April 2014);

'Our strategy is to concentrate on broadcast, broadcasting is much more important for us – but having said that, much of our time is consumed by dealing with newspapers' (Scotland, February 2014);

'I think you still need good, positive coverage in the more traditional media. You need to have a strong profile on television and on radio. You need to do the best you can with the newspapers' (Scotland, February 2014).

It seems quite clear that despite the differences between the two media systems in Catalonia and Scotland, mainstream media –specifically broadcasting- still occupies a very central and powerful position in regards to the communication strategies of political parties and governments. This particularity of political communication strategies can be related to the intensity of the relationship between political parties and news media: some of the practitioners are former journalists; and it is fairly common that political PR practitioners spend most of their time talking, trying to influence and dealing with journalists and editors. It can be assumed that it is quite difficult for these practitioners to escape an environment in which the importance of mainstream media is maybe overrated. To that point, during the interviews notions of professionalism emerged as related to the tone and management strategies of their media relations, demonstrating the relevance that media relations have in the political PR profession (for more detail, see Chapter 5).

6.3.2 Online communication

The centrality of media relations as the main function of the political PR practitioner is also related to their skeptical perceptions on online communication. Practitioners explain that they were not directly involved in the tasks associated to the management of online communication. They only dealt with online communication from a supervisory role to ensure the convergence of messages, but mostly it was the responsibility of the press officer or similar subordinate employees:

> 'We had a Head of Digital as well who dealt with social media but he worked very close to me to make sure that there was convergence of messages' (Scotland, February 2014).

Practitioners oversee online communication to make sure the messages stay on the line. They do not seem to be involved in, for instance, updating twitter or facebook accounts. Some practitioners related their lack of involvement with the dominance of traditional media:

> 'Social media is something I don't have much involvement with, and probably I should have more but the reality is that the job that I have is much more dominated by traditional media, by that I mean broadcast and print media. I would have no time to deal with it' (Scotland, February 2014).

Part of their lack of involvement seems to be related to an overall skepticism regarding the effectiveness of online communication as an alternative channel to traditional news media:

> 'Social media are just an extension of the departments of propaganda. Social media are not useful to make a different discourse about issues that citizens actually care about that do not appear on the newspapers…Some of the things that we did on social media had some repercussion but basically it was a platform for us to receive insults from all around; it's a problem' (Catalonia, April 2014);

> 'I think the influence of social media has been overstated…Probably the greatest influence that social media has is how the mainstream media reports it, how they would report twitter and facebook' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

Practitioners question the utility of these platforms because they do not perceive them to influence voters and perceive them as effective only when combined with traditional news media. They are regarded as 'echo chambers' in the political debate:

I think twitter is quite a big echo chamber which is why it's full of people who are very committed on both sides and you don't necessarily influence beyond that. I think twitter as a medium is dominated by media and political hypes who are already affiliated...but they are a good campaign tool' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

Amongst the data, those practitioners that were involved in the management of the referendum campaigns in Scotland were less skeptical than their colleagues and showed a higher degree of involvement in the management of online communications. However, the vast majority of interviewees seemed reluctant to admit the management of social media or other online-related tasks was an important function in their daily routines. The quotes in this section reiterate the centrality of media relations as the core centre of the political PR occupation.

6.3.3 Marketing research

During the interviews, practitioners were eager to explain in detail how they used marketing research to inform their strategies:

'For instance, one of the strategies that we did was to organise a focus group, qualitative, to see how people perceived the political leader. He [the leader] is only 5 months older than me but he seems very old. People regarded him as some sort of gorilla, very ambitious and always talking about money. Then we made a strategy in which his economic profile was important but you could also see some of his social skills. Consequently, that conditioned a lot our public agenda' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Practitioners portrayed themselves as the person who designs and supervises marketing research studies aimed at informing the communication strategy. Interviewees showed pride when explaining that they still managed to do polling and focus groups during elections despite having limited resources for market research:

'We would -particularly at election time- we wouldn't have a huge amount of money so we couldn't do this all the time. A lot of the time we were relying on our gut instinct but at election time we tested very carefully the messages, the languages that we were using and the policies we were using in focus groups. So we would conduct focus groups in various parts of Scotland and discuss with people. We would say 'here are ten policies, tell us the best three', so certainly that approach very much informed the election time' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

The interviewee presents marketing research as the rational approach to manage communication strategies, as opposed to communication strategies that are managed

using perceptions and instinctive reactions. However, the vast majority of interviewees recognised marketing research is a very expensive tool that is usually restricted to election periods. Therefore, managing and designing marketing research appears as the function that the political PR practitioner aspires to achieve. Practitioners considered marketing and research functions as indicators of professionalism:

> 'We try to professionalise things. We do surveys, especially during election period. We do not focus only on voting preferences but we are interested in knowing what matters to our voters, what are they worried about and what media do they consume…' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Professionalising elements of the communication strategy is understood as doing marketing research. Consequently, marketing research is a central function in the management of the communication strategy because it is perceived as the professional thing to do.

6.3.4 *Communication strategy tactics*

Managing the communication strategy is not only limited to more technical tasks, such as responding to daily media requests, but also involves tactical thinking. Practitioners describe this tactical thinking in the design of long-term or short-term communication strategies. One of the elements that emerged during the interviews is that practitioners both in Catalonia and Scotland articulate communication strategy according to the long term/short term axis or as proactive/reactive. Independent from the characteristics of each national media and political system, interviewees affirm that their strategies are based on long-term proactive plans, such as disseminating messages in advance of future events to shape public opinion, and on short-term reactive plans that are dependent on the needs and demands of news media and unpredicted political events that occupy most of their day-to-day job:

> 'You need to react on the short term and try -even though it's the hardest part- not to say something as a reaction, but to react proactively – that means you need to propose something, communicate something, influence the media and the political agenda' (Catalonia, April 2014);

> 'I suppose there is the pro-active sort of plan and there is the reactive to this and that. I think that all of us who work in politics, we end up spending much more time reacting. Often we don't spend enough time on that proactive plan. I think that is something that I have certainly heard, that you have to understand what is, it's not just about the next twelve hours, it is actually often about the

next 12 to 24 months…sometimes it is really important to try and step back and set where you are going to so you can keep a focus on that longer term plan. So that is the longer term strategy' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

The so-called 'short-term' strategy refers to the daily media relations routines, whereas the long-term or proactive strategies are described as a function they would like to develop further. The distinction between long-term and short-term strategies, or proactive and reactive strategies, reflects how political parties tend to 'adapt' their routines to the demands and needs of the media –nowadays this also includes social media- that seem to compete with the party's overarching goals or their manifestos.

6.4 The additional role of the Chief of Staff

In overall terms, there are some practitioners that work beyond the boundaries of the communication management areas. They are also involved in the design of the political agenda and leadership strategy. As previously mentioned, these tasks are sometimes recognised with the title of Chief of Staff or they are just incorporated in the list of tasks assigned to the Head of Communication. These practitioners tend to work in leader-based positions: they work directly for the leader and not the entire organisation. They also conceive the communication strategy that incorporates shaping the content of the message. They are the 'political spin doctors'.

The data indicates that in small parties with limited economic resources, practitioners tend (but it is not exclusive) to play the role of the Chief of Staff without being recognised as such. For instance, that was the case of Scottish Greens. Its Head of Communication was in charge of the communication strategy and, for instance, also supervised the parliamentary issues agenda that the party leader puts forward. However, this is not restricted to small parties. Similarly, the Head of Communication for the Scottish Conservatives (at the time, the ruling party in the UK's government) also had tasks related to political strategy, such as managing relationships with other parties. In Catalonia, two of the then-biggest parties –CiU and PSC- used the title of Chief of Staff in addition to Head of Communication to recognise the official role of political public relations.

During the interview process, I also asked these practitioners to describe the tasks and functions that they considered to be included in managing political strategy. Their responses have been summarised in the following table:

Table 6.4 Political strategy tasks

Coordinating the political agenda	Parliamentary activity - Briefing the candidate before meetings and committees Conference planning - Outlining events and speeches
Liaising with political actors and institutions	Act as liaison with the wider party structure, oppositional parties and/or government - Briefing on their activities - Coordinating actions and policies
Managing election campaigns	Coordinating messages and campaign events
Policy briefing	Advising on relevant policy issues

As it can be observed in Table 6.4, these tasks include four roles: coordinating the political leader's agenda; briefing on political intelligence and policy making; managing election campaigns; and coordinating relationships with other political parties and party federations. Practitioners that take part in these activities were referred to in the data as the 'political spin doctors' because they intervene in designing the political message:

> 'There were two kinds of spin doctors: the political ones that were more about the political message. This was basically Miquel Iceta, he is one the last brilliant minds in Catalan politics... Zaragoza is another political spin doctor; he also had a very clear media strategy but he was not always successful. These were the two spin doctors that designed the strategy with Montilla (former Catalan president). Then there are media spin doctors. There you have the trusted man of Montilla that back then was Bolaño. He was more of a similar profile to mine' (Catalonia April, 2014).

The distinction between the media and the political spin doctor reflects the aforementioned distinction between the political and the media strategies. For instance, Catalan practitioners identify themselves as having two different roles: the Head of Communication and the Chief of Staff.

> 'Usually the communication figure is associated with a more functional concept. The Head of Communications or Director of Communications is quite similar to the press officer. I think my experience in this case is quite unique as in my case I was the Director of General Strategy [Chief of Staff] with the assigned role of directing the communication. From my point of view, that had many advantages because there was a correlation between the [political] strategy and the communication which is not always evident' (Catalonia April, 2014);

> 'I manage both things. I am the Chief of Staff and the Head of Communications… For instance, this morning we were preparing a draft for a parliamentary question for the control session. We have prepared a draft and I have been actively involved in writing the proposal that afterwards is modified by the leader… then as the afternoon came I started dealing with media requests' (Catalonia April, 2014).

In the first quote, the practitioner identifies himself as being primarily the Chief of Staff, with communication functions as a secondary role. He justifies his position because of the need to correlate the political and the media strategies. As seen in the previous section, this view is challenged by those spin doctors who only manage communications strategy, as they argue communications and political strategy need to be separate areas of work. The second quote reflects how a division of these functions operates in the daily routine of these professionals who manage both communications and political strategy.

The underlying idea is that political spin doctors have a holistic role. In that sense, practitioners managing both the political and the communication perspective perceived their role as a catch-all function:

> 'My main task is to control everything that the leader does…The leader and I control his agenda… the agenda includes two things: communicating that agenda to the wider public and the content of those meetings and public speeches' (Catalonia April, 2014).

Those interviewees described their positions being restricted to the leader. They considered themselves as closer advisors to the party leader:

'But it was mainly and basically being with her, providing her with advise, sounding bits and all kinds of things, writing speeches, preparing her questions for first minister's Question Time on a Thursday. I suppose just being a pal' (Scotland, February 2014);

'My main job is to control everything that the party leader does; everything that he does goes is in my hands first' (Catalonia April, 2014).

They see their position as someone with close and direct access to the leader up to the point that they have some kind of 'authority' over his or her activities but not over the whole organisation. Despite the strong closeness to the leader, these interviewees recognised that their power is not absolute. Their role is to advise the leader, but it is always the politician who decides whether to follow their advice or not:

'The boss is the boss and one of the things I always tell them is 'I am here to advice you, to help you and tell you my point of view'. But the one who gives advice is not the one paying the bill and what does that mean? It means that if something goes wrong I don't lose my job; 'you are the one who loses, I am here to help'' (Catalonia April, 2014);

'Some advice she took, some other bits she didn't but she is entitled to because she is the leader' (Edinburgh, February 2014).

