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Online allies and tricky freelancers: understanding the differences in the role of social media in the campaigns for the Scottish Independence Referendum

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Abstract:	<p>Using the 2014 Scottish independence referendum as a case study, this paper asks: firstly, to what extent is the use of digital communications technologies (DCTs), in particular social media, associated with fundamental changes to campaign organisations, specifically to the command and control model? Secondly, under what conditions are challenges to the model more likely to emerge?</p> <p>Using mixed methods, our analysis of the case demonstrates that radical organisational or strategic change is not inevitable, nor is there a one-size-fits-all approach. Technologies are not 'just tools' that any campaign with enough resources will adopt in similar ways. Instead, depending on a number of interdependent factors (i.e. context, resources, strategy, organisational structure and culture), some campaigns—like Better Together—selectively adopt digital tools that fit with the command and control model; in other cases—like Yes Scotland—the application of DCTs and the dynamics created by linking to other (digital-enabled) grassroots organisations can have transformative effects.</p>

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3 **Online allies and tricky freelancers: understanding the differences**
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5 **in the role of social media in the campaigns for the Scottish**
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7 **Independence Referendum¹**
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11 Ana Ines Langer, Michael Comerford and Des McNulty
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13

14 **Abstract**
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17 Using the 2014 Scottish independence referendum as a case study, this paper asks:
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19 firstly, to what extent is the use of digital communications technologies (DCTs), in
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21 particular social media, associated with fundamental changes to campaign
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23 organisations, specifically to the command and control model? Secondly, under
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25 what conditions are challenges to the model more likely to emerge?
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30 organisational or strategic change is not inevitable, nor is there a one-size-fits-all
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42 the application of DCTs and the dynamics created by linking to other (digital-
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44 enabled) grassroots organisations can have transformative effects.
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 Ever since digital communication technologies (DCTs) became widely
4 available, they have raised great expectations for not only their democratizing
5 potential against authoritarian regimes but also the bread and butter of democracy:
6 electoral campaigns. They have raised hopes of information abundance, better
7 conditions for deliberation, and greater and more inclusive grassroots participation.
8 Lately, social media and its networked peer-to-peer interactivity have added to the
9 enthusiasm, potentially opening the door for individuals and groups to participate
10 in ways that are neither controlled by conventional media gatekeepers nor by
11 official campaign organisations. On the other hand, there are acute concerns about
12 information overload, echo chambers, ‘fake news’ and incivility, the reinforcement
13 of existing power inequalities and digital rocket fuel being provided for
14 exclusionary populist actors. As the academic debate matured, it has become
15 clearer that technology *per se* does not cause change. As our study demonstrates,
16 technologies are not ‘just tools’; instead, technological affordances are leveraged,
17 to different degrees and in different ways, by actors in context, thus providing
18 differential constraints and opportunities to campaigns. Change is taking place, but
19 it is not inevitable or uniform. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to how actors
20 differently adopt, and adapt to, technology (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016;
21 Earl & Kimport, 2011; Flanagin, Stohl, & Bimber, 2006).

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44 Thus, and given that the use of DCTs is now a mainstay of electioneering
45 *we must ask not if, but how and why* they are used the way they are by competing
46 campaign organisations, and with what impact on power dynamics. This paper uses
47 the 2014 Scottish independence referendum as a case study to answer the following
48 question: to what extent is the use of digital tools, and particularly social media,
49 associated with fundamental changes in the nature and practices of electoral
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 campaign organisations? More precisely, are electoral campaign organisations
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5 changing from the traditional professional model, focused on command and
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7 control, towards a more hybrid model that blends this with greater bottom-up,
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9 decentralised participation from a range of loosely connected non-elite actors, as is
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11 more typically associated with some social movements? Secondly, under what
12
13 conditions are these different models more likely to emerge?
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17 We were particularly interested in how in 2014 the two opposing campaigns
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19 navigated the tensions between using technology to foster enthusiasm and
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21 participation, while maintaining control of their key messages and resources, and
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23 how this relates to the context, to the respective campaign strategies, and to their
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25 organizational structure and culture. The focus is on use of social media by the
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27 campaigns but in the context of their broader use of DCTs—from blogs to email, to
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29 SMS, crowd-sourcing sites and membership management systems—and the hybrid
30
31 media system (Chadwick, 2013)
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35 Despite the massive interest in all-things-internet, research of this kind is
36
37 relatively scarce, especially outside the US. Moreover, most research has studied
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39 primaries or general election campaigns, notably Howard Dean's and Barack
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41 Obama's (e.g. Bimber, 2014; Kreiss, 2012; Stromer-Galley, 2014). In contrast, the
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43 organisational impact of the use of DCTs during referendum campaigns has seldom
44
45 been explored. However, as this paper shows, referenda provide rich research
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47 territory; as in the Scottish case, they are inherently interesting hybrids, in that they
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49 combine characteristics of general election campaigns with those of advocacy
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51 campaigns.
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 On the one hand, the campaigns were not party- or candidate-centred but
4 short-term coalitions. On the other, the main parties—and to some extent
5 governments (UK and Scottish)—were at the core of both campaigns, and both
6 coalitions relied on the parties' organisational resources and campaign expertise, as
7 well as some of their best-known figures. At the same time, political parties on both
8 sides were obliged to campaign alongside other parties with whom they are
9 normally in competition. On the No side (Better Together), differences in policy
10 and political values between Labour and the Conservatives made them uneasy bed-
11 fellows and affected the level of enthusiasm amongst party members and supporters
12 for joint activity. On the pro-independence side (Yes Scotland), the SNP and its
13 supporters appeared more willing to work with other parties and a number of
14 vibrant grassroots advocacy organisations, in pursuit of the common goal of
15 independence. These complex and varied interactions between the official
16 campaigns, established parties and many highly-engaged grassroots groups of
17 different kinds contributed to set different constraints and opportunities for each
18 campaign for the use of DCTs and makes this case especially interesting.

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20
21 At the same time, the referendum had much in common with key features of
22 many contemporary general election campaigns. Processes of political re-alignment
23 and the weakening of traditional partisan affiliations in many Western democracies
24 have been accompanied by the eruption in number and importance of vibrant
25 digitally-enabled grassroots groups, such as Indignados in Spain, Momentum in the
26 UK and Occupy in the USA. These groups are increasingly playing key roles
27 alongside (and often within) established parties in which, with 'multi-speed
28 memberships' (Scarrow, 2014), boundaries between insiders and outsiders are
29 becoming increasingly fluid. This makes the case of the Scottish independence

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relevant not only to referenda, which are increasingly important, but also to electoral campaigns more generally.

The distinctiveness of our study resides not only in the characteristics of its subject—the referendum—but also our mixed methodology, which combines the use of computational techniques to analyse the differences in the pattern of Twitter activity between the two campaigns and key groups, and in-depth interviews with key campaign stakeholders. This provides a rich and innovative empirical analysis of how and why DCTs—and especially social media—are used by, and affect, competing campaigns.

The paper will first discuss the impact of DCTs on parties and campaign organisations, with emphasis on the concept of organizational hybridity. The second section explains our methodology. The final sections focus on the analysis first of the Twitter data and then of the interviews. We conclude by highlighting the significance of our findings for the study of electoral campaigns and the impact of social media, and DCTs more broadly, in politics.

