

DIGITAL DIPLOMACY FOR SUB-STATE ACTORS

A CASE STUDY OF CATALONIA

By

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned **Ana Todorovska** hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including final revisions.

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Abstract

This research analyzes two questions: 1) what is the role of digital media platforms in reshaping public diplomacy practice on sub-state level? And 2) how does the growing utilization of digital platforms by sub-state actors help in expanding the outreach of public diplomacy objectives? In order to answer these two questions the research investigates the case of the autonomous region of Catalonia and the work of the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia, responsible to conduct the public diplomacy strategy for the Catalan autonomous government.

For this purpose semi-structured interviews are conducted with the members of the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia, and the Catalan government. Furthermore, desktop research analysis and social media account analytics are used to answer the above raised questions.

Taking into consideration the theoretical framework articulated in this paper, as well as the case study of Catalonia, final analyses show that: 1) Digital media platforms are an important tool in communicating public diplomacy objectives to relevant audiences; 2) Utilization of digital platforms helps sub-national actors generate popular international and domestic support and provides credibility to the self-determination aspirations; and 3) The digital component of public diplomacy practice remains relevant but for qualified assessment of the results it has to be further developed by creating a complex monitoring and evaluation assessment model which can produce justifiable results.

Finally, the recommendation that stems from this research denotes a careful assessment of the soft power approach. Further research should provide stronger evidence of how to convert soft power to real power.

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Introduction

“Hard power coerces while soft power convinces” – Philip Seib

The traditional form of public diplomacy, depending upon formal diplomatic practices has changed significantly in the digital communication era. “With the popularization of new media, social networks, smartphones and other new internet-based tools, diplomacy moved into a new domain of digital affairs” (Abbasov 2007, p.2). This laid the foundations for the concept of ‘digital diplomacy’ as a new form of public diplomacy practice.

Digital media and social media platforms have created a different communication reality for diplomats worldwide. The empowering role of communication technologies especially the rising popularity of social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, widened the communication realm for diplomats towards a broader set of audiences, developing potentially new spheres of public diplomacy influence. Therefore, sharing information with wider groups of audiences has become a must for any diplomatic service in the world which understands the power and the importance of information and communication tools (ICT’s) in diplomatic practice. Thus what seemed unimaginable in public diplomacy just few decades ago is a common diplomatic routine today. Public officials share, inform receive and engage online with various audiences, both official and unofficial.

The ‘technology-driven changes’ have also led towards “democratization of access to communication tools” (Henson, 2012). Accessibility of communication tools has put an additional bottom-up pressure towards central governments, in order to improve the accountability and transparency of their political actions. The upsurge of the social movements around the world, such as for example the movements in the so-called Arab

Spring and the massive Gezi park protests in Turkey, Syria and recently in the Balkans have all been ushered with the help of the social media such as Twitter and Facebook. Therefore, it is important for political establishments to fundamentally incorporate the digital communication tools into their daily political practice. The insecurity that the proliferation of information online poses to governments creates a very powerful and important foreign policy tool in their hands.

The growing relationship between digital media and public diplomacy has been well demonstrated by Alec Ross, who effectively argues that digital diplomacy (*'eDiplomacy'*) is providing an opportunity for interaction not just between governments but also between people and governments:

First it is figuring out what tools are available today that weren't available up until recently as ten years ago so that we can create a diplomatic development outcomes that otherwise weren't possible. The second thing is figuring out how we can change diplomacy from something that historically has been government to government to be also able to connect government to people, people to people and people to government (Ross, 2010, 00:00-00:30).

Therefore, the hybrid nature of digital diplomacy can possibly be defined as “a cross between social-networking culture and foreign-policy arena” (Lichtenstein, 2010). This phenomenon of the “integration of online and offline” diplomacy undoubtedly modifies the “old profession to adapt to new technologies” (Deruda, 2015).

Context

With the rise of the 'global agora' (Stone, 2008), the states are no longer the only actors in the international relations arena. They are increasingly challenged by the variety of non-state actors that exist within the global sphere today. Consequently, the proliferation of actors in transnational networks also reflects on the power structure and leads towards political fragmentation of the state-centric approach in foreign policy:

The impact of globalization has provoked the emergence of an array of non-state organizations that have progressively increased their influence, power, legitimacy and

credibility in the global arena. They may act complementary to or independent from states and sometimes even challenge the role of the state (La Porte, 2012, p.441).