It is not clear what elements determine whether one practitioner might have a limited role in communication strategy or not. What emerges from the data is that there are two main reasons why the Head of Communications is involved in the design and/or management of the political agenda: in smaller parties, due to a lack of resources, these tasks tend to be concentrated in one person; in some cases, it is the same spin doctor who decides to play a role in the political agenda as he/she perceives it as part of the communication strategy. For instance, this interviewee, who combines both roles, linked his position to his own views on how political strategy needs to be articulated nowadays:

'Modern politics is 80% communication and that is crucial element of this job. If you don't disseminate your strategies then they remain hidden to the public eye. The challenge is to synchronise political strategy and communication. I believe this is the key to modern politics' (Catalonia April, 2014).

These personal reflections seem to indicate that the personal influence of the spin doctor plays a very important role in determining the scope of power they achieve. This precise interviewee has published a book with a very elaborate discourse on how

his innovative strategies and his modern conception of politics helped his party's electoral success.

6.5 The singularities of practitioners in government

The roles and tasks described in the above sections apply both to government and party practitioners. However, there are a series of characteristics and, most importantly, differences between Scotland and Catalonia that only apply to government. The Head of Communication for the Scottish government operates in a context where political information is clearly separate from public information (which is managed by civil servants). However, in Catalonia, the Head of Communication manages both public and political information strategies.

In Scotland, the government's Head of Communication is attached to a series of regulations that the same figure in Catalonia does not have. The Head of Communication of the Scottish government is a Special Advisor in the area of communication that is appointed by the First Minister. Special Advisors need to follow the procedures and norms established in the Special Advisors Code of Conduct (Scottish Government, 2017). The role of the Head of Communication is to manage the communications strategy from a 'political' perspective, as opposed to the body of civil servants that manage the government's communication from a 'public service' perspective:

> 'My job was to plan out the government's communications. I had to work alongside with the press staff, who are exclusively civil servants. They are not politically-appointed; they are career civil servants, some of whom had worked for the previous administration. All of whom, if there was a change of administration, they will work for them as well' (Scotland, February 2014).

Despite they are political appointees, the code of Special Advisors limits some of their political activities. For instance, the code establishes special advisors cannot brief the media on purely party matters, neither they can engage in political controversy particularly in personal attacks (Scottish Government, 2017). Basically, the code of conduct aims to separate special advisor, in any of the four areas they belong to, from what they consider to be the party political machinery. One of the reasons that explains the existence of this regulation criteria is the constant conflict between special advisors

and the body of civil servants (Fawcett and Gay, 2010).The Head of Communication is in charge of the government's communication plan; however, this plan has to be executed by a body of permanent civil servants.

Civil servants dealing with government communications are considered neutral suppliers of information (McNair, 2000). According to the Civil Service Code, Scottish civil servants are obliged to remain politically impartial. They cannot 'act in a way that is determined by party political considerations, or use official resources for party political purposes' (*Civil Service Code*, 2010, art.14). Consequently, civil servants cannot take part in the promotion of press releases or messages whose content relate to political dimensions of the Scottish Government –i.e. disputes between political leaders. The role of the Special Advisor is based on the distinction between political input and public service information. When these practitioners are asked to elaborate what it means to be political, they describe it as:

> 'We as special advisors are allowed to have public political stands. We can say things that civil servants cannot say. We can add a political dimension to what the civil press officer or the civil service communication team comes up with' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'Basically taking the best positive coverage as you can for the government for all the different activities that are going on… You can be political within government but you can't be party-political in terms of campaigning' (Scotland, February 2014).

Doing 'political' communication within the government means presenting information in the best possible way to eventually benefit the party and its leaders. Interviewees explained that when there is a conflict of interest between civil servant communication officers and the Special Media Adviser, the Advisor adds his or her own quote at the end of a press release. Interviewees explain that the line that separates these two roles can be blurry and sometimes questionable. This has also been reflected in previous studies (Eichbaum and Shaw, 2010; Gregory, 2012). The line that separates the political role of the Special Media Adviser and the neutral civil servant was one of the most important causes for the controversy surrounding Alastair Campbell in the UK (Gaber, 2000; Jones, 1990). Civil servants complained that Alastair Campbell compelled them to break the political impartiality rule.

6.5.1   Communication structures in the Catalan Government

Government communication departments in Catalonia do not operate with the same restrictions as the Scottish ones. First of all, the Catalan Government has the power to appoint not only the Head of Communication but all press officers working in the government's communication areas (Generalitat, 2016). Secondly, there are no regulations in terms of the political impartiality of civil servants in Spain and Catalonia (García, 2011). Thirdly, both political and public communication strategies fall within the functions of the Head of Communication (Generalitat, 2016). In some cases, such as in CiU's last government, these functions also included managing institutional advertising and public subsidies to news media (Ridao, 2014). Finally, some practitioners explained the government's Head of Communication can also be in charge of managing communications strategy for the government, the president, and the party, in addition to coordinating communications for any city/regional governing body governed by the party. One of the interviewees described his role as cross-organisational:

> 'I coordinated from wherever the leader was either parliamentary groups, Barcelona's Diputació and every centre of power of the party. With whom? With a team that reported to me directly, they had their bosses but I was the cross-section boss that I was in charge of communications' (Catalonia April, 2014).

He presents himself as the person that was above press officers in each political institution controlled by the party. From his description, it seems that his access to exclusive knowledge in the party was one of the reasons for his elevated position:

> 'I had no specific post. My title was not Secretary of Communications, neither I was a formal member of the Executive Committee of the party. But I was present in all the executive meetings of the party. I was in the Executive Committee for the First Secretary, in the Ministerial Executive Committee and in the Executive Committee of the Catalan government. If you are not in those places, you cannot do proper communication. Who do you give orders to? How do you get your message across?' (Catalonia April, 2014).

Similarly, another interviewee depicts how he was hierarchically situated in a higher rank than some of the party and government members that had to follow his directions:

'At the beginning [during his time in the government], it was just me designing the strategy from the government and then I would also give this strategy to a team of members of the party so they could execute it' (Catalonia April, 2014).

This quote indicates –as the ones above- that when parties are in government, political public relations practitioners can achieve top managerial positions. These top managerial positions are not formally labeled, but rather are determined by their capacity to dictate orders to other party branches and institutions and their access to privileged, top managerial information. As will be explained in Chapter 7, Catalan government professionals have access to a wider range of powerful tools to influence their relationship with the news media.

6.6 Conclusions

The aim of the chapter was to outline the role, tasks, positions and functions that political public relations practitioners have in the organisations for which they work. The main finding is that there is a body of tasks, roles and functions that are similarly reproduced across Scotland and Catalonia despite contextual differences. Practitioners claim their basic role is to manage the communication tools available to the organisation. These communication tools refer mostly to the task of managing the relationship between news media and the party/government. The role is enacted in three different positions within the organisation (Head of Communication, press officer, Chief of Staff) depending on the tasks assigned (communication versus political tasks) and on the function played (for the leader or for the organisation).

These tasks, roles and functions outline a profession that is enacted in three different organisational positions: the Head of Communication, the subordinate press officer, and the additional position of the Chief of Staff. The three different organisational positions relate to the assignment of tasks along a communication-political strategy axis outlined by the same practitioners. This communication-political strategy axis reflects once again the tensions of a profession that is constantly shaped by both the media and the political spheres (see Chapter 3). An analysis of the tasks included in this axis also indicate the central relevance of relationship management and networking to the political public relations profession.

This chapter follows the constant tension and blurring lines encountered in Chapter 3 between the political and the media sphere. However, it is not one's career path that determines whether a practitioner is more involved in communication or political strategy. Regardless of the career path they followed, practitioners claim their basic role is the management of the communication tools available to the organisation. Those practitioners in the Chief of Staff role (although not always recognised as an official position) understand these communication tools also include managing the content of the message. This reflects the scope of their functions being directly related to the political leader. They manage the agenda of the political leader, write their speeches, and manage their relationship with the media sphere. Heads of Communication and press officers, by contrast, consider their professional role to be limited to adapting a pre-established political message within the communications sphere. Their scope of functions is usually oriented to serve the entire organisation.

One of the main differences encountered between Scotland and Catalonia is the existence of regulations affecting practitioners in government. In both context, the top management figure in charge of government's communication is politically appointed. However, the main difference is that Scotland regulates and limits the degree of political involvement that the Government head of communication can have. In Scotland, the government's head of communication is a Special Advisor regulated by the Special Advisors' Code of Conduct and the Civil Service Code(UK Government, 2010; Scottish Government, 2017). These codes of conduct restrict Scottish political PR practitioners being directly involved in the management of the party's communication strategy. In sharp contrast, Catalan practitioners can achieve higher scope of power because they can be at the same time the government's head of communication and the party's head of communication. There are no regulations in Catalonia's case.

This chapter strongly focused on the similarities encountered in both cases. However, as this last section on government communication indicates, there are a series of significant differences related to the wider context in which these practitioners operate. The following chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the differences and impact of the wider context on the profession of political public relations.

CHAPTER 7 MEDIA SYSTEMS AND POLITICAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

This chapter explores how political public relations practitioners relate to the wider media and political system in which they operate. Previous chapters explored the abstract patterns and norms of the professional group (Chapter 5); and professional routines and roles (Chapter 6). This chapter explores the specific performance of political PR and how it relates to the macro-level dimension of media systems.

The aim of the chapter is to understand how the interaction between the media and the political system influences the professional group of political PR practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia. This chapter is based on examining the different dimensions of the relationship between media and political systems through interviewees' responses. These dimensions derive from a revisited version of Hallin and Mancini's model (2004) outlined in Chapter 2 and applied to Scotland and Catalonia's case in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 argued that there are four key dimensions in the relationship between the political and the media spheres in Catalonia and Scotland: sub-state intervention in media policies, the articulation of the nation-building project, levels of political parallelism and the structure of media markets. The basic argument was that different nation-building projects in Scotland and Catalonia have generated different configurations of the relationship between the media and political systems. This chapter uses the contextual framework described in Chapter 3 as the basis for the analysis. This chapter focuses on two dimensions of the relationship between political and media systems: sub-state intervention on media policies and levels of political parallelism.

The main argument of the chapter is as follows. The context in which political PR practitioners work (the interaction between the media and political systems) generates a series of resources (tools of influence over the media system) that eventually relate to the practitioner's degree of professional power and professional performance. Practitioners' professional power is connected to their ability to overcome limitations and use the available tools to get their message across. The way practitioners perform political PR (i.e. design communication strategies) relates to the characteristics of political parallelism in Catalonia and Scotland, respectively. Catalan practitioners

have access to a larger number of institutional and informal resources to influence news media than their Scottish counterparts. The main reason is the existence of a complex and interdependent relationship between the political and the media spheres in Catalonia. Scottish practitioners have instead developed more tools to overcome the restrictions on political parallelism and political influence in their media system. In Scotland's case, there are institutional and cultural elements that limit the degree of interdependency between the media and the political spheres.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The first section explains how the concept of 'tools of influence' emerged from the data analysis. It outlines the main tools of influence in Scotland and Catalonia. The second section explores how these tools of influence relate to different patterns of professional performance and to different characteristics of political parallelism in Scotland and Catalonia.

7.1 Tools of influence over the media system

The analysis of the data demonstrates that the dimensions of the relationship between the media and the political spheres (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) can be also considered tools of influence that practitioners have over the media sphere. Both Scottish and Catalan practitioners have an instrumental view of the media and political systems in which they work. Practitioners see their relationship with the wider political and media systems in terms of barriers and enablers. These barriers and enablers are different in Scotland and Catalonia. However, all interviewees find the wider political and media system can facilitate their main goal (to get the political message across) or it can have barriers that impede their goal:

> 'One of the challenges of the government is to try and get their achievements covered. Sometimes the media doesn't regard the good news as news… If you are dependent up on a journalist taking what you say and writing up, you might feel you are not written up very well or it doesn't make it as a story that it gets edited out and it never appears in the newspaper… If you use social media, there is no risk of that'(Scotland, February 2014);

> 'I try to reach my voters through the news media that are willing to get my message across…Spanish media have set up a barrier against us, it's obvious I cannot communicate with them…Anything I want to do with them, they sell it with a negative frame. If you look at the last three years we have done negative

things but also positive ones, they would never talk about the positive things' (Catalonia, April 2014).