Electioneering and DCTs: change and continuity

Since the 1980s, political communication research has analysed changing models of campaigning and how these have been greatly influenced—and for some driven—by technological developments. Election campaigns in the modern or ‘third era of political communication’ have been characterized by a heavy focus on mediated communication (especially TV), professionalization, tightly centralized control of campaign messages, emphasis on targeting of undecided voters aided by public opinion research, and escalating costs (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Norris,

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3 Curtice, Sanders, Scammell, & Semetko, 1999; Swanson & Mancini, 1996). This is
4
5 accompanied by a ‘top-down’ centralized command and control organization,
6
7 emphasizing agenda setting, staying ‘on message’, and rapid rebuttal. In this model
8
9 most citizens have a limited role as spectators, and those party supporters who
10
11 continue to actively engage are tightly managed by the professional campaign
12
13 hierarchy.
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17 This model has continued to evolve alongside developments in technology
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19 and data science into the so-called ‘post-modern’ era (Norris et al., 1999). On the
20
21 one hand, digital tools have enabled even more sophisticated message discipline,
22
23 micro-targeting and use of data (Kreiss 2016), while on the other hand, technology
24
25 has contributed to the creation of a fragmented, high speed and rapidly changing
26
27 communication environment (Chadwick, 2013). These challenges are played out
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29 against a background of widespread concern at crises of participation, especially
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31 disengagement from traditional political parties and decreasing turnout (Van
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33 Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012).
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37 In this context, DCTs offer great opportunities for campaign organisations
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39 but, equally, they present challenges to the traditional model of professional
40
41 command and control. Because of their technological affordances, DCTs—and
42
43 most especially social media—offer the *possibility* of greater and more diverse
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45 forms of participation, more easily and with greater two-way interaction with, as
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47 well as autonomy from, the campaign. However, the practice is less simple:
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49 technological affordances do not automatically translate into change, still less
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51 democratizing change. Moreover, they are adopted and adapted by campaigns in
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53 different ways. Research has shown that DCTs are most often used by campaigns
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55 to instrumentally harness citizens’ enthusiasm and labour, using data-assisted
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3 guidance (Vaccari, 2010) or ‘computational management’ (Kreiss, 2012) to manage
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5 participation, with the emphasis on ‘controlled interactivity’ (Stromer-Galley,
6
7 2014). Supporters become message multipliers and even ‘brand advocates’, but
8
9 generally have little input over policy or strategy. Thus, much research has argued
10
11 that DCT use often falls well short of the higher ideals of deliberative and
12
13 participatory democracy, even if they have some success at mobilization (Howard,
14
15 2006; Stromer-Galley, 2014). On the other hand, the more optimistic accounts of
16
17 DCTs and citizenship have stressed their potential to fit with ‘actualizing’ (Bennett,
18
19 Wells, & Freelon, 2011) or ‘engaged’ (Dalton, 2008) modes of participation,
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21 although more for civic than party organisations (Wells, 2015).
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25 Ultimately, as Chadwick and Stromer-Galley argue, the degree and kind of
26
27 participation associated with digital tools depends upon how they ‘are assembled
28
29 and organizationally enacted’ (2016, p. 285). But how is this manifested in practice
30
31 and how can it be explained? In other words, how do different campaign
32
33 organisations react to these possibilities and challenges and which factors help to
34
35 explain why they do so?
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38 A large body of literature has demonstrated the impact of changes
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40 associated with the digital revolution on policy-advocacy arenas and especially
41
42 social movements (e.g. Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl,
43
44 2005; Chadwick & Dennis, 2017; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Karpf, 2012). Research
45
46 about the impact on electoral campaign organisations is less common but it is clear
47
48 nonetheless that the adoption of digital tools is now commonplace and that they are
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50 used in a range of both back-end and public-facing functions (Kreiss, 2012;
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52 Lilleker & Jackson, 2011; Nielsen, 2012; Vaccari, 2010). Much of the election
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54 campaign research has focused on testing the normalization vs. equalization
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 hypotheses (see Gibson & McAllister, 2015) and thus on the effects of party size,
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5 funding and incumbency. However, aside of the impact of resources, less is known
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7 about how and why campaign organisations differentially adopt and adapt to the
8
9 use of DTCs, and the ‘micro-incentives’ (Vaccari 2010) and constraints for doing
10
11 so. Moreover, existing studies have tended to focus on analysis of content such as
12
13 websites or tweets (e.g. Gibson, 2015; Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2014;
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15 Lilleker & Jackson, 2011), while research incorporating the input from campaign
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17 actors themselves is rare (for some insightful exceptions see Baldwin-Philippi,
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19 2015; Kreiss, 2012; Nielsen, 2012; Stromer-Galley, 2014; Vaccari, 2010), as is that
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21 integrating the analysis of the role of actors outside the official campaigns. This
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23 paucity is especially marked outside the US, which both technologically and
24
25 institutionally is a rather exceptional case (Anstead & Chadwick, 2008; Bimber,
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27 2014).
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32 It is clear, however, that it cannot be assumed that the use of DTCs leads to
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34 far-reaching nor one size-fits-all changes to the command and control model of
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36 campaigning. There are thus two key arguments at the core of our analysis. Firstly,
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38 it is not just a matter of access to technology; how it is used, and thus the
39
40 challenges to the command and control model, are conditional to a number of other
41
42 inter-dependent factors. Secondly, change results on hybridity rather than replacing
43
44 the ‘old’ with the ‘new’. The beauty of the concept of hybridity it is that it avoids
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46 unhelpful dichotomies, and leads us to “not only, but also” patterns of thought
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48 (Chadwick, 2013). A hybrid campaign organization is one where there is a blend of
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50 organizational structures and strategies found in electoral politics with
51
52 characteristics more typically associated with some social movements, especially
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54 digitally networked ones with ‘post-bureaucratic’ characteristics that emerged in
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the late 1990s and 2000s. Drawing specially on Chadwick (2007, 2013), Flanagan et al. (2006), Kreiss (2009), and Vaccari (2010), we understand the concept in two dimensions. Firstly, it is about how campaigns engage with citizens, especially individual supporters and volunteers as well as groups, and hence how they construct citizenship (Baldwin-Philippi, 2015; Wells, 2015). Secondly, it refers to the organizational arrangements that enable this and also enhance it, in a two-way dynamic between modes of engagement and organizational structure.

Below we schematically summarise the main dimensions that characterize traditional electoral and networked movement-like organisations. There is a degree of overlap between some categories but each pair emphasises a different dimension. Moreover, these categories are a matter of degree with most campaigns falling somewhere along the continuum, and movement from one type to the other is as an adaption that represents a shift along the spectrum, rather than replacement of one type of organization with another.

Traditional electoral organisations	Networked movement-like organisations
Elites/campaign professionals	Greater/more diverse grassroots participation
Top down/one-to-many/broadcasting	Bottom-up/many-to-many/interactive/co-production and peer-sharing
Management	Empowerment and self-expression
Structure/coordination/control	Spontaneity/self-initiative/autonomy
Hierarchical and bureaucratized organization	Loosely connected individuals and groups
Centripetal/centralized	Centrifugal/decentralized

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3 According to US research, the most successful electoral campaigns
4 increasingly combine elements of both types, albeit to different extents (Bimber,
5 2014; Chadwick, 2013; Kreiss, 2009, 2012; Vaccari, 2010). Moreover, how much
6 and how they do so is mediated by the interplay of a number of factors. We will
7 demonstrate that in addition to resources, which as explained above has been the
8 focus of much of the previous research, one must consider contextual, strategic,
9 organisational and cultural factors. Furthermore, our research contributes towards
10 understanding how these processes work outside the US—where previous research
11 has focused—and how specifically they work in the context of a heated
12 constitutional referendum.
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25 Thus, drawing on the analytical framework above, we analyse *to what*
26 *extent, how and why* the two campaigns in the 2014 Scottish independence
27 referendum blended the two types of organization and practices in their use of
28 DCTs, focusing on social media. As with any single case study, we are not able to
29 generalise. Nonetheless, we offer a detailed exploration that enables us to better
30 understand the dynamics at play and the range of factors involved. Before we
31 proceed to our analysis, the next section explains our methodology.
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44 **Methodology**