Therefore, the trans-boundary context leads towards the rise of the “micro-powers... who pose a significant threat to the mega powers [...] where those micro-powers create a certain incoherence which has the power to “disrupt the status quo” (Crowley 2015, 00:22). Because of this phenomenon, sub-state actors are becoming an important part of a considerably different multilateral reality today. The possibilities of digital media are giving them the additional powers to create a new pattern of influence in the international scene.

The networked world which “exists above the state, below the state and through the state” (Lichtenstein, 2010) has changed with the communication and technology expansion, uncovering a new sphere for academic discourses related to the growing relationship between the public dimension of diplomacy and sub-state actors. Thus, the rising power of sub-state actors in the transnational arena on one side and the digital outreach possible through the expansion of communication and technology tools on the other one, has produced a particular conundrum in the strive to understand how these two concepts intersect at the forefronts of public diplomacy.

Most of the existing academic literature analyzing this phenomenon is focused on the public diplomacy discipline in general (state approach), or in relation to the expansion of the digital communication tools and its relation to public diplomacy (Archetti 2011; Nye 2011; Gilboa 2008; Gregory 2008; Seib 2009; Henson 2010; Bijola 2015; Cull 2013).

Alternatively another set of scholarly literature mainly comprises of analysis on the rise of the non-state actors and its effects on the state in a transnational context (Castells, 2008; Stone, 2008, 2011; Podder, 2014). Digital diplomacy as a ‘niche discipline’ (Henerickson, 2005) within the public diplomacy literature has had a recent

upsurge (Owen, 2015; Westscott, 2008; Stein, 2011; Seib, 2012; Kuznetsov, 2015). The unfolding phenomenon of digital diplomacy is at its early stage of development and thus many aspects of it still need to be further analyzed. Therefore, there is a need to build on the specificity of the connection between digital platforms and sub-state actors in particular.

For this purpose of covering the theoretical gap this thesis research focuses on a case study of Catalonia. By now, only few scholars have studied the case of public diplomacy in the sub-state context in Catalonia. Namely, authors like Xifra (2014), De Eugen Veda, (2014) and Seib, (2012), have analyzed the Catalan case from a public diplomacy perspective. However, not enough emphasis has been given on the relation between digital communication tools utilized as part of the public diplomacy strategy. Most of the scholarly work is devoted to analysis of the cultural diplomacy in relation to the nation-branding concept Barbieri, (2012); De San Eugenio (2014) and Xifra, (2009, 2014).

Thus, a puzzle exists in the current literature, and this is why the intention of this research is to fill in some of the existing gaps by analyzing sub-state actors and the utilization of digital communication tools.

Research Questions and Methodology

For the purpose of analyzing this phenomenon and with the intention to understand how the autonomous governments use digital network tools in order to avoid the institutional hurdles of the state through extensive and sometimes even aggressive forms of digital diplomacy. this research is focused on answering the following two questions:

- 1) What is the role of the digital media platforms in reshaping public diplomacy practice on sub-state level? And*
- 2) How does the growing utilization of digital media platforms by sub-state actors help in promoting public diplomacy objectives?*

For a more methodical approach towards answering these two questions, a case study has been used. Namely, the autonomous region of Catalonia in Spain was chosen as the most appropriate for this thesis research. The motivation to study Catalonia's case comes out of two reasons. Namely, the Catalan's decisive use of digital media platforms as an element of their public diplomacy strategy. Secondly, the public diplomacy strategy is part of the governments' five year Foreign Action Plan, 2010-2015. The Government appointed an external collaborating private-public partnership body, the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia (DIPLOCAT) which is responsible to carry out the main body of activities related to public and digital diplomacy. Thus, this thesis is focusing on the work of this body in order to find the answers to the research questions presented above.

Three research methods are used for the purpose of answering the above-stated research questions: 1. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews with members of the Catalan's Secretariat for Foreign and European Union Affairs and with members of the public-private partnership body that conducts the digital diplomacy strategy for the Catalan government - The Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia (DIPLOCAT). The interviews, three in total, lasted an hour and a half each. They were also accompanied by several e-mail correspondences in purpose of providing additional information and relevant data for the research. The interviewees have been chosen so that their position and experience adequately responds to the questions relevant for this research. 2. Social media tracking analysis, obtained from DIPLOCAT and referring to the social media accounts they operate. This self-performed data provided by DIPLOCAT has been generated over a period of several months. 3. Desktop research and document analysis such as reviews of public diplomacy strategies adopted by states and sub-state autonomous governments, newsletters, reports, podcasts and other relevant secondary sources.