These two quotes reflect how news media and journalists can be seen at the same time as barriers or enablers. The main difference behind these two quotes is the tools of influence that each practitioner has (see the next section for more detail). The concept of tools of influence refers to those institutional features and established behaviours that allow political parties and governments to influence different actors within the media sphere. This concept is not usually found in public relations or political communication theory. Hallin and Mancini (2004) do not regard the dimensions of the relationship between the political and the media spheres as tools of influence. The concept of tools of influence results from examining the relationship between the political and the media spheres from the viewpoint of political public relations as a profession. In that sense, the different dimensions of the relationship between media and politics become instruments, more specifically professional instruments. From this viewpoint, the relationship between the media and the political spheres is the field of work of political PR practitioners, and in this field of work there are different tools to work with.

The analysis of the data shows that in the relationship between the media and the political spheres of Scotland and Catalonia, there are two tools of influence: a series of institutional features and a series of established behaviours and practices. Institutional features refer to what Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe as 'the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system' (2004, p.21), and the added characteristics of political systems in sub-state nations: nation-building projects and the decentralisation of powers (Humphreys, 2012). Established behaviours and practices refer to influential dynamics that are not formalised but are accepted amongst media and political actors. For instance, Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe some of these practices as part of the features of political parallelism. Table 7.1 shows each of these tools of influence in Scotland and Catalonia.

Table 7.1 Tools of political influence and barriers in Scotland and Catalonia

Elements that facilitate political influence over the media system	Barriers to political influence

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Scotland	Internal pluralism in news media content	Political parallelism in newspapers	Personal relationships with journalists	Emergence of digital/social media	Limited powers over media policies	Impartiality regulations on broadcasters
Catalonia	Party representatives in the public broadcast council and audiovisual council	Subsidies, public advertising funds and newspaper subscriptions accessible to the party	Politicians' intervention on news editors' appointments	Networks of party-controlled media pundits	News media editorial polarisation (yes/no axis)	Parties with limited or no access to power

Analysis of the data revealed that Catalan practitioners have access to more institutional tools and established practices of influence over the media sphere than their Scottish counterparts. However, Scottish practitioners enjoy a more efficient and powerful dynamic in their relationships with journalists. Catalan practitioners aim to use their tools of influence to control the editorial line of the news media as a whole, and also the structure of media markets –usually when they are in government. Scottish practitioners aim to use their tools of influence to control the content of specific news stories. The following subsections will examine how these tools of influence and their respective barriers relate to elements of professional power and performance.

7.2 Professional power and performance

Scottish practitioners work in a context where the degree of interdependency between the media and the political spheres is limited (see Chapter 3). In this context, the professional power of Scottish practitioners relates to their ability to overcome the barriers limiting political influence over the media system. These barriers relate to the configuration of political parallelism in Scotland's media system. Political parallelism in broadcast media is limited by impartiality regulations (Ofcom, 2016): broadcasters cannot show political bias, but they need to reflect the plurality of political views. Open partisanship can be found in newspapers; however, this partisanship tends towards anti-independence positions (Mcnair, 2008; Hutchison, 2016). Consequently, this editorial imbalance is a barrier for pro-independence political parties. To overcome these limitations, Scottish practitioners claim to use their personal

relationships with broadcast journalists, to use social media, and to take advantage of the internal pluralism existing in Scottish news media.

Catalan practitioners work in a context where there is a strong degree of interdependency between the media and the political spheres (see chapter 3). This interdependency can be seen through the large number of institutional structures and informal practices that allow the political sphere to intervene in the media sphere, and cause the media sphere to be dependent on the political sphere –including public subsidies to news media (Fernandez and Blasco Gil, 2005; Villarroya, 2012). In this context, a practitioner's professional power relates to the practitioner's ability to manage institutional and informal tools to influence news media. The focus of Catalan practitioners' performance is not so much on overcoming limitations –as is the case in Scotland– but to feed and maintain existing ties of political parallelism with news media. Catalan news media's (broadcasters, online and print) editorial lines mirror closely the ideological distribution of political parties. There are no restrictions to political parallelism in Catalonia, and almost all political parties have at least one or two supporting news media.

7.2.1 Performance and political parallelism in Scotland

The data demonstrates that the political debate between pro- and anti-independence parties in Scotland, along with Scotland's political parallelism characteristics, influences political PR practitioners' performance. An analysis of the data finds that there are two different patterns of professional performance corresponding to pro- and anti-independence parties, respectively.

7.2.1.1 Non-interventionist media policies
As explained in chapter XX, Scotland and the wider UK are characterised by a non-interventionist media policy in which there are no public subsidies to private owned media as there are in Catalonia and other European countries such as Norway or Denmark (Philip Schlesinger and Benchimol, 2014). The very few tools of influence that Scottish practitioners had –government advertisement on local newspapers- have been eliminated because parties fear to be accused of trying to 'buy' news media content:

'The Scottish Government and local authorities used to be the biggest source for advertising revenue in terms of job for the print media. There were allegations some years ago that the Labour Party tried to withdraw adverts after some hostile coverage. You cannot buy coverage in Scotland' (Scotland, February 2014)

'In Scotland the role of the spin doctor is different because [in Catalonia] there are places where they will get the coverage no matter what because they have bought it already. It is the same as in America up to some extent with the broadcasters where you can buy commercial space which you can't do here. Here it is different you could buy advertisement space in the newspapers and maybe that would work. 15 years ago maybe you could read more political ads in the papers but you don't see them now' (Scotland, February 2014)

Scottish practitioners take pride in getting news coverage because of their personal management strategies and good relationships with news media. They consider any State intervention on media policy as a simple way of buying news content. Scottish practitioners might not have strong and powerful tools of influence such as a system of media subsidies but they have access to other tools such as personal influence over particular journalists to overcome editorial lines.

7.2.1.2 Relationships with journalists

Both anti and pro-independence practitioners claim they use personal relationships with journalists to overcome editorial lines and impartiality regulations. One of the main differences between Scotland and Catalonia is that Scottish practitioners consider themselves as powerful enough to counteract editorial preferences using their individual relationships with journalists as a tool of influence. This practice is based on the perception that journalists' personal sphere of political interests is not necessarily aligned with the editorial line of the news media they work for. Therefore, this is an area open to the spin doctors' influence. Scottish journalists are not regarded as public defenders of specific political ideologies as it is the case in Catalonia.

Journalists are just like very ordinary you trying to do their job so they are just waiting for wages by selling copies of their newspapers.' (Scotland, February 2014)

'I don't blame individual journalists for that (being hostile), they have their editorials and their owners' agenda to pursue' (Scotland, February 2014)

'The idea that individual journalists working within should be seen as having a bias or consciously promulgating the X campaign I think it's absolutely non-sense'(Scotland, February 2014)

Scottish journalists are not motivated by personal political interests but they just act as part of the organization they work for. These views relate to the dominant professional model of journalism in which journalists are seen as independent actors from political powers (Hanitzsch, 2007). Scottish practitioners explained that using their personal relationships with journalists and news editors were able to obtain positive coverage in 'hostile' newspapers:

'I think the press is largely hostile anyway so you would only probably succeed in alienating those that were at least on a personal level prepared to give you the fair treatment. My view is that you have to try to have a good relationship…On a one to one basis you can tell a journalist 'don't be ridiculous' or 'we are not engaging with that'. You have to be very sure that is on a one to one basis, on individual issues or individual stories.' (Scotland, February 2014)

The strategy of the practitioner seems to be clear only on a one to one basis he can 'convince' the journalists to adopt the party's position on a specific story. The above quote needs to be placed in a context where this specific political party did not have systematic support from any printed newspaper in Scotland at the moment of the interview. This tool of influence is not only used by those parties that have 'difficulties' obtaining positive coverage, personal relationships are also used to overcome broadcast impartiality regulations:

'You know that there are journalists you might have a good relationship or some people might give it a better show that could get a front page splash or if it is a television broadcast you could get the story up in the bulletin' (Scotland, February 2014)

'Even if a newspaper is hostile as a title or as a company, then the individual journalists you might have a good relationship with them so why waste that? You have to use whatever decent relationship you have with a journalist.' (Scotland, February 2014)

The last quote is a good example of the power that Scottish practitioners perceive to have in their individual relationships with journalists: they can overcome not only newspaper hostility but that of the news media group. These conceptualizations of power and media relations are opposed to those of Catalan practitioners.

7.2.1.3 Political parallelism and party power

Scottish practitioners describe pragmatic tactics of media management aimed to maximize media coverage regardless of the editorial lines. This pragmatic reasoning is highly important because it is one of the most significant distinctions between Scottish and Catalan spin doctors that reflects the differences between the two media system models. In polarised media scenarios such as Catalonia, the data shows it is common to limit media relations or be more keen to those news media that are editorially favourable your organisation as media consumption reflects the cues of the political debate. However, there are differences between pro and anti-independence Scottish political parties. The less-advantageous position that pro-independence parties have in Scotland's political parallelism landscape explains some of the differences encountered between Scottish political parties.

Practitioners in Scottish anti-independence parties expressed different views and described different strategies than those in pro-independence parties. The main reason seems to be the editorial balance of news media that has historically supported their party's political views –specially those of Scottish Labour (Hutchison, 2008). According to the data, anti-independence parties' strategy was to feed and maintain supportive news media, but also to extend their influence to other areas such as broadcasters.

> 'Our job with those guys [supportive newspapers] was to continually feed them with stories and policies that would demonstrate that their point of view [sceptical against pro-independence movement] was the right one' (Scotland, February 2014).

Practitioners in pro-independence parties strategised their actions within the context of an overall media environment that was hostile to their political views. Consequently, they argued their strategy was make the most of any media coverage they received, even if it came from hostile newspapers:

> 'A lot of the media is editorially hostile, you have to deal with that but you would never give up on any bid of the media. You would always try to get the best coverage you can everywhere because in the end somebody will probably see it' (Scotland, February 2014).

Practitioners in pro-independence parties claimed their strategy to overcome news media editorial hostility was to find stories that would attract the hostile news media. Their strategy was essentially to take advantage of the internal pluralism that sometimes emerges in Scottish news media:

> 'We tried to play the game 'our strengths and their strengths' as opposed to try and change their editorial line. So rather than saying you are wrong, you are right, support us or believe us we would go to the Daily Mail with just a story' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'The Daily Record, for example, it would be editorially opposed to independence but it is also editorially opposed to the Tory government in Westminster. The reasons for their opposition are topics such as welfare cuts, for example. Therefore, first the Daily Record will not support a Yes vote and not support the SNP but they can support announcements or policy initiatives that are about to mitigate the damage of welfare cuts or about what you could do in an independent Scotland with the welfare powers. The Daily Record can pick up some positive elements of the constitutional debate' (Scotland, February 2014).

These attractive stories were promoted through the use of personal networks with editors and journalists. Chapter 6 already demonstrated that networking is the main tool of work for political PR practitioners.

> 'I think the press is largely hostile anyway so you would only probably succeed in alienating those that were at least on a personal level prepared to give you the fair treatment. My view is that you have to try to have a good relationship…On a one-to-one basis you can tell a journalist 'don't be ridiculous' or 'we are not engaging with that'. You have to be very sure that is on a one-to-one basis, on individual issues or individual stories' (Scotland, February 2014).

One of the main differences between Scotland and Catalonia is that practitioners in Catalonia can use institutional tools, such as subsidies to news media, to influence editorial lines. One could argue the strategies described above relate to practitioners' working ethics. Practitioners promote good stories that they know will increase the quality of information that citizens receive from the news media.