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46 We employed a mixed methods approach: in-depth interviews alongside a
47 network analysis of posts in the social media platform Twitter². The focus is not on
48 the content of the tweets, nor on the use of Twitter specifically; instead we analyse
49 Twitter data to provide a window into the characteristics of the two campaigns and
50 their wider network of relations (Segeberg & Bennett, 2011, p. 201). This
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3 'window' has its limitations and provides only *one* way of examining the
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5 campaigns' structure and strategies, which might be different to we might learn
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7 from other platforms, given differences in affordances, norms and reach (Gerbaudo,
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9 2012; Kreiss, Lawrence, & McGregor, 2018); nonetheless, it is highly insightful in
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11 combination with the interview data.
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14 We collected tweets using the public search application programming
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16 interface (API)³. This was queried three times per day for the hashtag '#indyref'
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18 between January and September 2014⁴. This method provided over 2.8M tweets,
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20 drawn from c.146,000 unique user accounts. To construct the dataset for network
21
22 analysis, we extracted user interactions, i.e. 'retweets', '@mentions', and
23
24 '@replies'. These interactions (c.1.4M) provided the nodes (the Twitter user
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26 accounts) and edges (interactions between two users) for the network analysis⁵.
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30 We subsequently conducted twelve in-depth interviews asking how and
31
32 why the two sides in the referendum used social media and DCTs more generally,
33
34 and how this connected to strategies, actors and context. The rich insights from the
35
36 interviews enabled us to 'reconstruct the operating philosophies of elite political
37
38 actors' (Vaccari, 2010, p. 335), exploring *how* and *why* they *believe* they used
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40 technology as they did, while the analysis of the twitter networks helps reveal some
41
42 of the ways that the campaigns and other actors *actually* used it. The interviewees
43
44 were four key staffers from each of the official campaigns, and three leading
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46 members of groups that were highly active in the digital sphere during the
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48 referendum but were not, at least formally, part of the umbrella organisations. In
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50 addition, we interviewed one journalist focused on digital issues, who was
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52 mentioned several times in the interviews as someone with useful insights into both
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54 campaigns. From the official campaigns, we selected those responsible for leading
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3 on digital, but included also the managers they reported to and key staff working in
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5 other aspects of the campaign, such as message or community. The second group of
6
7 interviewees were from unofficial pro-independence groups. The imbalance
8
9 between Yes and No reflected the heavy preponderance of groups on the Yes side
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11 in the digital conversation about the referendum. The interviews were semi-
12
13 structured and were conducted between November 2014 and March 2015. On
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15 average they were an hour long, mostly conducted face-to-face, and recorded and
16
17 later transcribed. They were then thematically analysed following the framework
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19 on Table 1 (above). As agreed in our ethics consent procedures, quotes from the
20
21 interviews have been anonymized.
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28 Analysis

29 30 **Twitter networks and the characteristics of the campaigns**

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33 In this section we analyse Twitter data from the key period of the
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35 referendum campaign: January to September 2014. By comparing data for the Yes
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37 and No campaigns, we are able to show how their use of a key social media
38
39 platform played out in practice, in particular in relation to key groups in the
40
41 assemblage. Previous research has shown that Yes Scotland was overall more
42
43 successful in terms of number of friends, followers and engagement both in
44
45 Facebook and Twitter (Shepard & Quinlan, 2016). Our macro analysis based on
46
47 measures of centrality in Figure 1 also shows that the Yes side dominated the
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49 conversation in Twitter: the blue nodes coded as Yes were more central, and
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51 heavily outweigh the red No-aligned nodes⁶.
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55 **Figure 1**

Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 In line with our research question, the objective is not to delve into markers
4 of success. Instead, our focus of analysis is on the networks, and specifically on the
5 ways in which different nodes interacted with each other and what this tell us about
6 levels of centralization and autonomy of the official campaigns vis-à-vis key
7 groups in their assemblages.
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14 To uncover the general characteristics of the official Yes and No overall
15 networks, we identified all the Twitter accounts that the official campaigns
16 interacted with, i.e. by retweeting them or mentioning them directly, which is
17 known as their outbound ego-network⁷. The first striking difference is numerical,
18 suggesting a different degree of engagement and inclusiveness: 291 vs. 160 nodes
19 (or accounts) for Yes and No respectively. Secondly, there are significant variations
20 in prevalence of different types of actors. For Better Together, of the 10 accounts
21 they most often retweeted or mentioned, only three belonged to supporter groups,
22 while six were accounts of leading members of the campaigns, and one a media
23 outlet. In contrast, for Yes Scotland, seven out of the top 10 belonged to supporter
24 groups. Furthermore, all top five accounts were supporter groups for Yes Scotland,
25 whereas only one of the top five for Better Together was a supporter group.
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41 To further explore these differences, in Figures 2 and 3 we specifically
42 visualize the connection between the official campaign accounts and the accounts
43 of key groups aligned with them⁸. Given our aims, and that only a small fraction of
44 the findings can be visualised in detail, we selected a subset of accounts from their
45 ego-networks. The selection criteria for the visualisation were as follows: the
46 accounts had to have a reciprocal relationship in Twitter with the official campaign;
47 they had to support the official campaigns side of the debate; they had to be
48 organisations or websites that identified as a collective, rather than individual
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3 political actors (e.g. politicians, journalists, etc.); and they had to hold some
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5 importance in the network. We quantify importance here using three criteria: their
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7 betweenness centrality, the frequency of interactions with the official campaigns
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9 and their own level of out-bound activity. Finally, only groups that were not
10
11 directly controlled by Yes Scotland/Better Together were included, i.e. groups that
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13 the official campaigns either created, or whose communications they exerted
14
15 significant control over (e.g. sectoral groups such as Academics for Yes, NHS
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17 Together), are excluded.
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24 **Figures 2 and 3**

25
26 These visualizations consist of a circular node representing each Twitter
27
28 user account, where the size of the node represents the number of connections that
29
30 account has⁹. The connecting lines between accounts are representative of the
31
32 amount of activity (represented by the thickness of the line) and the source of that
33
34 activity (colour of the line¹⁰). For example, in Figure 3 we can see the strong
35
36 connection between National Collective and Yes Scotland, represented by the thick
37
38 blue line that indicates a large volume of traffic (i.e. retweets or mentions) from
39
40 National Collective (@wearenational, the source) directed at Yes Scotland (the
41
42 target). To the lower right of the National Collective node a smaller red edge can be
43
44 observed representing the traffic that passes from Yes Scotland to National
45
46 Collective.
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51 Overall, the analysis suggests that Yes Scotland's twitter engagement with
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53 key groups is more hybrid, i.e. less centralized, and combining autonomy and
54
55 control, a blend that is essentially absent for Better Together. The key difference is
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3 that in Figure 2 there is a lack of interconnections between the No-aligned
4
5 accounts, in a way that most closely resembles the hub-and-spoke or star structure
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7 associated with centrally managed hierarchical networks (Bennett & Segerberg,
8
9 2013). In contrast, although the Yes subnet in Figure 3 also has a dominant official
10
11 campaign node at its centre, the breadth of interconnections and levels of activity
12
13 between intermediate nodes shows a higher degree of decentralization.
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17 Regarding differences in the degree of autonomy, Figure 3 also shows that a
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19 number of Yes-aligned accounts were at times creating more output on Twitter than
20
21 the official campaign; National Collective is the most active of these accounts.
22
23 There is also an indication that a different pattern of engagement is taking place. In
24
25 a heavily centralized campaign we would expect traffic to largely use the official
26
27 campaign as a conduit in order to communicate with other parts of the network;
28
29 however, there are multiple interactions happening between the intermediate group
30
31 nodes. For example, the patterns of traffic between the Radical Independence
32
33 Campaign (RIC) (@radical_indy) and other nodes such as Women for
34
35 Independence (@womenforindy) and Bella Caledonia (@bellacaledonia), contrast
36
37 with the low traffic between RIC and Yes Scotland. On the No side, the
38
39 predominant pattern is linear, corresponding to a broadcast model where
40
41 information is relayed downwards. On the Yes side, the pattern of transmission is
42
43 more complex with multiple interactions, and a key role for the grassroots groups.
44
45 This is also supported by Figure 4, which visualizes the connections between Yes
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47 Scotland and supportive local groups¹¹: many groups active on Twitter on the Yes
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49 side developed their own organic connections, often bypassing the central
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51 campaign account. Furthermore, the interaction between the pro-independence
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53 groups is polycentric in character, and shows a much greater number of twitter-
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3 engaged local groups when compared with the No side (not shown here), whose
4 network of local groups is sparsely populated and has again a hub and spoke
5 structure.
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10 At the same time, it is important to acknowledge and delineate the limits of
11 the official campaign's openness. The absence of some prominent Yes supporting
12 accounts in Figure 3 tells us something important about the attitude of Yes
13 Scotland toward different organisations. The most striking example is Wings Over
14 Scotland, an influential blog, which is absent from Yes Scotland's active
15 connections. This was discussed in our interviews as a decision taken not to engage
16 directly with aspects of the wider Yes campaign regarded as problematic and
17 potentially counter-productive to the main message: 'Wings –we never engaged
18 with, ever' (Interview 5, Yes campaign).
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33 **Long Live Command & Control?**

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35 The analysis of the Twitter networks, and especially the relationship
36 between the official campaigns and key groups, show revealing differences
37 between the two sides. However, this analysis is for us a window into the broader
38 characteristics of the official campaigns, their networks and how they used social
39 media, and DCTs. The interviews with key campaign staff and associated groups
40 are an essential complement to understand continuity and change with the control
41 and command model, and especially the reasons for the differences and similarities
42 between the campaigns. This is discussed in the next two sections.
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53 The interviews reveal that digital tools enabled some innovations in their
54 campaign practices, but their disruptive impact on the command & control model
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 was limited; instead, there is strong continuity especially, but not only, for Better
4 Together. Both official campaigns highlighted the usefulness of a range of DCTs
5 on recruiting volunteers, briefing them, and coordinating and monitoring their
6 activities, both online and offline. They also referred to their usefulness for
7 fundraising, especially for small donations, and to the promise of crowdfunding
8 initiatives; but these capabilities were exploited only to a limited extent, in part
9 because of UK campaign funding regulation (Anstead & Chadwick, 2008). Social
10 media were also regarded as having facilitated new forms of networked peer-to-
11 peer persuasion and a degree of self-organization among groups on both sides.
12 Furthermore, the interviewees explained that the content, form and targets of the
13 official campaign messages were influenced to some degree by email and social
14 media metrics, especially Facebook's, which were monitored regularly—although
15 in a rather amateur fashion—to calibrate which issues were of greatest interest, by
16 whom, and which messages, both in terms of content and presentation, got the most
17 positive responses.