Thesis structure

This thesis research is comprised of three chapters, and a conclusion. The First chapter is devoted to literature review, important definitions of key concepts used in this research elaboration of the theoretical framework. The Second Chapter is exposing the case study of Catalonia, focusing on analysis of the data gained from the interviewees. Chapter Three is concentrated on the analysis of the Catalan's Social Media Data provided by DIPLOCAT. And lastly, this research ends with the conclusion part.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to explain the key definitions important for the scope of this research, to provide insight of the relevant literature and to set the adequate conceptual framework relevant for the topic of interest in this thesis.

1.1. Definitions

The first subsection is devoted to brief insight of the concept of public diplomacy. The second subsection offers several approaches in defining digital diplomacy. This is important as some of the terms as building blocks of the research are still subject to various interpretations. Moreover, it is necessary to narrow the scope of the definitions, usually used in a rather state-approach context. Hence, the definitions presented are considered to be of importance in a way that this ensures a clearer understanding when relating them to sub-state actors.

1.1.1. Public Diplomacy

The public diplomacy theory spectrum encompasses many authors which have analyzed public diplomacy from different angles. The two main philosophies about public diplomacy's utility (Taylor and Snow, 2009) is comprised of "those who view public diplomacy as a 'necessary evil' and those who view it as milieu for how nations interact with each other, from public affairs officers [...] to the citizen diplomat[...]" (2009, p.6). Signitzer and Coombs (1992) define public diplomacy as "the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly those public attitudes and opinions which bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions" (p. 138).

Other authors make a distinction between different types of public diplomacy. Eytan Gilboa for example, distinguishes between three models of uses and effects of diplomacy: public diplomacy, media diplomacy and media-broker diplomacy (2001). He makes this differentiation based on the idea that each model has a different applicable effect regarding a

particular case study. These definitions offer a flexible margin in which the element of sub-state actors can be positioned.

Following the development of the discipline, authors such as Jan Melissen have started using the term '*new public diplomacy*' which according to Melissen is about "[...] building relationships with civil society actors in other countries and about facilitating networks between non-governmental parties at home and abroad" (2005, p.22). He further states that "the technological developments [...] are producing an unprecedented degree of global transparency in public affairs enabling individuals and groups to acquire information directly" (2005, p.31).

This helps us understand how sub-state actors can incorporate the power of the information technologies, enabling an engagement of foreign and domestic publics in a two way process, thus involving them into the policy making process as well. As Emanuel Castells describes it, converging technologies enable "mass self-communication" which is a [m]ultimodal communication that is "self generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception by many who communicate with many" (Castells, 2007).

1.1.2. Digital Diplomacy

It is important to underline that various authors, institutions and governments use different definitions for the term 'digital diplomacy'. As the field is relatively new, many authors decided to use different terminology in order to better reflect the combination of digital media and diplomacy. Hence, expressions such as for example "*e-diplomacy*", "*cyber-diplomacy*", "*twiplomacy*" or "*real-time diplomacy*" can be found in the literature by various scholars, all more or less referring to the same phenomenon. However, variances do refer to subtle differences. For example, the term twiplomacy is more narrowed as it mainly devoted to the use of Twitter for diplomatic purposes and not necessarily referring to the whole scope of digital diplomacy phenomenon.

According to the UK's Foreign Office Digital Strategy, the term 'digital' originated as a "communication and information tool" and has evolved today into "how we engage with people at home and overseas" (FCO's Digital Strategy: Executive summary, 2012 p.6).

The US Department of State named it 'the 21st century statecraft' and in the effort of describing the 'internet moment in foreign policy' the statecraft is important since "[w]e live in a world of technology that enables pervasive, disruptive social change". Therefore, "[t]he work of diplomats is to increase the speed at which government can respond to that change" (21st Century Statecraft, U.S. Department of State).

For the purpose of this research the suitable operational definition for the term 'digital diplomacy' is taken from a recently published book, *Digital Diplomacy: Theory and Practice* by Corneliu Bjola and Marcus Holmes (2015). Here, Holmes defines digital diplomacy as a "strategy of managing change through digital tools and virtual collaborations" (2015, p.35). The scope of this definition is conceptually relevant as the change management element of Holmes's definition presumes that ICT's are not just disseminators of information but also provide an effective change in international relations (Holmes, 2015). Also this definition is valuable to consider, since it is adding an emphasis to the collaborative aspect of digital diplomacy (Bijola, 2015).