Analysis of these parties' strategies indicates a very significant element: maintaining editorial support is a task that goes beyond historical connections between the two organisations, and can be affected by the daily routines of press release distribution or negotiations for exclusives, both of which are in the hands of the political PR

practitioner. The data demonstrates that Scottish political PR plays an important role in maintaining the ideological ties between the party and its supportive newspapers. According to their descriptions, practitioners are expected –by a newspaper and its readers– to maintain newspaper loyalty beyond the traditional ties between the two organisations by feeding the paper exclusive stories:

> 'The Daily Mirror or the Daily Record would often get annoyed because they would say 'we are your loyal backers so we want stories first', so we had to keep happy our long-term supporters and at the same time other people, and that was always a difficult balance' (Scotland, February 2014);

> 'Our job with those guys [supportive newspapers] was to continually feed them with stories and policies that would demonstrate that their point of view [sceptical against pro-independence movement] was the right one' (Scotland, February 2014).

These quotes challenge views that consider relationships of political parallelism as requiring less media management techniques (Brown, 2011). Practitioners describe their relationships with their supportive newspapers (more partisan environments) as needing as much media management effort as those with non-supportive newspapers. This idea is also reinforced by Catalonia's data (see the next section).

7.2.1.4 Impartiality regulations and broadcasters

Practitioners in pro-independence parties considered that the impartiality regulations that forced broadcasters to represent plurality of views was an advantage:

> 'We tried to work harder with broadcasters to set some agenda stuff. The main reason is because I think we had a better chance because they had to balance that out' (Scotland, February 2014).

Pro-independence practitioners described having good and friendly relationships with broadcast journalists and broadcast editors. This contrasts with the fact that inside Scottish pro-independence parties are voices critical of the BBC and its perceived bias against the pro-independence movement (Lynch, 2009b). In addition, during the independence referendum campaign, pro-independence activists gathered outside BBC Scotland's headquarters to protest against the BBC's bias (Greig, 2016). However, pro-independence practitioners argued there was a line separating their friendly relationships with broadcasters and their criticism of the BBC's structure:

'I think we have a constructive relationship. We have friendly relationships with individual journalists and producers. We meet the BBC on a regular basis. I met some senior producers from the BBC just a few weeks ago and basically rehearse some arguments' (Scotland, February 2014);

'There is no problem in terms of the relationship, is perfectly amicable. The problem is the structure of it because it doesn't actually reflect the reality of a self-governing Scotland. It never did reflect the reality of Scotland because Scotland's educational system, health service has always been different. However, post-devolution it has become even less satisfactory because Scottish politics have become very diverged from Westminster politics. For example, The Question Time is the flagship current affairs programme on the BBC, not quite but almost every week they have a representative of UKIP on and UKIP has no presence in Scotland at all' (Scotland, February 2014).

As previously explained, maintaining and creating good personal networks is the main tool of influence that Scottish pro-independence parties have. Practitioners in anti-independence parties expressed different views and performance strategies. Practitioners in anti-independence parties considered impartiality rules limiting political parallelism in broadcasting to be detrimental to their strategies. They described feelings of frustration when they could not influence broadcasters' editorial lines or complained about broadcasters' editorial decisions:

'Broadcast was more of a challenge because it was really frustrating that they would just report whatever it was that both sides said rather than say 'what they just said is totally mad'… So it was difficult and it was challenging because we spent a lot of time just going back to the BBC and saying 'you can't just let these things go on unquestioned, you got to question them'' (Scotland, February 2014);

'But I find really difficult to change the BBC's mind… The BBC seems to report the news that the government creates without questioning it or providing comment, so that was really frustrating. The reason the BBC used to say to us was 'oh it is very easy in London, you have government and one opposition, but here in Scotland you have government, three opposition parties -Labour, LibDem, SNP- and we can't put all of you on the television so none of you are'. That was really frustrating' (Scotland, February 2014).

The quotes have no direct references to impartiality regulations, but the critique has an implicit reference to it. The first interviewee wanted the BBC to express doubts about a statement from his party's political opponent because that was part of his communication strategy. In a later quote, the interviewee explains his communication strategy's main goal was to create scepticism around the policies promoted by the opposing party. Interviewees explained that one of the main tasks of political PR

practitioners is to scrutinise television coverage because their final aim is to influence news content:

> 'The scrutiny is on the television company and that is part of a job of a spin doctor: spending a lot of your time with thing like debates, you are trying to put pressure on the broadcaster to be as fair, but not only as fair, you want things to be much in your favour. It doesn't matter if you are left, right or a nationalist' (Scotland, February 2014).

Despite the above interviewee's claim that all parties want to influence broadcasters, not all do it using the same tools. The data shows the political PR practitioner is the one designing the tactics and strategies to influence or overcome broadcasters. However, these tactics and strategies seem to differ between pro- and anti-independence parties. Anti-independence parties (Scottish Conservatives, Scottish Labour and Better Together) claimed they avoided complaining about their frustration:

> 'You can't just let these things go on unquestioned, you got to question them and that was a frustration that we had with the BBC in particular. Although we did not go public with it because I think that is the wrong thing to do. That was my decision. I think that you are in a very bad place if your argument is that the media aren't treating us fairly and if that is where you are, then you are not in a good place'. (Scotland, February 2014).

> 'Bombarding BBC on a daily basis with complaints and about their perceived bias that is relentless. We took a view that our best way forward was to not bombard them with complaints and only when absolutely pushed to raise issues with them but in a disappointed kind of way rather than being aggressive with them. So they felt we were reasonable people and not just having a go for the sake of it. Our relationship with the broadcasters it was that of we are reasonable people' (Scotland, February 2014).

The first interviewee is making an implicit reference to pro-independence activists protesting outside BBC Scotland's headquarters during the independence referendum campaign. Practitioners in anti-independence parties accused pro-independence parties of over-complaining about the media coverage they receive:

> They [SNP] complain about everything but that is the culture of the nationalist, it's grievance…. Nationalists have a persecution obsession… My party I would say has possibly... has been more consistently attacked by the Murdoch papers than the SNP has. (Scotland, February 2014).

These accusations reflect elements of the political competition dynamics between parties on the different communication strategies. Practitioners interpret the communication strategies of their counterparts in other parties according with the axis of the political debate.

7.3   Performance and political parallelism in Catalonia

The focus of the Catalan practitioners' performance is not so much on overcoming limitations –as is the case in Scotland- but to feed and maintain existing ties of political parallelism with the news media. Different patterns emerge not between pro- and anti-independence parties, but between parties that can access powerful government positions and those who cannot. One of the main differences between Scotland and Catalonia is that relationships of political parallelism in Catalonia are rooted in a series of institutional features –e.g. media subsidies- in addition to informal behaviours (these behaviours also differ in the two cases). Parties that achieve government positions can aim to control or modify the institutional ties between news media and the political system, whereas parties with less power see their strategies limited to informal practices of political parallelism.

In addition, the data shows Catalan practitioners do not consider it necessary to invest their efforts in influencing hostile news media. All Catalan practitioners consider the news media on the other side (usually pro- versus anti-independence/referendum) are not useful channels to communicate with their voters. They regard news media on their side as sufficient tools to get their messages across. The following subsections explore each of the institutional and informal practices of political parallelism in Catalonia, and how political PR practitioners are or are not involved in each of them.

7.3.1 Public subsidies
The system of public subsidies to news media –both broadcast and printed news media- is used as a tool of political influence, according to the interviewees, because they are used as a chain of favours:

'I think news media depend too much on public subsidies, then they always have to return the favour. When you are not economically independent, sometimes it can happen that someone phones you. I don't know how the British system works but here this happens. I cannot say that my boss has never done that' (Catalonia, April 2014).

In this case, the practice of phoning a news agency is a shortcut that refers to the existence of a demand from the side of the political organisation towards the media. These relationships are described as a patronage system:

'When I was working there, there was a right-wing newspaper that received a lot of public media subsidies from different public administrations controlled by the party because part of the party's elite wanted the newspaper to be there. What happened in the end? They put in millions of euros and when the moment came, they [the newspaper] decided that our President was politically dead without any hesitation and they sided with 'the enemy'. Then the system here is pretty much a patronage system. I don't think there are any independent media, there are some but not a lot' (Catalonia, April 2014).

As it can be observed, public subsidies are regarded as patronage systems because political parties and governments use them in this way. However, as this case shows, such influence is not always successful. From the perspective of smaller and less powerful political parties, public subsidies are a barrier to effective media relations management and the cause for constant confrontation with 'the other' news media:

'That affects my job in a very serious way because the media are determined by that and that is part of the lack of critical spirit that I was talking before. Many news media, they survive thanks to public subsidies and institutional advertisement. Here in Catalonia, there are media groups that receive big quantities of money and that determines their messages in a very specific way' (Catalonia, April 2014);

'How do I face that scenario [media subsidies]? Badly, because effectively news media, when they have an opinion they have it on the basis of certain subsidies that come from certain groups…There is no way of fighting that, you need to take advantage of the other's strength and try to sneak some information whenever you can. Nowadays it's true that we live in a country where you need either a lot of power or a lot of money to communicate well your message' (Catalonia, April 2014).

The fact that the economical ties between certain news media and the government are regarded as barriers from both sides of the political debate in Catalonia indicates the strategic or tactical significance that public subsidies have. One of the interesting elements found in the data analysis is that the political PR practitioner, when the party

is in government, can be involved in the management of public subsidies. Section 6.5 in Chapter 6 demonstrated that during CiU's last government, the Head of Communication was also in charge of the government department that deals with public subsidies.

> 'One of the explanations is that [one of the interviewees of this research] is the one managing the money that they gave to news media. The dircom [director of communications] is the one doing all that: he is the money delivery person, the one communicating and the one making pressure. It's a little bit of lobbying, it's not a dircom in strictu sensu' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Practitioners explained that the organisational structure that allows the political PR practitioner to control media subsidies changes with each government. However, it can be assumed that the structural features of the media system are the cause for the practitioner to have an additional role in Catalonia: they can be involved in the management of public subsidies to news media and that grants them higher levels of power.

7.3.2 Networks of media pundits

In addition to the tools of influence described in the previous sections, the data demonstrates that there are two additional tools of influence available to the political PR practitioner in Catalonia to maintain levels of political parallelism. These two tools are unique to the Catalan media system and are not found in Scotland's case. According to the data, political parties in Catalonia reinforce and maintain levels of political parallelism by: intervening in the appointment of news editors; and by possessing a network of partisan media pundits. While the first is usually practiced by the politician directly, the spin doctor is responsible for maintaining the pundits network. Notions of professionalism emerged in relation to these practices.

Catalan practitioners described –without naming specific politicians- that is common practice for the politician to be involved in the appointment of news editors and news directors to make sure they are 'on their side':

> 'Politicians regard news media as just one mean to get to their voters, and their big obsession is to transform news media in simple message deliverers…There is a dance of media editors because when there is a change of government, they always say they would change the director at La Vanguardia [most read Catalan

newspaper]. The reason is because politicians want to control everything and the better the merrier' (Catalonia, April 2014);

'It has always happened that they change the media director because someone [a politician] makes a phone call. We have known that for a long time. The attitude towards the media is that of strong interventionism' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Practitioners blame politicians for their interventionist attitudes towards the media in an attempt to claim their image as ethical relationship managers. However, it seems quite unlikely that practitioners, as experts in the media sphere and managers of media relationships, would not have any sort of involvement in these practices. It is also the case that interviewees were reluctant to talk about their involvement in managing their party's network of media pundits. Political parties have an unofficial team of supportive media pundits who regularly appear on television and radio debates defending the party's position. They are not presented as party members to the public but only as people whose views are in line with those of the party. Therefore, media pundits are part of the relationship between news media and political parties. Nevertheless, one of the interviewees clearly explained that the spin doctor is the person in charge of making sure media pundits' statements are in line with those of the party:

'My party was not capable of creating a network of strong media pundits to defend their ideas. I could make a list of all the media pundits and I could tell you who is who. All media pundits receive the party's core arguments at some point during the week. I am saying so because I have sent those party's arguments and then you listen to them on the radio. I have also seen phone calls from media pundits two days before the political show asking what they have to say' (Catalonia, April 2014).