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36 However, there is little evidence from the interviews that the capabilities of
37 digital tools, or information obtained from them, were major influences on
38 campaign strategy by either side. Firstly, established techniques such as focus
39 groups and polling were mentioned as much more important tools in this regard.
40 Secondly, the emphasis from both official campaigns was on transmitting
41 campaign messages rather than two-way engagement. Attention focused on
42 ensuring that there was coherence across media messages and with activities on the
43 ground, with campaign managers playing a key role in coordination and
44 monitoring. Moreover, social media, and Twitter in particular, were highlighted as
45 a key tool that could be used to try to influence the mainstream media and thus 'the
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3 agenda'. In short, many of the dimensions of the control & command model
4
5 remained in evidence with DCTs bringing new, but not deeply transformative,
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7 dimensions to it. Crucially, however, there were also significant differences
8
9 between the two campaigns, which were a result of the interplay between
10
11 contextual, strategic, organisational and cultural factors.
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14 In terms of strategy, the most important difference lay in Better Together's
15
16 concentration on uncommitted voters as the key to winning the vote. Campaign
17
18 messages were relentlessly aimed at this group, pointing out the risks associated
19
20 with separation, to the extent that the campaign was dubbed (initially by Better
21
22 Together staffers) as 'Project Fear'. Yes Scotland, while also targeting
23
24 uncommitted voters, gave more weight to addressing and mobilizing their own
25
26 supporters. Crucially, these differences were reflected in, and in turn reinforced by,
27
28 the respective campaigns' digital strategies.
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31 32 **Better Together: Top down, On message** 33 34

35 Despite recruiting the services of Blue State Digital, famously associated
36
37 with the Obama campaigns, Better Together's digital strategy placed little emphasis
38
39 on self-expression, empowering and mobilizing. Instead, the interviews revealed a
40
41 remarkable accent on control and discipline; the use of 'we' firmly restricted to
42
43 campaign professionals at the centre:
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45

46 'We were *fairly disciplined* in our approach to that...our local groups
47
48 had their own Facebook groups which were largely there to advertise
49
50 local meetings and things like that, and to, sort of, *amplify what we*
51
52 *were doing nationally*. The truth is that in a campaign as heated as
53
54 this was on both sides, *people freelancing was a problem*, because
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 you had deeply unhelpful things being generated...I think, luckily for
4 us, because *we were more tightly controlled*, let's...say than the
5 other side, you know, there was...whether it was, you know, boycott
6 campaigns or attacks on people who were...who had come out in the
7 debate. *That, sort of, thousand flowers bloom approach to it caused*
8 them trouble and actually diluted their message' (Interview 2, No
9 Campaign).

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21 For Better Together social media were used mostly to distribute top-down,
22 carefully controlled messages to supporters, the public and especially 'public
23 opinion formers', including media elites, in line with their overall strategy:

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28 'Both Facebook and Twitter were broadcast rather than necessarily
29 engagement. Because we didn't want to dilute the message (...) but
30 also we were not building something to last, you know. We always
31 *were conscious we weren't going to exist the day after [the vote]*, so
32 we could be more, I guess, mechanical and have a more, kind of,
33 instrumental approach' (Interview 2, No Campaign).

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45 Collective action repertoires—whether digitally enabled or not—were tightly
46 managed. Supporters recruited as volunteers via social media were treated as brand
47 advocates, restricted to institutional modes of participation where there is 'little
48 initiative, creativity, or control on the part of individuals' (Flanagin et al., 2006, p.
49 37). Systems were put in place to control any 'over-enthusiasm' which Better
50 Together campaign managers felt could be wasteful if not directed: 'they [activists]

Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 wanted to leaflet everyone', rather than restrict themselves to the target groups
4 identified by the centre, based on research data and Mosaic groups¹². This control
5 from the centre created tensions with those on the ground, many of whom were
6 new to campaign volunteering: 'for a lot of people that was a big struggle, they
7 were getting frustrated' (Interview 7, No Campaign).
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14 Only staff could post events to the Better Together website, whereas anyone
15 could create and advertise events on the official campaign website for Yes
16 Scotland. There were less stringent controls over social media; many pro-Union
17 groups were 'given' an account and some were allowed to create their own social
18 media identities. But campaign managers made it clear that 'nothing with the Better
19 Together brand would be run without a degree of editorial control by staff
20 members' (Interview 2, No Campaign).
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30 In summary, the use of social media, and DCTs generally, by Better
31 Together was not transformative either within the official campaign organization or
32 in its relations with supporting groups. There was little openness and
33 decentralization or 'blending' of the more entrepreneurial participatory modes
34 associated with DCTs in cutting-edge contemporary campaigns. This was not a
35 result of lack of resources. It was a consequence of the campaign's strategy, which
36 in turn related to the political context, the characteristics of the coalition, and the
37 organizational structure and culture that underpinned it. Firstly, and crucially, it
38 played to what the interviewees saw as the objectives and strategy of the No
39 campaign. It was a short-term coalition with the single objective of winning the
40 referendum vote. It avoided 'emotional messages' related to identity or other issues
41 that could help mobilize but would have exposed differences between the uneasy
42 coalition of political parties; instead, they focused on using polling combined with
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 Mosaic data to identify undecided voters concerned about the economic risk of
4 independence and then hammered away at this theme. Secondly, Better Together
5 was the front runner, until almost the end of the campaign comfortably ahead in the
6 polls. Moreover, although campaign managers recognized that Yes was dominating
7 social media, they felt they could rely on the support of the press and much of the
8 mainstream media. In this context, from an instrumental point of view, it is not
9 surprising that control of the message and targeting was regarded as vital, and
10 ‘freelance’ participation as a liability that they could do without. Thirdly, their use
11 of DCTs was associated with a highly centralized structure, which heavily relied on
12 the existing expertise, infrastructure and collective action repertoires from the
13 political parties that formed the pro-Union coalition. Thus, Better Together
14 operated more like a conventional political party in its media handling and attempts
15 to canvass public support. Moreover, the campaign brought together political
16 parties that, according to the interviewees, had not yet mastered digital for
17 campaigns. Finally, it was underpinned by, and in turn further promoted, an
18 organizational structure where ‘Digital’ was subsumed under ‘Broadcasting’, with
19 staff across different sections ‘chipping in’ (Interview 2). Moreover, internal staff
20 (not the Blue State Digital consultants) were mostly political campaign—rather
21 than digital—specialists which meant that they had, in line with traditional party
22 campaigns, norms, values and expertise associated with the command and control
23 model and thus were less likely to be innovative in their use of DCTs (Baldwin-
24 Philippi, 2015; Chadwick, 2013; Kreiss, 2014).
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Yes Scotland and the key role of ‘online allies’

Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 Yes Scotland was more clearly a hybrid organizational type. It had
4 elements of a more decentralized structure and some movement-like
5 dynamics blended with traditional party campaigning characteristics,
6 enabling —or at least not discouraging— more autonomous bottom-up
7 participation and entrepreneurial modes of engagement. As with Better
8 Together, this was a result of the interplay of contextual, strategic,
9 organisational and cultural factors that affected how they used DCTs, which
10 in turn reinforced pre-existing dynamics.
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21 There are two important contextual factors that shaped Yes Scotland's
22 overall strategy, which in turn affected their use of DCTs: their trailing
23 position in the polls and the weak support in the mainstream media.
24 Regarding the latter, social media was deemed particularly important as it
25 gave Yes Scotland an alternative channel to what they regarded as a hostile
26 press and broadcast media. But it was not the only purpose; social media
27 communication was also seen as a means of motivating and expanding the
28 activist base:
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38 'So apart from being the counterbalance to the mainstream media, to
39 the anti-independence media if you like, it [social media] was also one
40 of the more obvious means through which we could communicate the
41 kind of campaign that we wanted to run and begin to create that
42 national movement' (Interview 1, Yes Campaign).
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53 Moreover, considerable emphasis was laid by the Yes campaign on training
54 and educating, not just so that activists could relay official messages, but also
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 with an emphasis on self-expression and peer-sharing, encouraging supporters to
4
5 make their own contributions and to develop personalised networks:
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8 'We trained a hard core [of volunteers/'ambassadors'] to just be online
9
10 regularly and to help promote our material, but also to train other
11
12 people and to encourage other people to behave in the way we behave.
13
14 And also, the behaviour thing was less important for us than the
15
16 getting people to understand the message and understand where we
17
18 were at that point in the campaign and what to do, and how to produce
19
20 their own content' (Interview 3, Yes Campaign).
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27 This mobilizing strategy was facilitated and reinforced by several factors,
28
29 which might be overlooked if one focuses exclusively on Yes Scotland position
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31 as 'challenger'. Firstly, there is the prominence given to Digital in the official
32
33 campaign organization. Unlike Better Together, it had a dedicated team, with its
34
35 Director—a respected figure in digital publishing—one of the very first hires.
36
37 Moreover, he reported directly to the Chief Executive—who himself came from
38
39 outside the election campaigns field—and was put on an equal footing with the
40
41 other Directors. Secondly, Yes Scotland was able to draw not only on the size
42
43 and enthusiasm of the SNP's membership, which was also much younger in
44
45 average, but also on its digital expertise and culture:
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49 'The SNP has actually got a good understanding of how digital works
50
51 and a commitment to it. So these people were pre-prepared (...) that
52
53 was very useful in terms of establishing just a culture of digital as part
54
55 of what we do' (Interview 3, Yes campaign)
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6 At the same time, the interviews highlighted the importance of the fact that this
7
8 was a referendum. Firstly, that there were greater incentives and opportunities to
9
10 innovate outside the party structure and routine election environment:

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12 The SNP is...even from an organisational level or other social media, it
13
14 is very rigid and very...in a sense, they have to be a lot more, because
15
16 they're a membership organisation, whereas we were never a
17
18 membership organisation which meant we...you can't impute
19
20 responsibility for anyone's actions, although many people tried. Whereas
21
22 with the SNP, they're far more often responsible for the actions of
23
24 councillors or anything like that. So theirs is a very controlled...our
25
26 message was still very controlled. Our...what we put out in the core
27
28 things we'd put out, they were always the same themes. But the SNP,
29
30 you don't know anything unless they tell you. Whereas there was so
31
32 much information and research on...the independence campaign was so
33
34 broad (Interview 5, Yes Scotland)
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39 Secondly, and crucially, there were important differences on the degree of
40
41 grassroots support each campaign could tap on and how they chose to interact with
42
43 pre-existing and new groups. In fact, it is in the relationship of each campaign vis-à-
44
45 vis other groups that the differences between the Yes and No campaigns are most
46
47 striking (as illustrated in the twitter analysis above). Both campaigns created some
48
49 local and sectoral groups, whereas a number of other were formed independently.
50
51 But there were many more for Yes Scotland (circa 350 vs. 80) and their online
52
53 presence was subject to less control and interference from the official campaign.
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 Most crucially, for Yes Scotland there was a further assemblage of highly vibrant
4 grassroots groups and individual bloggers, which they defined as ‘online allies’,
5 that were all but absent for Better Together. Some were SNP members and others
6 not, but most of them worked in a decentralised and mostly autonomous manner
7 from the official campaign: ‘They set up themselves, self-motivated, and our
8 engagement with them on social media would mostly be to share their posts or
9 retweet a particular, kind of, campaign message or part of their momentum as well’
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11 (Interview 5, Yes campaign).
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21 Moreover, within the Yes campaign hierarchy and amongst the key supporting
22 actors, there was a strong emphasis on the importance of reducing dependence on
23 the SNP and building a broader inclusive movement, the term being mentioned by
24 almost every interviewee from the pro-independence side. And in doing so,
25 autonomy and decentralisation were regarded as key values:
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32 ‘Well, it's just an umbrella term [movement] to describe lots of
33 disparate groups working for the same goal. It wasn't an organization
34 because it wasn't organized, so what else do you call it? [...] people
35 didn't wait for instructions or permission, they just got on with doing
36 whatever they thought needed done’ (Interview 6, Yes supporter group)
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46 For these grassroots groups, social media played an important, and often crucial,
47 role although most of them undertook offline activity as well:
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51 ‘So National Collective, for instance, online linked people talking on
52 Facebook chat. It then developed into offline meetings. It then
53 developed into organisational structures that then developed into local
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3 groups, that then developed into live public events and campaigns.

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5 Those people would never have been connected or would have been far
6
7 less likely I believe to have been connected. People would have been
8
9 far less confident about sharing their voice and sharing their thoughts if
10
11 they hadn't first had that platform of social media to put them together'

12
13 (Interview 8, Yes supporter group)
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19 And social media were also important in developing relationships between these
20
21 groups and Yes Scotland, enabling the official campaign to benefit—if not directly
22
23 control—from the broader pro-independence assemblage. It meant that different
24
25 groups could develop content for—and indeed by—a range of audiences, and the
26
27 central campaign could choose to 'leverage' (Kreiss 2009) these networks and their
28
29 creative and sharable content, by amplifying these messages through their own
30
31 digital channels:
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34
35 'I would say that National Collective were a huge part of the effort in
36
37 terms of producing some really, really good content. They had a lot of
38
39 fun during the campaign and it showed in the material they produced,
40
41 which we were then able to on-share and expose to a really enormous
42
43 audience. Bella Caledonia as well. We would re-tweet Women for
44
45 Independence, Business Scotland material as well, and Labour for
46
47 Independence' (Interview 3, Yes Campaign).
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53 Moreover, although the regulations governing the conduct of the referendum
54
55 were the same for both campaigns, they adapted to them differently. Better
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 Together assimilated groups within their own campaign and funding structures,
4
5 ensuring greater control: ‘We took the decision that Academics, Women Together,
6
7 all these groups, we would bring in house, they’d be in our funding, we could then
8
9 work together, but in terms of the work they did it would be independent, it was
10
11 just they were part of Better Together’ (Interview 7, No Campaign). Yes
12
13 Scotland’s different approach to external groups was in part pragmatic, simply
14
15 because they had limited influence over a number of organisations. But greater
16
17 autonomy was considered acceptable because this wider base was seen to add both
18
19 energy and breadth to the campaign. It fitted with what Yes Scotland defined as
20
21 their strategic objectives, which included developing into a ‘movement’.
22
23