Three key components are relevant to the digital diplomacy definition according to Holmes: 1.The way in which actors engage with outside audiences in order to project a particular message or image; 2.The way in which different agencies both public and private structure and organize information resources and 3.Ways in which actors acquire data on the ground in order to monitor subtle endogenous changes in political structures and public opinion (Holmes, 2015).

1.2. Digital diplomacy in context of sub-national actors

The establishment of the multilateral global sphere has created a new field of possibility for a variety of stakeholders. Diplomacy changed fundamentally and the days of traditional diplomacy practice, exclusively associated with states, belong to the past (Crikemans, 2010). Sub-state actors in this context play a profoundly important role in international policy making. This has become gradually possible with the development of communication and technology tools that managed to provide new possibilities of influence for the policy making process, thus “augmenting the bandwidth of engagement, more importantly augmenting the ability to interact” (Sarukhan, 2015).

Over the past decade, rapid advances in digital technology have empowered individuals and ad hoc groups to do what was once available only to institutions run mainly by the state established apparatus and to private organizations built on a similar top-down, bureaucratic model (Owen, 2015). The traditional forms of state-to-state diplomacy were focused “almost exclusively on conversations between elites [...] and were therefore the filters for news of global events for their home governments” (Owen 2015, p.165).

The networked reality presumes that diplomats have to be tech savvy, able to use digital tools and to understand how to communicate with various audiences both domestic and foreign. This is almost a prerequisite for any public envoy who wishes to preserve the credibility of his position and furthermore to understand the normality to “lose control over the information environment and network of influencers” (2015, p. 165-66). This means that the traditional information gatekeeping is not possible today because of the fact that the networked world disperses information in a way that is difficult to control. Alec J. Ross articulates this phenomenon of un-controlled flow of information online, saying that “the 21st century is a terrible time to be a control freak” (Ross, 2014).

It is important to distinguish the difference, where public diplomacy was about “communicating it and framing it” (Owen, 2015 p.169) and if presently it has been stretched

towards “making policy” as well. As Owen explains it, digital public diplomacy means relations with anyone and everywhere (2015, p.169). This points towards the question whether or not the way power is exercised in the digital space presents a crisis for the state. Countries, Owen says, no longer have the monopoly to shape the behavior of large number of people; neither had the opportunity to be challenged by competition. States in that sense are troubled with the legacy burdens of the 20th century hierarchy of bureaucracies (Owen, 2015).

In a world of increasingly decentralized power we are at the start of reconfiguration of power, and navigating this terrain is one of the principal foreign policy challenges of the 21st century (Owen, 2015).

Due to the fact that sub-state actors pursue international policy agendas which might not be compatible to the central state objectives, digital tools are especially important for them. This might be so because of several reasons. First, with relatively modest costs and potentially huge payoffs, utilizing digital media promises to stretch their span of influence within global discourses. Furthermore, this is an opportunity for sub-state actors to fulfill the gaps of the advantage that established state apparatuses have when pursuing their foreign policy agenda.

Namely, states have the legitimate power to use resources in order to create or maintain their diplomatic influence abroad. This however might be difficult when it comes to sub-state actors which pursue a self-determination policy agenda. Their actions are seen as ‘illegitimate’ and unwanted by the state they officially belong to. This creates a conflict of interest and quite often states use their monopoly of state powers to deter this kind of behavior. Also, it is likely that sub-state actors face a greater challenge to demonstrate to the foreign counterparts and supporters the view that they have the capacity to produce and deliver sound policies which derive from their internal structural and institutional capacities.

This is exactly the case why rebuild the magnitude of diplomatic influence abroad is important. In this sense, digital revolution has strengthened the role of sub-state actors and made it possible for these actors to become more *visible*. In that way, sub-state actors are able to participate and propose policy solutions for pressing problems throughout the world.

Another challenge is the aspiration for cultural or ethnic particularity which falls under the nation-branding agenda. This is very often the *raison d'être* for their self-determination aspirations. It is not just the desire for institutional recognition but also for the possibility to decide upon its own future through a legitimate democratic procedure. Thus the opportunity to consolidate within the already established state actor's arena on the global level becomes realistic through the communication technologies.