The relevance of media pundits seems to be increasing in communications strategy. The spin doctor is expected to be knowledgeable about what media pundits are associated with each political party. This knowledge is considered essential to prepare the politician when they take part in television or radio talk shows:

'When he goes to an interview, I always make sure that the media pundits are not going to be like ferocious animals running against you. That is the same as a football coach having a bad referee: when things are going wrong this can change the result of the game' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Media pundits are one additional element in the levels of political parallelism between news media and political parties. Editorial lines of television channels and radio stations are evaluated by practitioners on the basis of the political diversity of media pundits:

> 'There is no Spanish television with a conciliatory message towards what a big part of the Catalans want (referendum). How many sovereignists (pro-referendum) media pundits can you see in a Spanish television?' (Catalonia, April 2014);

> 'This figure of the media pundit, they are people that have nothing better to do and I don't know if that has any electoral effect. That has been generated to the service of whom you already know. They are doing harm to our society not because they express their opinions but because their debate is not corresponding with what people is interested in' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Media pundits seem to have been incorporated into a political role that some news media have in the Catalan media system. It is worthwhile to note that two of those interviewed for this research are nowadays recognised media pundits. It is hard to tell if this is a significant trend amongst former spin doctors in Catalonia or if it is just a coincidence. Media pundits serve as a framing tool that Catalan radio stations use to articulate their editorial positioning in political talk shows (Montagut 2013).

7.3.3 Public broadcast governance structures

One of the elements that positions Catalan practitioners more powerfully than their Scottish counterparts is Catalonia's model of public broadcast governance. According to the data, government spin doctors can be involved in the decision-making process of policies affecting the public broadcaster because the public broadcast governance model allows for the majoritarian party –usually the government party- to effectively control the public broadcast network When in opposition, practitioners can also take part in the party's proposal of candidates to the Board of Directors (Corporació

Catalana de Mitjans Audiovisuals, CCMA), the governing body of the Catalan Public Broadcaster[7].

The vast majority of interviewees were reluctant to explain if they had any involvement in the CCMA when they were in government, but some of them admitted off the record that the spin doctor has a saying in that. On the record, interviewees described attitudes of political interventionism towards the Catalan Public Broadcast Enterprise (TV3) as common practice:

> 'You need to take into consideration that here, the Board Directors of TV3 is directly appointed by political parties and they would never put there someone with a little bit of moral principles' (Catalonia, April 2014);
>
> 'Tv3 is not independent no matter what they say. It will always be the voice of its owner [the government], they will put political input according to the party in government. Tv3 is not the BBC. Maybe it's just a coincidence but the news presenter's boyfriend is someone from the party Esquerra Republicana. I don't believe it's a coincidence. Esquerra is a party with a strong voice within the government, if they say it's enough, the government- it's over. They are also a party that are keen on putting their own people in strategic positions' (Catalonia, April 2014).

As managers of the relationship between their political organisation and the news media, it seems quite obvious that the spin doctor is part of the political interventionism practices described in these quotes, an important dimension in the relationship between the party and the public broadcaster in Catalonia. Previous research has demonstrated that Southern European countries have a long tradition of political control and influence over their public broadcasting system (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Gonzalez, Rodriguez and Castromil, 2010; Pfetsch, 2013), and Catalonia is not an exception (Fernández *et al.*, 2011). The involvement of the spin doctor with the Catalan Public Broadcaster when the spin doctor's party is in government was also confirmed by one of the interviewees, who explained how he tried to change the election campaign coverage regulations within TV3:

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[7] As explained in Chapter 4, it is common practice for each party in Parliament to get one or more of their candidates elected for these positions depending on the size of the party.

'They have always accused me of imposing the electoral blocs and it's true I defended them. One time we tried to work without those regulations for a week and it was a disaster. I still remember some of the conversations with the news editor and some of the journalists' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Consequently, it can be assumed that Catalan practitioners, when they are in government, can play or 'use' their direct influence over the Public Broadcaster as part of their communication strategy.

7.3.4 Personal relationships with journalists

Section 7.1.2 shows that Scottish practitioners use their personal networks and personal relationships with journalists as their main tool of work. Scottish practitioners endeavour to use these networks to overcome editorial hostility. These conceptualisations of power and media relations differ from those of Catalan practitioners. Catalan practitioners contend they are not powerful enough to use their individual relationships with journalists to counteract editorial lines. Journalists are seen as motivated by their personal political orientations that in most cases are aligned with the editorial line of the news media they work for:

'The vast majority of the political journalists, they work for some sort of political goal. 80% of the journalists in Barcelona are supporters of the independence of Catalonia. They are journalists because they want to favour the independence process and I think that is a huge mistake. That is very frustrating when you are working as a spin doctor' (Catalonia, April 2014);

'For instance, the newspaper ARA, if you don't follow their 'wave', they don't let you [journalist] work there. Not only the politics section is biased but all the sections are oriented towards the idea that Spain is shit' (Catalonia, April 2014);

'When I was there, we had a significant journalistic sectarianism oriented towards leftist positions in some news rooms. Televisions, radios, newspapers and the…I have always been surprised by the link between the journalistic profession and leftist worldviews. This link happens because it is a cheap way to change the world' (Catalonia, April 2014).

All Catalan interviewees expressed these views regardless of the party they worked for. These quotes reflect two things: the tradition of advocacy journalism, and how this limits the capacity to influence in a strongly polarised political climate. The spin doctor and political parties cannot influence the content or the framing of news by advocating the liberal values of the journalist, since this is not associated with ideas of independent professionalism. Advocacy journalism is described as the motivation that journalists

have to promote specific political perspectives (Waisbord, 2004). This journalistic ideology (Deuze, 2005) has also been related to commentary-oriented journalism, not strongly differentiated from political activism; and associated in those contexts with high media political parallelism (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Catalan interviewees bitterly complained about the blurring lines between facts and opinion:

> 'I think that in Spain and in Catalonia, it is not journalism what they do, it's opinion. Classic journalism, that one with the traditional reporter that went to the parliament and just explained what happened, that has died. Nowadays you find parliamentary pieces that say 'the opposition biggest mistake' and is not a report- that is an editorial. I talk to a lot of journalists and I tell them, 'listen, what you did yesterday was just opinion and I respect that, but that is not a report not even a little bit'' (Catalonia, April 2014).

Catalan political PR practitioners seem to share the same normative view on journalists' role: they need to report from an impartial point of view. One might question whether these views on journalists' roles are motivated by practitioners' ethical standards or whether these views reflect their frustrated attempts of influence. It can be assumed that both elements (ethical standards and instrumental perception of journalists) are behind the views expressed in the quote above.

7.4 Key findings

The analysis of the relationship between the political PR profession and media systems in Scotland and Catalonia shows that:

- *Political PR practitioners have an instrumental perception of their media and political context. The context is constituted by tools that facilitate their job or barriers that limit their ability to get messages across.*
- *One of the roles of the political PR practitioner is to maintain and feed relationships of political parallelism with news media*
- *Relationships of political parallelism are not simple tasks, but they require as much effort and time as relationships with non-supportive news media*

7.5 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to understand how the profession is shaped by the wider structure of the media system in Scotland and Catalonia. The main finding is that

media systems influence the degree of professional power of political public relations. The element that determines the professional power of political public relations is related to the tools of influence that these professionals have over the media system. The different configuration of the relationship between the political and the media sphere in Scotland and Catalonia generates different tools of influence that practitioners use in their strategies and daily tasks. These tools of influence range from the effectiveness of individual relationships with journalists to sub-state intervention on media policies. In the comparison between Scotland and Catalonia, Catalan practitioners emerge as having more professional power. The main reason is because Catalan practitioners operate in a highly complex media system where there is a strong interdependency between political powers and news media. The analysis of the data indicates that this interdependency is articulated through a series of tools of influence that in most cases are part of the communication strategy of parties and governments and therefore, executed or supervised by political public relations practitioners.

The data analysis indicates that both Scottish and Catalan practitioners have an instrumental view on the role of news media in the public sphere. In other words, they all consider influencing news media is the aim of their relationship with journalists and editors. For instance, almost all Scottish and Catalan practitioners complained about public broadcasters blocking their attempts to influence news content. The main difference is that those attempts of influence in Catalonia they are more successful for two reasons. There is an institutional context that allows parties to partly influence news media, mainly through public subsidies and strong interventionism on media policies. In addition, there are a series of practices of political parallelism accepted amongst the political elites. For instance, the intervention of politicians in the appointment of news editors or the existence of extensive networks of party-controlled media pundits. This is not to affirm that Scottish practitioners are not influential players in their relationships with the media sphere or that there are no relationships of political parallelism.

The main tool of influence available to Scottish practitioners is the individual relationship with journalists. Scottish practitioners use their relationships with journalists to overcome editorial lines and even impartiality regulations in

broadcasting. Certainly, some Scottish political parties such as Scottish Labour have supportive newspapers such as Daily Record. However, the existence of internal pluralism in Scottish news media (several views in one newspaper) allow practitioners to use this flexibility to obtain positive coverage in specific articles. The data shows a political context that does not easily accept practices of political parallelism as the ones identified in Catalonia. It might be the case that practitioners are wary of news media exposing some of their activities as part of news stories. Nonetheless, the most important feature is the lack of a socio-institutional context that restricts some of their attempts to influence news media.

CHAPTER 8 THE PRACTICE AND PROFESSION OF POLITICAL PR

This chapter discusses the overall findings of this thesis on the practice of political public relations in Scotland and Catalonia in relation to the academic literature on professionalisation, political public relations and political communication. This chapter highlights the core empirical and theoretical contributions of this thesis.

The chapter aims to contribute to generating a more empirically-based understanding of the practice of the political public relations occupation. It also intends to contribute to the understanding of the impact that different media systems have on the practice of political public relations. In terms of a more theoretically-oriented debate, this chapter aims to develop the neo-institutional sociological approach to professions to understand and explore emerging professions and their practices in the political communication sphere.

The central argument of this thesis is as follows. The practice and performance of political public relations occupies a particular niche in the division of labour in the political field. The profession of political public relations uses networking and tactical management to solve the communication needs of parties and governments. Political public relations is a hybrid profession that seeks its own space in-between the constant influence of journalism and politics. The professional performance of political PR is influenced by the characteristics of the interaction between the media and the political spheres. The relationship between the media and the political spheres determines the tools of work used by professional practitioners.

The chapter is divided into three main sections corresponding to the three aims of the thesis. The first section discusses the idea of the political public relations profession as a hybrid profession. It puts forward the idea that the profession of political PR reflects the interrelated nature of the relationship between the media and the political spheres. The second section deals with the implications of the main tasks, roles and functions of the political PR profession. It relates these elements with the practice of

public relations in the corporate sector. The third section discusses the impact of the different configurations of the relationship between the media and political spheres on the political public relations profession. It argues the differences encountered in the performance of political PR in Scotland and Catalonia reflect and expose the political communication culture prevailing in each context. It questions the power of political PR practitioners in parties and governments. The final section explores the limitations of the thesis and the lines for future research.

8.1 The hybrid profession of political public relations

This section explores the professional structures of political public relations and discusses the idea of political public relations as a hybrid profession resulting from the interaction between the media and the political spheres. In doing so, this section deals with the first aim of this thesis: to outline the constitutive elements of the political public relations profession.

This thesis makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to understanding how communication has become a professional field in the political sphere. This thesis is the first study to apply a neo-institutional approach to professions (Suddaby and Viale, 2011) to the political sphere. It has outlined for the first time the idea that the political public relations profession in the political sphere is a hybrid profession (Noordegraaf, 2007). One of the goals of this thesis was to challenge previous studies that argued political public relations is not a profession (Negrine and Lilleker, 2002a; Maurer and Pfetsch, 2014). Using a neo-institutional approach, what emerged is that political public relations is a dynamic institution resulting from constant interaction between the media and the political spheres. This interaction can be observed in three characteristic aspects of the profession: the origins of the profession, professional knowledge and the profession's system of informal credentialism.