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25 In fact, according to one senior source, ‘we very much had to be *not* like a
26
27 political party’ (Interview 1, Yes campaign). Being too closely identified with the
28
29 SNP, or more generally with the collective action repertoires of political parties,
30
31 was seen as an impediment to broadening support for independence. Hence Yes
32
33 Scotland’s less hierarchical structure and encouragement—or at least tolerance—of
34
35 ‘different centres of activity and creativity’ (Interview 1, Yes campaign).
36
37 Moreover, as direct coordination of organisations outside the funding umbrella was
38
39 not legal, it enabled, and in some ways necessitated, more entrepreneurial (Flanagin
40
41 et al., 2006) modes of engagement. It is thus clear that the role of grassroots groups
42
43 on the pro-independence side, in combination with contextual, strategic,
44
45 organisational and cultural factors, influenced how the affordances of DCTs were
46
47 enacted. In turn, this challenged traditional campaign hierarchies, dragging both
48
49 Yes Scotland and the wider Yes campaign along the spectrum of hybridity, away
50
51 from exclusive reliance on traditional party campaign organisational practices and
52
53 hierarchies.
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 However, we should not exaggerate either the differences between the two
4 campaigns nor the impact of the use of DCTs on the command and control model.
5
6
7 Better Together did take some steps to encourage participation and develop
8
9 supporter groups, even though its key priority was maintaining control over
10
11 message and activity, which was reflected in its digital strategy. For its part, the
12
13 Yes campaign was hardly a hybrid participatory ‘nirvana’. Although the
14
15 independence movement at large had more horizontal and participatory
16
17 characteristics, and these influenced the official campaign, there were tensions,
18
19 especially with the SNP. Not only there was in Yes Scotland a strong continuity
20
21 with the professional model, but the campaign managers remained nervous about
22
23 their inability to control, and specifically about the risks associated with the way
24
25 social media was used by some of its ‘online allies’ and individual supporters.
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30 Firstly, although DCTs facilitated greater participation, some of that activity
31
32 was regarded as an inefficient use of resources, and on occasions as a distraction
33
34 with potentially damaging repercussions (e.g. protests against ‘BBC bias’).
35
36 Secondly, they feared the central campaign message was sometimes drowned out
37
38 because: “There was so much information [out there and the] independence
39
40 campaign was so broad with Radical Independence [etc.] putting out their own
41
42 ideas so we had to repeat, repeat, repeat, messages in order to make sure that they
43
44 were the ones getting through” (Interview 5, Yes Campaign). Finally, there was
45
46 great frustration with trolling by what became known as the ‘cyberNats’: ‘We
47
48 distanced ourselves from that as much as possible and we issued guidelines, we got
49
50 our supporters to stamp on that behaviour as much as possible. But it did hurt us’
51
52 (Interview 3, Yes Campaign).
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3 At the same time, there was a recognition within the official Yes campaign that
4
5 because of how the affordances of the technology were enacted and the values that
6
7 underpinned this—it was ineffectual to try to achieve full control: ‘you are in a
8
9 canoe on the rapids and you can’t stop moving but you can avoid the rocks’
10
11 (Interview 3, Yes campaign). Trying too hard to enforce control was considered
12
13 potentially ‘enormously counterproductive’ and had the potential to ‘stifle
14
15 initiative’ (Interview 9, Yes campaign).
16
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19 The best approach in the Yes campaigners’ view was to develop ‘an ability to
20
21 just try and accept’ that bottom-up autonomous participation, much of it digitally
22
23 enabled, was a key element in generating and sustaining the passion of the pro-
24
25 independence campaign. A number of the interviewees also highlighted the
26
27 importance of self-expression, and even enjoyment and fun, something that was
28
29 entirely absent for Better Together. The official campaign did not accept all
30
31 groups—or arguably any groups—as equal partners, but they were prepared to
32
33 relinquish some of their ability to command and control to try to harness the
34
35 creativity, enthusiasm and effort of local and sectoral groups and the ‘online allies’
36
37 that had sprung up, even where that resulted in the official campaign being
38
39 bypassed and, on occasion, eclipsed.
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45 **Implications and conclusions**

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48 This paper contributes to the literature on DCTs and electoral campaigns by
49
50 providing a rich empirical analysis of two opposing campaigns, located at different
51
52 points along the spectrum of hybridity, and unpacking some of the factors that help
53
54 to explain the differences. Our research demonstrates firstly that the use of social
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 media—and DCTs more generally—does not necessarily lead to significant change
4
5 to campaign organisations and practices; in fact, overall, the challenges to the
6
7 command and control model were fairly muted. Secondly, the pattern of use is not
8
9 determined by technological affordances or resources, although both of course play
10
11 a role. Use still very much varies across campaigns, even if they have access to
12
13 similar digital tools. In explaining the differences between the two sides, the
14
15 interplay between contextual factors and the strategic choices made by campaign
16
17 managers were highly significant. But so too were the organizational structure, and
18
19 culture and values of key participants within and outside the official campaigns.
20
21 These are factors that have been less emphasised in previous studies on elections,
22
23 although not so in social movement research. As Chadwick (2007, 285) highlights,
24
25 drawing on Tilly, collective action repertoires ‘are not simply neutral tools’ to be
26
27 adopted at will: ‘values shape repertoires of collective action, which in turn shape
28
29 the kind of adoption of organizational forms’. The same applies to DCTs; they are
30
31 not “just technologies” that any campaign with enough resources will adopt in
32
33 similar ways. There must be an elective affinity between digital media affordances
34
35 and organisational culture, which mediate how they are enacted and their impact on
36
37 organisational change. The values and repertoires of Better Together, a
38
39 professionally and party-run, electorally-focused coalition with short-term goals,
40
41 were restrictive and led to a controlled but stifling campaign and use of social
42
43 media. This was in contrast to the pro-independence side, an insurgent campaign
44
45 run by a mix of party and non-party experts and that—although with the SNP at its
46
47 core—was situated within a vibrant independence movement, and thus could rely
48
49 on a broader coalition of grassroots groups which had a more decentralised
50
51 structure, and inclusive and participatory values. This was a key factor on shaping
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 how Yes Scotland enacted the digital affordances of social media and their model
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5 of campaigning overall.
6

7
8 We cannot generalise from a single case study, we. Nonetheless, our
9
10 findings provide insights relevant not only to understanding of referenda campaigns
11
12 but also contemporary electoral campaigns more generally, where the significance
13
14 of the relation between official campaigns, the extended network of campaign
15
16 actors and the use of digital tools continues to grow. Nowadays political parties—
17
18 even in hierarchical and centralized party systems such as the UK's—need not only
19
20 to deal with the challenges and opportunities of DCTs, but also increasingly must
21
22 engage and coordinate with a range of grassroots groups—often digitally driven—
23
24 outside their organizational structures, practices and values.
25

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28 As our study shows, however, it is only by understanding the interplay
29
30 between a number of actors and factors (i.e. financial and labour resources,
31
32 strategy, organizational structures, values and repertoires of the official campaign
33
34 and other groups, as well as context) and how this relates to their use of DCTs, that
35
36 we can better understand to what extent, how and why campaigns are changing.
37
38 Technology and specialised consultancy can be bought, but other factors are less
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40 controllable factors, and yet they play a crucial role on mediating how digital tools
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42 are used and how it affects campaign models. We need to continue to develop a
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44 better understanding of the interaction between these factors, especially outside the
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46 United States.
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50 Moreover, while our study is not focused on the normative citizenship
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52 issues, it raises relevant “democratic health” questions associated with different
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54 models of campaigning. In an era where exclusionary populism has gone
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Online Allies and Tricky Freelancers

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3 mainstream, debates are moving beyond the anxieties of the “crises of
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5 participation” in which almost any engagement was welcomed after decades of
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7 declining voter turn-out and crumbling party memberships. The cultural values that
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9 underpin the differential use of technology by campaigns cannot be switched on
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11 and off at will. Moreover, how well do they work for different goals and contexts?
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13 It should not be assumed that the digital action repertoires of different kinds of
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15 groups can be automatically transferred across types of organisations or domains,
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17 nor that it would be democratically desirable if this was the case. Instead, we must
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19 consider what types of participation are being enabled and encouraged and *for what*
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21 *ends*, whether these types are equally apt for parties and government as they are for
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23 single issues and protest, and how they relate to the (often contested) norms of
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25 democratic citizenship.
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Figure 1: Top 0.1% of Nodes by Betweenness Centrality (January-September 2014)