These three aspects are at the very core of the unique position that sub-states entities hold *vis-à-vis* the state actors. This takes us to the conclusion that digital media tools are even more crucial due to their 'unstable' position. Sub-state actors should be capable to use digital platforms extensively in order to create awareness, to push for desired policy outcomes closer to the central state governments and to generate popular support among international audiences. This is the essential 'change management' aspect of digital diplomacy. As defined by Bruce Gregory, radical changes in diplomacy are comprised of three main elements: (1) power diffusion and unclear boundaries between foreign and domestic; (2) many more actors, people, and issues; (3) digital technologies, new media, and networked actors; and (4) whole of government diplomacy (2014, p.5).

1.3. Conceptual framework

In order to be able to choose the appropriate theoretical framework, a careful consideration is taken for the essence of this thesis research. Digital diplomacy as a 'niche' sub-discipline itself is a fusion of several other disciplines such as international relations, particularly public diplomacy theory on one side and communication studies on the other,

encompassing the role of digital information tools and the public dimension of diplomacy. It is therefore a challenging effort to set the ‘appropriate lenses’ through which to look at this issue from a theoretical perspective.

Due to the fact that the specificity of this question does not fully comply with any of the literature disciplines although conceptually and operationally part of them, it is necessary to include several theoretical elements so that the logic of the research question is set in the adequate theoretical position. It seems reasonable to conclude that a systematic deficiency in this discipline exists. For that purpose, this research will rely upon a mix of several theoretical concepts which derive from the international relations theory, the study of regional governments in international relations and public diplomacy theory.

As a result, three theoretical concepts are taken into consideration. First the concept of soft power (Nye) is elaborated; secondly, the model of track two diplomacy (Montville) and thirdly, the approach of ‘parallel disharmony’ (Soldatos).

1.3.1. Soft power

It is important to discuss the concept of the so-called ‘soft power’ approach to public diplomacy developed by Joseph Nye, Jr. (2011; 2010; 2008; 2004). Namely, soft power is the underlying element of public diplomacy and therefore should not be excluded when analyzing digital diplomacy consequently. Nye defines soft power as “[t]he ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes” (2011, p. 20-21). Jan Melissen also reassures "the importance of ‘soft power’ and its implications for contemporary statecraft" (2013, p.705).

The concept of soft power is broadly used and accepted and its relevance stretches further to many authors which have justified its theoretical relevance in public diplomacy theory.

Soft power tools and public diplomacy are both critical and increasingly important elements in the foreign policy arsenal of all governments, and reflect a changed and changing world which is characterized by growing social networking and a communications and technology revolution that has profoundly reduced the distance between and among the peoples of the world (Hawes, 2010 4-1).

Soft power is an important operational concept as it is the very underlying fabric of public diplomacy itself and the legacy of the international relations theory.

Its development followed later on, incorporating the reality of both hard and soft power, which was the foundation for the construction of the concept of smart power later on.

1.3.2. Track two diplomacy

In order to further narrow the conceptual framework, this research also considered the ‘track two diplomacy’ concept (Davidson and Montville, 1981). Track two diplomacy is defined as “[u]nofficial, non-structured interaction. It is always open-minded, often altruistic, and [...] strategically optimistic” (1981 p.155).

The model of ‘track two diplomacy’ although originally developed in the context of conflict prevention has also been conceptually stretched to “the most apolitical cultural exchanges to psychologically focused political problem-solving meetings [...] as a critical complement to the essential but often sterile official relations between adversaries” (Montville, 1981, p. 156).

Although seen as a complementary to ‘track one diplomacy’ and not to be used individually, the model is acceptable to the level that Catalonia as a case study taken in this research does seem to act as a “*quasi state*”. It therefore attempts to avoid the official diplomatic channels of the Spanish central government in order to be able to persuade and encourage greater collaboration with international partners. This is why it can be assumed that the Catalans’ public diplomacy strategy contains elements of the so-called “track two contact” (Montville, 1981).

1.3.3. Parallel-disharmony Model

This theoretical classification developed by Professor Panayotis Soldatos provides four principal patterns on how the state deals with sub-states' international performance (Kuznetsov, 2014, p. 114). The four parameters of this theory incorporate the following patterns:

- “1. *Cooperative-coordinated pattern*. This model assumes regional involvement in international relations under a formal or informal coordination with the federal government;
2. *Cooperative-joint pattern*. This formula means formal or informal inclusion of paradiplomacy within national foreign policy;
3. *Parallel-harmony pattern*. This model presumes that regional governments act independently in the international arena in accordance with their competency [...] and their actions are harmonized and do not contradict national foreign affairs; and
4. *Parallel-disharmony pattern*. In this pattern, the regional authorities' external actions oppose national government policy.