The main argument of this section is that the characteristics of the political PR profession reflect the interrelated nature of the media and political spheres.

8.1.1 The origins of the profession

The profession of political PR exemplifies the interrelated nature of media and politics. The profession itself emerges from the need of political parties to interact with the wider media sphere to communicate their messages. One might argue that the increasing complexity of the media sphere (Chadwick, 2013) and its multiple channels of communication – 24/7 media, online platforms, social media – are behind the emergence of the political PR profession. However, the existence of communication experts in political parties and governments dates back to the early beginnings of the 20th century (Kelley, 1956), even before the emergence of television. The emergence of the political PR profession is rather more directly related to the important role that the media plays in politics (Strömbäck, 2011; Stromback and Van Aelst, 2013).

The profession of political PR is related to the relevance that politicians give the media sphere as the best means not only to communicate their message, but also to influence other dynamics of the democratic process such as policy-making (Deacon, 2004; Davis, 2009; Kunelius and Reunanen, 2011). Certainly, the increasing complexity of the media sphere plays a role in the consolidation and development of the political PR profession. Chapter 6, for example, shows how online communication is nowadays a relevant task of these professionals. Nonetheless, the political PR profession responds to the need of political parties by influencing the media sphere.

8.1.2 Inferential and practice-based knowledge

Political PR practitioners respond to political actors' need to understand and influence the media sphere by offering inferential and practice-based knowledge of politics and media. This double knowledge in media and politics allows them to align the interests of the party (political knowledge) with the characteristics, routines and interests of the media sphere (media knowledge). However, a significant element found in the data analysis is that professional knowledge does not emerge from a scientific theory applied to a specific situation through a defined technique, as classic and knowledge-based professions have done (Noordegraaf, 2007).

As Noordegraaf (2007) explains, hybrid professions apply a case-treatment structure to their daily work, but instead of inferring that knowledge from a body of abstract

theories or learned techniques, professionals tend to rely on experiences and professional behaviours to make judgements and apply creative solutions. In line with its neighbouring professions –journalism (Deuze, 2005) and public relations (Pieczka, 2000) – the body of knowledge claimed to be the basis of the profession is derived mainly from expertise accumulated through practice, often obtained as former party employees or former journalists and public relations professionals. Political public relations is practiced on the basis of an inferential and practical-based knowledge of media and politics. In other words, practitioners claim themselves to be professionals in political communication because they have expert and first-hand knowledge of how politics and news media operate in their respective national contexts. Depending on the route of access they followed, political knowledge might come as a result of their first-hand experience working for the party in different positions while their knowledge of journalism comes as an indirect element of their work, or vice-versa in the cases of former journalists.

It is important to note here that two sets of knowledge and skills are claimed as essential for the profession: political knowledge and media knowledge. Previous studies described political public relations as having in-depth knowledge of the logic of the media (Esser et al., 2001), and being able to anticipate, stimulate and simulate journalists' actions (Frenkel-Faran, 2006). However, participants explained that they also need a strong understanding of the political environment and the rules of the political game to be good practitioners. The relevance of this combined political and media knowledge is observed in practitioners who also serve as their organisation's Chief of Staff and manage the politician's political agenda, not just the communication side of things. For instance, Scottish practitioners highlighted that, because of the referendum campaign context, part of their role was to coordinate the political agenda with the campaign platform. In those cases, they described their political knowledge as being essential for developing their role. It is the combination of these two sets of knowledge that makes them unique, and different from journalists and politicians. These results reinforce previous findings on the relevance of political knowledge as part of the expertise of political marketing campaign consultants in the US (Grossman, 2009).

8.1.3   Informal credentialism

The system of informal credentialism of the political PR profession shows there is a revolving door between journalism, public relations, politics and political public relations. Political public relations practitioners are part of the political and media elites of the nation, along with politicians and journalists. Some comparative studies on political communication argue there is a growing professional split 'between the media and political actors, one that transcends national boundaries' (Pfetsch and Moning, 2013, p.289). If that professional split refers to a differentiation process of professional identities and tasks, then the data of this thesis might reinforce this assumption. However, the data of this thesis also shows that the process of differentiation is not in terms of sociological groups.

Classic professions restricted access to the profession through credentialing processes of education, training and examination (Witz, 2003). However, in this case the data demonstrates formal and certified university degrees are not part of the selection criteria. According to Catalan and Scottish practitioners, they are hired by parties and governments because of their expertise in the media-political sphere. The basic selection criteria requires having experienced how the relationship between the media and the political spheres works from one or another perspective: they need to know the rules of the game before entering it.

As Mills (1956) defended and still accepted amongst elite theorist scholars, elites maintain closure by co-opting social types that reproduce similar values, personalities and knowledge. It might be argued that the system of informal credentialism is related to the fact that political elites, as the employer of these professionals, seek some sort of guarantee that the people they hire will adapt to the values and routines of their organisations. They need to create credential systems to filter down specific social types that, from an elite theory point of view, 'are compatible with existing structures of power' (Akard, 2000: 270). Certainly, politicians seem to filter down their candidates carefully. The process of recruitment is not publicly advertised, but parties seek out their political PR candidates through their networks of contacts amongst political journalists, public relations and party employees. Therefore, only those who

already belong to these political and media networks would find out about open positions. Practitioners describe how they were offered jobs because of their connections with political leaders and party members, often after a change in the party's leadership or after electoral outcomes.

8.1.4 The political PR professional identity

The characteristics of the political PR professional identity also reflect the constant dynamics of influence between the media and the political spheres. The professional identity of political PR practitioners brings together interests in the media and the political spheres. This can be observed through practitioners' conceptions of professionalism, work ethics and their interactions with journalists. In this case, the influence of politics and journalism over political PR is not about translating professional values from one to the other, but about these professions defining what the other profession should do.

8.1.4.1 Client-oriented professionalism

Political public relations' concept of professionalism serves both the politician and the journalist. As a hybrid profession, political public relations practitioners orientate their professionalism towards their survival in a rapidly-changing and unstable environment (Noordegraaf, 2007). Their survival depends both on their employer –governments and parties- and their main tool of work –actors in the media sphere. Both politicians and journalists can be considered the clients of the profession. The good professional never overshadows the politician's popularity either in the media or inside their own organisation. However, at the same time, they need to stick to journalists' behaviour standards, foremost being no lying to them, to maintain good relationships with news media.

Previous studies have criticised the lack of ethical standards and professionalism of spin doctors (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; Gaber, 2000b; Charon, 2004; Dhani, 2011; Schmitz and Karam, 2013). Their activities have been described as 'unorthodox methods that get the job done' according to 'liquid conceptions of truth' (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994, p.24). Certainly, political public relations practitioners, in opposition to journalists, do not have a body of normative values oriented to providing a better

public service (Deuze, 2005). Political public relations coexist with politicians and journalists, whose notions of professionalism are strongly related to their duty towards the citizens (Uhr, 2012; Meyers and Davidson, 2016) as basic pillars of the democratic system. According to the data, inside these basic pillars of the democratic system is another profession –political public relations- whose main principles are related to a service-dominated economy (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012; Svarc, 2015) rather than democratic and public service normative values.

One of the central ideas that runs across this thesis is that of challenging the concept of 'spin doctors' as it is understood in political communication and media studies. This thesis contributes to understand that the spin doctor concept is useful to understand how practitioners reflect on their professional identity –ie. it is the informal label of the profession- and their cultural references. However, the concept cannot be used to describe the essence of the political public relations profession. First of all, political communication and media studies fail to identify that the label spin doctor refers to three different organisational roles: the Head of Communication, press officers and the additional role of the Chief of Staff. Each of these roles has different attributed tasks and functions. There are no elements in the data that indicate the systematic unethical practices described by some of these studies. There are elements to question the power of these non-elected practitioners specially when they are involved in the design of the content of political messages or when in Catalonia they use media policies to influence the media. These practitioners have conflictive relationships with the media but they also adapt to their routines and demands in a mutually self-interested relationship. The question of whether these practitioners attempt to breach the watchdog function of journalists can only be answered in relation to the overall prevailing political communication culture.

Do political public relations need to adopt democratic and public service normative values? Attempts to establish a professional code of ethics amongst US political consultants have failed precisely because practitioners do not regard having an ethical code as something essential to provide good service to their clients (Grossmann, 2009). Almost none of the practitioners interviewed considered needing a sort of ethical code to improve their practices. There was only one Catalan practitioner –one of the two

who worked for more than one party- who had created their own ethical code that can be read on their website[8]. Practitioners describe communication strategies where the message is sent from the party to the voters through different channels of communication; there is no feedback considered when creating communication strategies other than the occasional use of marketing studies during campaign periods. It is not a matter of building a strong relationship with the voters; rather, the professional spin doctor is the one who ensures the voters are aware of the party's message because, ultimately, they serve the party and not the public.

8.1.4.2 Jurisdictional battles between journalists and practitioners

One of the elements that regulates professional identity in political PR is the constant interaction between journalists and practitioners, and the subsequent jurisdictional battles between the two professions. Journalists are one of the main tools of work for political PR practitioners and vice-versa (Hobbs, 2015). They need to work together, and to do so both professions need to establish rules of interaction. The interaction also depends on the power balance between the two professions in the wider media system and the public exposure of political PR practitioners in the media. Here, there are some significant differences between Scotland and Catalonia.

Previous studies have defined the relationship between spin doctors and journalists as symbiotic and co-dependant (Atkinson, 2005) and as an exchange (Brown, 2003a; Quinn, 2012). Chapter 1 explains that the media's exposure of spin doctors has fascinated some media and political communication researchers (Esser, Reinemann and Fan, 2000; McNair, 2004; Esser and Spanier, 2005; Joe Atkinson, 2005). These studies see journalists portraying 'spin doctors' badly to complain about politicians manipulating news stories (J Atkinson, 2005). However, none of these studies understand these interactions as part of the jurisdictional battles between the two professions.

 The rules of interaction between journalists and political PR practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia are based on the same principles: political PR practitioners should not

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[8]   https://politikomblog.wordpress.com/2010/03/04/la-consultoria-politikom-presenta-el-primer-codigo-etico-para-profesionales-de-la-comunicacion-politica/

lie to journalists; the practitioner should always attend to journalists' requests; and confrontational attitudes and rudeness are detrimental for the relationship. These rules show the influence that journalists have over the political PR profession. Political PR practitioners consider that part of their role is to be available 24/7 to journalists' requests.

Nevertheless, Scottish political PR practitioners are more susceptible to journalists' influences over their professional behaviours than their Catalan counterparts. If Scottish political PR practitioners break the rules of the relationship, they expose themselves to the danger of appearing as part of a news story. In addition, Chapter 7 demonstrated that personal relationships with journalists is one of the main tools of influence Scottish practitioners have over the media system. Scottish practitioners use their personal relationships with journalists to influence particular news stories and overcome editorial hostility and impartiality regulations. In contrast, Catalan practitioners are not exposed to this threat because there is no tradition of portraying 'spin doctors' in Catalan news media. Furthermore, Catalan practitioners claim to be less capable of influencing particular journalists.

8.2 Constitutive elements of the practice of political public relations

This section discusses the practice of political public relations and answers the second aim of the thesis: *explore the performance of political public relations and determine the main tasks, functions and roles of these practitioners*.

This thesis makes an empirical contribution to understanding how individual practitioners enact what academia has defined as political public relations. The second aim of the thesis aimed to overcome two limitations of the academic literature (see Chapter 1). The first limitation is the lack of studies that empirically explore the tasks, functions and roles that fall into the theoretically-defined field of political public relations. The second limitation is the existence of a biased explanatory framework that categorises spin doctors' activities as ethical or non-ethical, using journalists' descriptions as the data source.