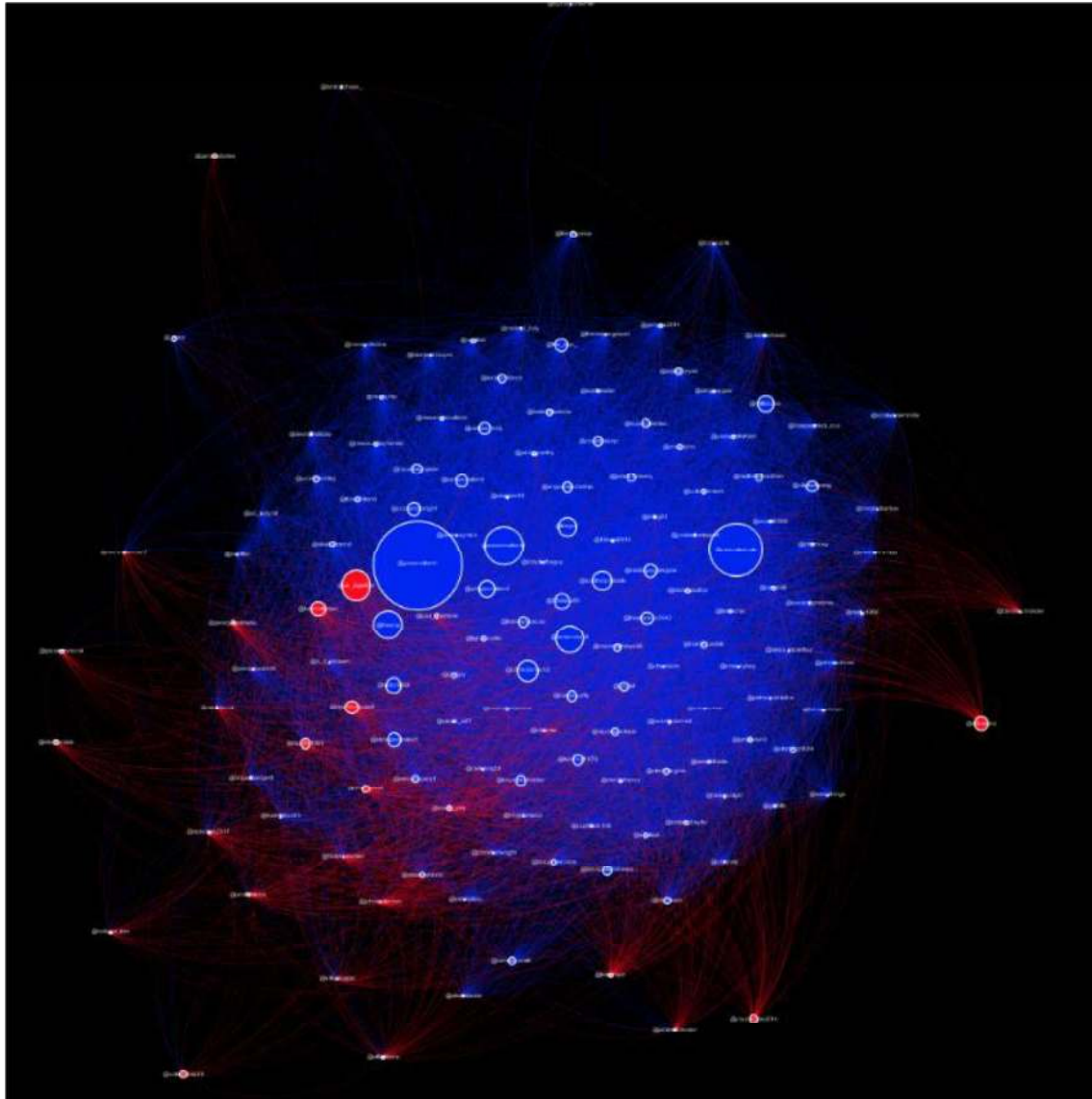


Figure 2: Better Together and intermediate nodes: extracted (subset of 6 nodes)

from out-bound ego network, original size: Nodes = 161, Edges =2014

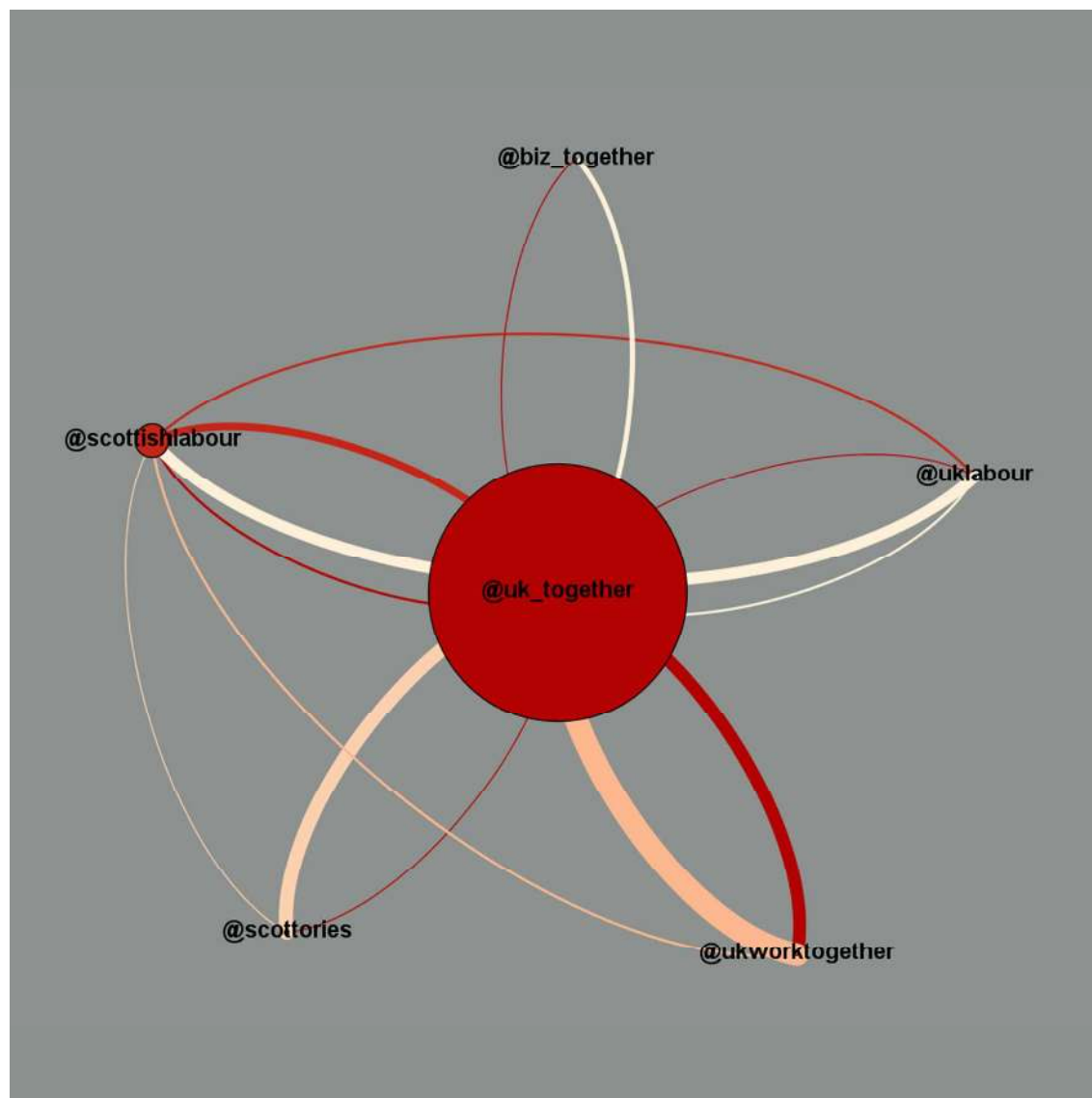
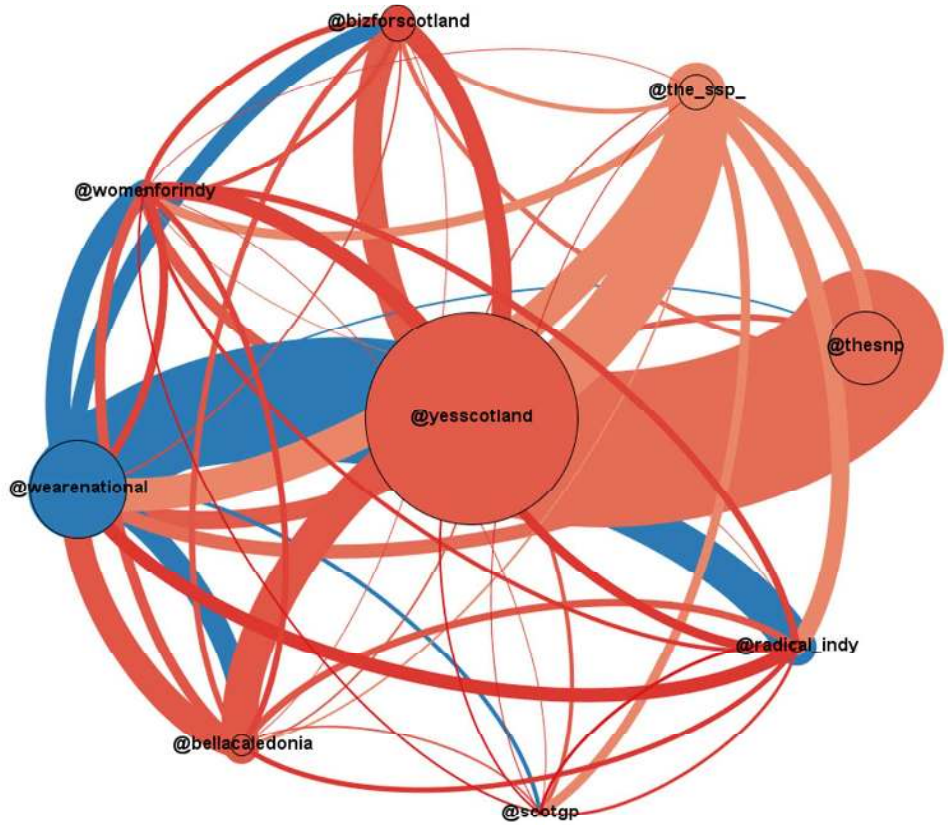
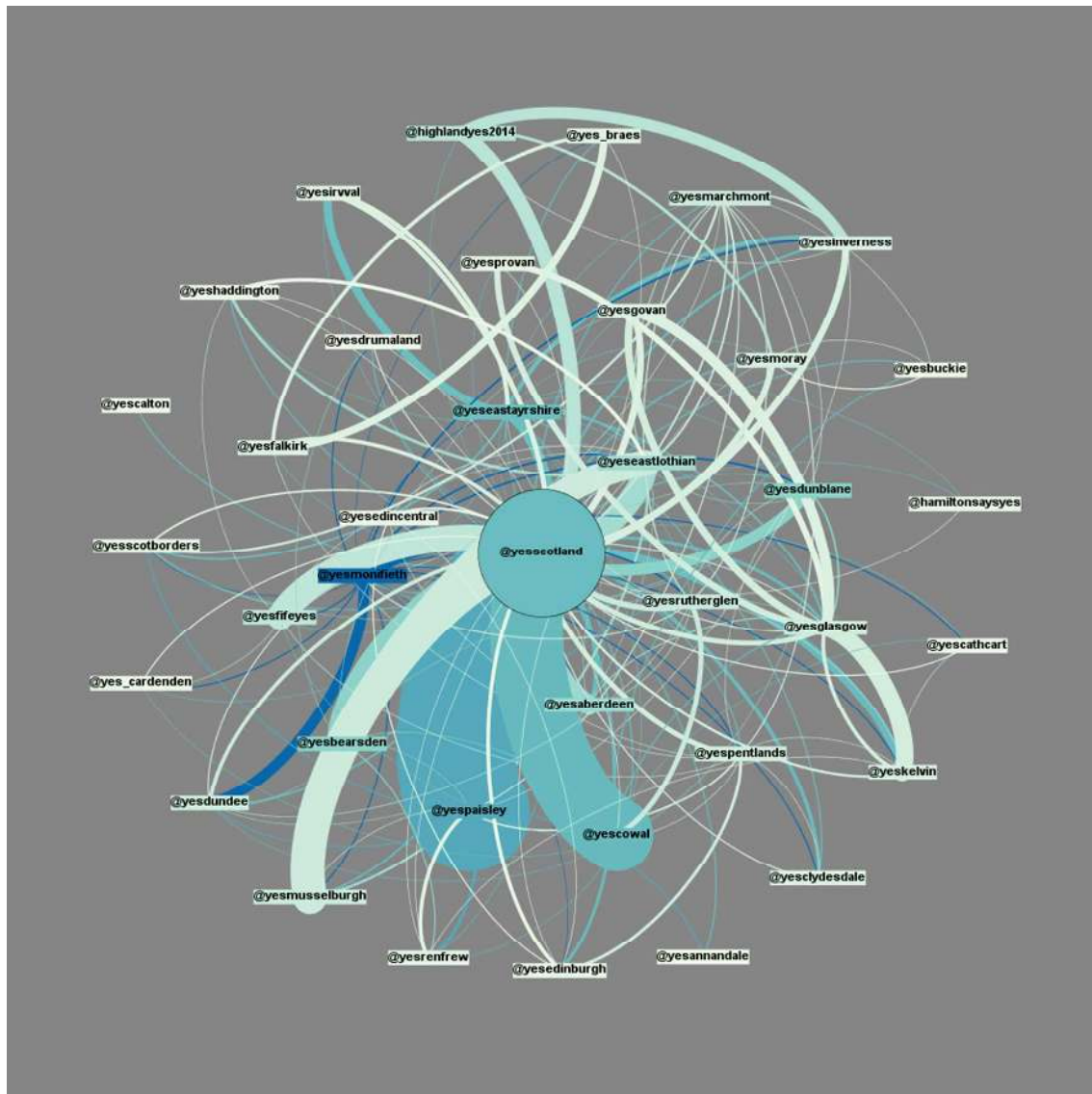