The main arguments of this section are that the roles, tasks and functions of political PR are similar to those of the practice of public relations in the corporate sector. The section also argues the tasks, roles and functions of political PR pose some normative questions in terms of the power they can achieve inside parties and governments.

8.2.1 The field of political public relations

One of the central arguments of this thesis (see Chapter 1) is that the emerging academic field of political public relations (Kiousis and Strömbäck, 2011) is offered most convenient framework to define the actions of communication experts in parties and governments. Chapter 1 explained that the figure of communication experts in political parties and governments has been approached by five different fields, each one with a different vision of the main task and role of these experts. The central argument was that the recently emerged field of political public relations offered the most integrative approach and it was free from biased normative frameworks. The results of the data analysis point out to the adequacy of the concept of political public relations to describe the core activity of communication experts working in political parties in Scotland and Catalonia. The results also point out to strong similarities between these experts working in parties and governments and public relations experts working in the corporate sector.

The examination of the daily tasks, roles and functions of experts in Scotland and Catalonia demonstrated that networking and relationship management are the core element that sustains the practice of political public relations. Both Scottish and Catalan practitioners described long lists of daily routines that ranged from writing press releases to coordinating messages with the different party branches. Practitioners also described sometimes their roles go beyond strictly communication-related tasks and they get involved in tasks that ultimately decide the content of the message such as deciding what topics will be included in the next parliamentary speech. All these tasks, despite practitioners differentiated between political and communication strategy, they all had something in common: they are all based in practitioners knowing what networks of people (ie. journalists, bloggers) are willing to send out the message and what relationships need to be fostered to get the message across, generate

interest around it, and eventually convince. Basically their daily practices are about knowing how to navigate two worlds media and politics that are strongly based on relationships and networks (Savigny, 2009).

On the light of these results, previous definitions of the spin doctors' activities as either strategic news management (Hobbs, 2015) or as agenda-setting (Aira 2012) seem limited. This is not to affirm that news management or agenda-setting are not an essential part of political public relations but the crucial element that practitioners sell to politicians is the ability to generate relationships and navigate networks. For instance, news management understood as 'the strategy to control the media news agenda in order to influence public opinion' (Lilleker 2006 p.131) according to practitioners is one of their most-consuming tasks but it is not the only one. Practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia also act as liaison with other parties, advise the leader on different strategies or strategize their online image. The concept of political public relations seems to better encompass all the tasks, roles and functions found in the data analysis.

Kiousis & Strömbäck (2011) defined political public relations as:

> 'the management process by which an organization or individual for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals'(Kiousis & Stromback, 2011 p.8).

It was not the goal of this thesis to empirically test Kiousis and Stromback's (2011) definition. However, the analysis of practitioners' descriptions indicates that their practices are about relationship and reputation building. These relationships and reputations are mostly built amongst the actors of the media and politics sphere. As explained in the previous section, practitioners do not see themselves as the ones building the relationship between the politician and the voter. They consider their public service is that of helping the politician to inform citizens about the party or government's actions. In that sense, the data also indicates that the goal of the profession is to support the mission of the organisation: practitioners serve the party or government they work for. The results here described also indicate significant differences with the field of public relations as examined in next section.

8.2.2   The similarities between political PR and corporate PR

The findings of this thesis show that there is nothing inherently different between the tasks, roles and functions of political PR practitioners and those described as belonging to corporate public relations. There are some differences in terms of how the concept of the public plays in each sector. Nonetheless, in both cases (politics and corporate sector) the basic role of their practitioners contains persuasive communication and an organisation that has communication needs.

One of the core challenges of this thesis was to label and situate the actions of this group of practitioners in a context where different fields had different views regarding their main actions and practices (see Chapter 1). The central argument was that the recently-emerged field of political public relations (Kiousis and Strömbäck, 2011) offered the most integrative approach and was free of biased normative frameworks. The definition of the political public relations field assumes there are elements that distinguish this from the field of public relations (Strömbäck and Kiousis, 2013). However, there are almost no empirical studies on the practice of political public relations. Consequently, this distinction needs to be endorsed with caution as the results of this thesis demonstrate.

The analysis of the results confirms the adequacy of the political public relations umbrella to define the actions of this group of practitioners in Scotland and Catalonia because of its integrative approach. However, the results also point to strong similarities between these experts working in parties and governments and public relations experts working in the corporate sector. These similarities can be seen in the tasks, roles and professional careers of political PR practitioners.

Similarities are to be observed at the very functional level: the list of tasks and activities traditionally associated to public relations (Cutlip et al. 2000; Fawkes, 2004) is almost equal to the list of activities described by political public relations practitioners −see Chapter 6. For instance, Cutlip et al. described public relations activities and functions as consisting in media relations, research, management and speech writing (2000:6). As described in the data analysis, the main tasks and functions

of the political public relations are: media relations, marketing research, coordination of the communication strategy, speech writing and online communication.

There are also similarities with the so-called public relations roles (Dozier and Broom, 1995; Vercic et al., 2001) that, despite having received strong critiques, are useful in this case for the following reasons. For instance, Dozier and Broom's (1995) differentiation between the communication technician and the communication manager relates to the distinction between the press officer and the Head of Communication, respectively. The data shows press officers' tasks are those of the communication technician: manage the daily tasks of writing press releases, organising events and producing web content. The Head of Communication operates as the communication manager: the expert strategizing and elaborating plans and communication programmes (Dozier and Broom, 1995).

Vercic et al.'s (2001) European roles of public relations relate to the distinction between the Chief of Staff and the Head of Communication. When the Head of Communication also manages the political agenda through the role of the Chief of Staff, it is because the role developed to support the entire organisational mission (Vercic et al., 2001), and both communicative and political goals are understood as a single issue. However, when the Head of Communication only manages the communication strategy, is because the role 'is concerned with the communication plans developed by others and is aimed only at the implementation and evaluation of the communication processes' (Vercic et al., 2001, p.380).

The thin line that separates public relations and political public relations can also be observed in the revolving door that exists, both in Catalonia and Scotland, between public relations practitioners from corporate settings and the communication heads for political organisations. Practitioners from corporate settings that have connections within the political world, derived for example from public affairs activities, may be hired to manage the communications of political parties. The same system works in the other direction, with examples in Scotland and Catalonia of spin doctors transferring to corporate settings.

The differences can be found in political PR practitioners' idea of publics. Practitioners do not see themselves as the ones building the relationship between the politician and the voter. They consider their public service is that of helping the politician to inform citizens about the party or government's actions. In that sense, the goal of the profession is to support the mission of the organisation: practitioners serve the party or government they work for. The concept of the public in political PR practice challenges concepts of dialogue and symmetry in public relations (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002). Citizens and voters play a passive role in political PR practitioners' strategies. Political PR practitioners aim to build fruitful and influential relationships with those actors that control or influence the different channels of communication.

Both Scottish and Catalan practitioners have a top-down approach to communication strategies, wherein news media are instruments to disseminate messages passively received by voters. Chapter 5 already indicated that these findings are not new. Previous studies on Spanish political PR practitioners showed the dominance of unilateral communication strategies in the political sphere (Xifra, 2010; Castelló and Montagut, 2011). In that sense, Somerville and Kirby (2012) argue that communication practices in the political sphere cannot be examined according to 'virtually impossible demands of dialogue' (2012, p.240). The underlying idea is that inside the democratic system are asymmetrical relationships and, therefore, asymmetrical communication strategies to support these relationships. For instance, the prevalence of top-down approaches seems to be related to political actors being the decision-makers of the democratic game (Kriesi, 2004). Decision-makers use top-down approaches because they want their political claims to get people's attention and to eventually obtain public support for their policies.

All these similarities found at the empirical level call for a reformulation in understanding the spheres in which public relations is practiced. Part of this reformulation can be found in Moloney's (2000) redefinition of public relations as a concept that refers to the management of communication by an organisation, as a practice related mostly to media relations, and as persuasive communication used to advance material or ideological interests. This definition incorporates the two basic

elements of communication in the political sphere: ideology and persuasion (McNair, 2011).

8.3 The impact of the relationship between the media and the political sphere

This section discusses the impact that the relationship between the media and the political spheres (i.e. the media system) has on the political public relations profession. This section combines the results from the micro- and macro-level analysis. In doing so, this section answers the second research question of the thesis: *how do specific media systems impact the political public relations profession?* It also responds to the third aim of the thesis: *outline the elements of the media system that influence the practice and profession of political public relations*.

This thesis has contributed to an expansion of the most-used framework (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) in comparative political communication studies (Esser and Pfetsch, 2016) with two new elements: the incorporation of political public relations practitioners and the use of sub-state nations as the context of study. The incorporation of political public relations practitioners in the dimensions of the relationship between the media and political spheres has shed light on the fact that, from the side of the political sphere, there are a series of tools to exert influence over the media sphere. The concept of tools of influence emerges from transforming the different dimensions of the relationship between the media and the political spheres into instruments – more specifically, into professional instruments. The use of sub-state nations as contexts of analysis has demonstrated that projects of nation-building have a very significant role in the configuration of the relationship between the media and the political spheres.

There are two significant elements in this contribution. The first is the relationship between the professional performance of political PR practitioners and the prevailing political communication culture. The second is the relationship between the tools of influence and the professional power of these practitioners, which also poses some normative questions.

8.3.1   The prevailing political communication culture

Chapter 7 demonstrates the configuration of the relationship between the media and the political sphere influences the professional performance of political PR practitioners. The focus of Catalan practitioners' performance is to feed and maintain existing ties of political parallelism with news media, whereas Scottish practitioners' performance aims at overcoming the barriers that limit political influence over the media sphere.

This thesis makes an empirical contribution to understanding the political communication dimensions of Catalonia and Scotland. The long-standing tradition of comparing the two cases (Keating, 1996; Greer, 2007; Solano, 2007) had focused on the political dimension of the two sub-states, ignoring significant differences in the communication dimension of politics. Sub-state nations have proven to be very useful contexts of study because the impact of the nation-building variable becomes more evident. The analysis of the data demonstrates the significance of communication for these two sub-state nations that are immersed in a process of claiming their own space either inside or outside Spain or the UK. At the same time, using Pfetsch's (2004) concept, the data suggests that these similar demands do not necessarily translate into similar prevailing political communication cultures. Catalonia has developed an institutional and established context with practices of close relationships between the political and the media spheres. Scotland instead has a limited institutional context with less political power over media policy and the prevailing political communication culture restricts attempts of political influence over the media sphere.

Pfetsch defends that 'the objectives of political public relations are a consistent expression of the communication culture prevailing in each country' (2001, p.63). In that sense, one might wonder about what this thesis, and more specifically the results of this section, says about the communication and political cultures of Scotland and Catalonia. Pfetsch justifies her assumption using the concept of political communication culture. The concept refers to 'the empirically observable orientations of actors in the system of production of political messages toward specific objects of political communication, which determine the manner in which political actors and

media actors communicate in relation to their common political public' (Pfetsch, 2004, p.348). Certainly, the data of this thesis contributes to the understanding of some of the elements Pfetsch points out.

There are elements that might indicate political parties and governments in Catalonia are particularly concerned about the media and communication dimension of political competition. This is not unique to Catalonia, and this is not to affirm that Scotland's political actors are not concerned about media and communication. Nevertheless, there are elements in the data that indicate Scotland's political parties and governments manage their concerns about the media and communication dimension of political competition in a subtler manner because of a prevailing culture that does not allow them to do otherwise.

Catalan practitioners from all parties constantly complained about a political elite that, from their point of view, is obsessed with influencing news media. Practitioners described a political elite that considers news media –as well as new online media platforms- as part of their political strategies. In this context, it is not a coincidence that political public relations practitioners in Catalonia have access to more tools of influence than their Scottish counterparts. Scottish practitioners also explained that politicians constantly attempt to influence news media. However, Scottish practitioners regard news media as an institution independent from political powers.

Catalonia's political elite certainly operate in an institutional and established context where there are practices of close relationships between the political and the media spheres. Chapter 3 explained that the media –including online, cinema and arts- play a central role in Catalonia's nation-building project (Villarroya, 2012; Guimera and Fernandez, 2014) as a reaction to the political, identity and language conflicts with the Spanish nation-building project (Guibernau, 2004). This conflict is partly, but not exclusively, the cause for Catalonia having developed more interventionist media policies (Keating, 1996); there are economic reasons as well (Prado, 2014). In addition, Catalonia is immersed in the overall Southern European context where, as there research points out, there is a tradition of patron-client relationships in media relations (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002). In this model of media relations,

news media have historically played a very active political role (Gunther, Montero and Wert, 2000; Chaqués-Bonafont, Palau and Baumgartnet, 2015; Durán, 2015). As Hallin and Mancini (2004) find, in Southern European countries there are two elements that explain the relevance of mediated communication: the mass media having been intimately involved in political conflicts; and parties regarding news media as a means of ideological expression and political mobilisation.

Scottish political public relations practitioners operate in a context that partly restricts politicians' attempts to influence the media sphere. This restriction comes from an institutional design that limits relationships of political parallelism with newspapers and online media, and a public broadcast system that is not a devolved power to Scottish parliament (Mcnair, 2008; Hutchison, 2016). In addition to these institutional features, Scotland, as part of the UK, is embedded in a political culture that condemns overtly political attempts to influence news media (Hutchison, 2016). Newspapers' political orientations are understood as commercial responses to the public's political interest (Davis, 2007). News media are seen as serving the interest of the public, and not the interest of political elites and the different dynamics of political competition (Mcnair, 2008). For instance, UK governments are expected to use their communication resources in a citizen- and neutral-oriented manner (Canel and Sanders, 2014). This is not to say that parties or governments are not successful influencers of news media in Scotland, but that the prevailing culture restricts some of these attempts. The reduced number of tools of influence Scottish practitioners have compared to their Catalan counterparts relates to this cultural feature.

As both Byrne (2014) and Hobbs (2015) argue, communication practices within political organisations are the result of a set of accepted rules between media and political powers: those practices include both democratic and anti-democratic actions, but they are equally accepted as part of the game.

8.4 The legitimacy of the political public relations practitioner

Political public relations practitioners are not elected figures and that poses questions about the legitimacy of their professional power. The legitimacy of political public relations is rooted in different dimensions of their work: the legitimacy and

transparency of the selection process of these experts; their power and capacity of influence beyond the party or government's communication sphere; the effects and implications of the relationship dynamics with journalists; and the effects and implications of the significance of the communication dimension in the party or government's strategy.

There is nothing inherently anti-democratic in politicians hiring experts to manage different aspects of political life. The basis of current democratic systems is the delegation of power to democratically-elected representatives (Lijphart, 2012). This delegated power gives politicians the legitimacy to decide how to better organise and manage their party or government. Certainly, the selection criteria and recruitment process of political PR practitioners is not transparent nor open to public knowledge. However, political PR is linked to the dynamics of the democratic process because professional success is dependent on the party, politician or government's success. Chapter 5 explained that electoral failure or the end of a politician's career usually implies that the political PR practitioner leaves his or her job.

Chapter 6 demonstrated that some political PR practitioners work beyond the boundaries of the communication area. Practitioners can be involved in the decision-making process of the content of the party's message, especially when they play the double role of the Head of Communication and the Chief of Staff. Public relations theory has long claimed public relations needs to be practiced from a managerial position and practitioners need to be part of the dominant coalition of their organisations (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002). Section 8.2 explained that the existence of the double role of the Head of Communication and the Chief of Staff relates to how the organisation perceives the relevance of the communication area. Communicative and political goals become part of the entire organisational mission (Vercic et al., 2001). Further research could potentially explain whether there are any consequences to political and communicative goals becoming a single issue.

Finally, one of the elements that questions the legitimacy of political PR practitioners is how they manage their relationships with journalists and whether this has any implications for the wider democratic system. Some media and political

communication scholars (Brants *et al.*, 2009; Van Aelst, Sehata and Dalen, 2010; van Dalen, Albaek and de Vreese, 2011) assume that journalists' perceptions of their relationship with political actors influence the content of the news, and consequently can affect democratic engagement (Davis, 2009). There are no elements in the data that indicate the existence of systematic, unethical practices in the relationship between political PR practitioners and journalists as described by previous studies on spin doctors (Sumpter and Tankard, 1994; Louw, 2005; Schmitz and Karam, 2013; Ribeiro, 2015), but moments of conflict are evident. It seems difficult to connect the micro-dynamics of two actors in the political sphere –journalists and political PR practitioners- with the wider and more complex phenomena of democratic engagement.

The following section will summarize the key conclusions of this thesis.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis put forward two research questions: *What are the constitutive elements of the performance and practice of political public relations profession?* and *How do specific national media systems impact on the political public relations profession?*

The approach taken in this thesis relies on key concepts drawn from three sources: a political public relations approach to define and categorise communication practices in the political sphere (Kiousis and Strömbäck, 2011) communication in the political sphere is a managerial process to establish influential relationships in the political sphere; a neo-institutional approach to professions (Schinkel and Noordegraaf, 2011) that conceptualizes professions as changing institutions shaped both by its practitioners and the characteristics of its environment; and a theory of media systems that identifies the main dimensions in the relationship between the media and the political sphere (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) adapted to sub-state nations. These three sources were the basis to combine a micro-level analysis of the practice and performance of political public relations with a macro-level analysis of the eco-system where these practitioners operate, the relationship between the media and the political sphere (media system). The empirical data used in the thesis derives from in-depth interviews with Heads of Communication (political public relations experts) in political parties and governments in Scotland and Catalonia.

The main conclusions of this thesis are as follows.

1. *The common professional structures and identity features between Catalan and Scottish political PR practitioners outline a profession constantly shaped by the influence of journalism and politics. The profession of political PR reflects the relevance that politicians give to the media sphere. The profession emerges from the need of political parties to generate influential relationships with the different channels and actors of the media sphere. Political PR*

practitioners use inferential and practice-based knowledge on politics and media to solve parties and governments' communication needs.

2. *The practice of political PR is based on principles of networking and relationship management with the core actors and channels of the media sphere. The profession of political PR sees their public duty as maintaining an informed citizenship in a public sphere where citizens and voters emerge as passive receivers of political messages.*

3. *The role and position of political public relations practitioners in governments and parties results from the combination of political-related and communication-related functions and tasks. The balance between political and communication tasks generate variations in the managerial position and power that these practitioners claim to have in their organisations. The roles, tasks and functions of political PR are similar to those of the practice of public relations in the corporate sector*

4. *The profession and practice of political PR poses normative questions about the legitimacy of these practitioners when their capacity of influence goes beyond the party or government's communication sphere. Particularly, Catalan practitioners can achieve high levels of power when they are in government. The institutional design of Catalan governments can sometimes (not always) give the practitioner the capacity to control and design media policies.*

5. *Levels of professional power and differences in the performance of political PR between Scotland and Catalonia indicate the prevailing political communication culture in each sub-state nation. Sub-state nations have proven to be useful contexts to observe the influence that nation-building projects have on the political communication culture. Catalonia's nation-building project gives a strong significance to use and create their own communication channels and dedicated media, the identity debate between Spain and Catalonia is played out in the media sphere. In that context, political PR performance aims to maintain the strong relationships of political parallelism with news media. Scotland's nation-building project has a less influential or direct relationship with the Scottish media sphere. The prevailing political*

communication culture puts the focus on limiting political influence over news media. The performance of Scottish political PR practitioners aims to overcome the barriers for political influence.

6. *The configuration of the relationship between the media and the political sphere provides practitioners with different tools of influence over the media system and therefore, different levels of professional power. The configuration of the relationship of political parallelism between parties and news media influences different strategies of professional performance. Catalan practitioners aim their performance to maintain relationships of political parallelism with news media using powerful institutional tools of influence and informal practices. Whereas Scottish practitioners aim their performance to overcome the limitations to political influence that exist in the relationship between the media and the political sphere in Scotland.*

I.   Limitations of the thesis

The first limitation in a project of this kind is created by the researcher's own choices. Firstly, one might argue that the sampling of this thesis is a determining and limiting element. I decided to limit the complexity of deciding who constitutes a political public relations practitioner by creating my own sampling values. The main decision was that the official position of Head of Communication corresponded to the practitioners of political public relations. As a result, I ignored other experts that might also play a role in the communication dimension of parties and governments, such as party leaders or party secretaries. I also restricted the complexity by limiting the nature of the political organisations included in the sample, using only governments and political parties with parliamentary representation. Other political organisations such as unions and think tanks were excluded from the sample.

I also decided to reduce some of the complexity of the task by selecting the professional framework. While there are substantive elements in previous studies to consider the idea of political public relations being a profession, in the end the professional framework is the result of the researcher's choice. As in any project of

this kind, there is the inevitable tension between choosing the most adequate framework to understand the data or imposing the framework on the results of the data. I find using a neo-institutional framework to understand professions and their eco-systems offers a flexible approach to, for example, recognise both alternative and traditional professional structures in the political public relations profession. Throughout the thesis, there is also the inevitable tension between agency and structure. In the final section of Chapter 8, one might argue I inclined the balance towards the relevance of structures in shaping the individual actions of political public relations practitioners.

Secondly, there is a limitation concerning the feasibility of some elements of the data. This thesis used in-depth interviews with practitioners as its only data source. One might argue that there is a risk of uncritically accepting practitioners' reflections because there are no elements to contrast them. I contend the thesis demonstrates a good level of critical analysis and the data was carefully contextualised and questioned before any generalisations were made. For instance, a critical view can be observed in the analysis of what practitioners describe as the ethical principles of the profession. These principles are questioned and finally explained as a self-interested and consequentialist professional norm.

Thirdly, there is a limitation concerning the generalisability of the results. The main concern is how much this thesis can make claims for political public relations practitioners in other contexts or for political public relations as a global profession in Western democracies. The high degree of similarities found between Scotland and Catalonia, despite the strong contextual differences (notably in their media systems), indicate there is a case to be made for the generalisability of the thesis' results. There are no elements in the data that indicate political public relations is a particular phenomenon of Scotland and Catalonia. Moreover, there are no elements that indicate that because Scotland and Catalonia are sub-state nations the generalisability of the data is any different from other possible cases such as France or Italy.

II.   Further research

Building upon the research done in this thesis, further research might well be conducted on three main topics:

Firstly, further research could explore the contextual elements that are behind the emergence and origins of the political PR profession. This could be done by exploring how the political PR profession is perceived by its main clients: politicians. This thesis has demonstrated that the political PR profession has a client-oriented professionalism based on attending the needs of the party or government using the tools of the media sphere. However, exploring the politicians' reflections on the political PR profession could shed light on the characteristics and tone of the relationship between politicians and political PR practitioners.

Secondly, by exploring the views and reflections of politicians, further research could also offer insights about the institutional weight that communication has in parties and governments and more importantly, about the role that communication plays in political strategies. Further research could explore the relationship between parties' overall political strategy and the use of different communication strategies. This research has demonstrated that the performance of political PR –the enactment of communication strategies- is influenced by the wider media system. Nevertheless, there is scope to explore for instance the impact of the left-right or pro-anti-independence axis influence the design and enactment of communication strategies.

Thirdly, further research could explore cases that go beyond European or North-American cases. For instance, this thesis has demonstrated that there are significant differences between Scotland and Catalonia in terms of political communication culture. Further research could for example explore whether Mediterranean nations share common political communication culture features going beyond the three traditional cases explored by Hallin and Mancini (2004) –Spain, Greece, Italy. Finally, there is scope to explore how the political PR profession emerges in supra-state level systems such as the UN. By moving to supra-state level dimensions, future research

could explore how different political communication cultures interact and play out in a shared and common space.

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