Figure 3: Yes Scotland and intermediate nodes: extracted (subset of 9 nodes) from out-bound ego network; original size: Nodes = 288, Edges =8192



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Figure 4: Yes Scotland and local Yes campaign groups: extracted (subset of 35 nodes) from out-bound ego network; original size: Nodes= 288, Edges =8192



¹ We first want to thank our interviewees. We also want to thank Kate Dommett and Maggie Scammell; the University of Glasgow’s Comparative Politics Cluster; the participants of the workshop on Digital Media, Power and Democracy; the reviewers at

ICA were this paper was presented; and especially the journal's reviewers whose comments greatly helped us to improve it.

² The data consisted of: a unique tweet identifier; date and time; account; and full text. For the network analysis, the direction of the interaction, i.e. who mentioned who, was preserved. However, loops (or self-referrals) were removed.

³ As any other study using Twitter's API, the data Twitter provides is a sample of the total number of tweets. Studies have shown, however, that by covering long periods of time and using large data-sets, as in this study, the representativeness of the sample is enhanced, especially for network analysis (Morstatter, Pfeffer, Liu, & Carley, 2013).

⁴ #indyref was adopted by all sides in the referendum, including but not only by the official campaigns, as the main tag for those seeking messages on the topic of the independence referendum.

⁵ In a network, nodes are a representation of entities and edges are a representation of the relationship between these entities. In our context, nodes represent twitter accounts and edges are interactions between accounts - retweets, mentions and replies. For visualisation purposes nodes are drawn as points and edges are drawn as lines between interacting accounts.

⁶ Centrality, or how important a node is to a network, can be measured in various ways. In this analysis we use betweenness centrality, which measures the number of shortest paths in the network that pass through a node (for a more detailed discussion of these concepts see Brandes and Erlebach (2005)). In addition to constructing this network of interactions, we classified the nodes into a pro-Yes, pro-No, and neutral classification. This was done by manually coding the 600 most used hashtags in the dataset and then scoring the nodes in the network based on their usage of these hashtags.

⁷ These three types of Twitter affordances are not synonymous. However, we analysed them together because they all allow groups pursuing a common goal

(independence/maintaining the union) to interact and share content. Moreover, the organisations included in the network are part of the outbound networks of the official campaigns, so it is highly unlikely that hostile engagement is taking place.

⁸ These networks visualisations were constructed using Gephi and the Fruchterman-Reingold (1991) force-directed method. The edges in the graph are directional and therefore two-way activity between nodes will have two edges, from source to target, and from target to source. The thickness of the edges is weighted by the relative amount of traffic passing along that edge.

⁹ Although we present a subset of the network here, the number of connections is taken from the whole dataset so as not to distort the importance of a node at the subset level.

¹⁰ The nodes are coloured based on their level of outward activity, for the Pro-independence nodes the spectrum is from red to blue: National Collective (@wearenational) have the most outward activity. For the Pro-union nodes gradients of red are used, the stronger the red the more outward activity (@UKtogether and @Scottishlabour display the most outward activity).

¹¹ The selection criteria were as follows: the accounts had to have a reciprocal relationship with the official campaign; and had to be local groups supporting Yes (this was based on the name of the accounts).

¹² Using a number of private and public data-sources, Mosaic segments the population at the postcode level, classifying them according to demographics, lifestyles, consumer preferences and political opinions. Political parties use it to segment the electorate into types and tailor political messages accordingly.