Therefore the central government has no administrative power mechanism to control subnational entities' performances in the international arena and in its essence paradiplomacy de-facto shifts to diplomacy” (Kuznetsov, 2014 p.114).

In relation to this research the fourth pattern; ‘parallel-disharmony’ is used as a conceptual model due to the fact that the Catalan government is largely pursuing its autonomy within the Spanish state whereas also largely advocates for self-determination and even independence tendencies.

CHAPTER 2: A CASE STUDY OF CATALONIA

“With a distinct history stretching back to the early Middle Ages, many Catalans think of themselves as a separate nation from the rest of Spain” (BBC, 2015). The Catalan autonomous regional government (*Generalitat*) was constituted in 1931. Under the rule of General Francisco Franco, a military warlord and a dictator who came out victorious from the Spanish Civil War, the Catalans’ autonomy was revoked and its culture and language was repressed (BBC, 2015). With the fall of Franco, Catalonia was given a statute of autonomy within Spain.

This led to a strong national Catalan renaissance, culminating with a surge of popular support for an independence that has since been gaining momentum in the last forty years. Franco’s repression on the Catalan people is not the only reason why this province is pursuing independence and national self-determination agenda. Spain’s economic ills makes the provincial authorities more determined to seek future, separate from the rest of the country. As an expression of these feelings over two million people marched in 2013 for a symbolic vote for the country’s ‘right to vote’. A regional government backed by the two main separatist parties held an informal, non-binding vote on independence in 2014, with 80% of those taking part voting "yes" (BBC, Catalonia profile, 2015).

These developments have created a large international attention for the Catalan self-determination movement, an extremely unfavorable situation for the central government in Madrid. In the eyes of the Spanish central authorities, Catalan independence might start a process of Spanish disintegration, as several other regions nurture a sense of regional identity. Hence, unlike the Scottish referendum, for example, Spain has decided that a Catalan referendum will not face legal consequences for Spain. The Constitutional Court in Madrid overruled part of the 2006 autonomy statute, stating that there is no legal basis for recognizing Catalonia as a nation within Spain (Alexander, 2014). No Spanish government is willing to discuss Catalan requests when it comes to the issue of independence and national self-

determination and it seems it will do whatever necessary to stop Catalonia in the effort to promote its arguments to the world.

The Catalan movement has managed to reach popularity among the academic circles as well as on the podiums where international politics is discussed, striving to become the “next thing” after Scotland’s independence referendum. This achieved momentum was seen as an opportunity for the Catalan government to focus the international debate in order to put a heightened pressure against the central Spanish government.

The government of Catalonia appears to be making a clear commitment to public diplomacy strategies capable of overcoming the legal hurdle established by international law, particularly in relation to the exercising of independent foreign action and the opportunities available for sub-state actors to project their national identity beyond the current legislative framework (DeSan Eugenio and Xifra, 2014 p.6.)

In that respect the necessity of smart use of public diplomacy tools is seen as crucial for the Catalans. As a sub-state entity, or stateless nation, it is important to “obtain a sovereign space” and construct its own identity [...] based on the implementation of a renewed and feasible diplomatic strategy for the culture industry (De San Eugenio and Xifra, 2015, p. 8). The success and failure is largely dependent upon the use of all public diplomacy tools available. Relating it to Nye’s soft power approach to public diplomacy (2004), the complex interdependence stems from the idea of “multiple networked communication channels and the identification of non-state and transnational actors in world politics” (Xifra, 2009 p.75).

The strategy around the public diplomacy objectives has been rooted in the Catalan’s ambitious 'Foreign Action Plan 2010-2015', which is “the first internal strategy specifically designed to develop a public diplomacy strategy in an overt, orderly and systematic manner” (De Eugenio and Xifra, 2009, p.87). The legal background of this Plan is specified in the

Catalans 'Autonomy Statute' from 2006¹. The Foreign Action Plan 2010-2015 devotes a separate section for “developing a public diplomacy strategy that projects the Catalan image to the world” (Foreign Action Plan 2010-2015, p.71).

It is comprised of six strategic objectives: 1) To develop a governmental strategy for public diplomacy through consolidation of government structure with the capacity to implement public diplomacy strategy; 2) To promote a close, ongoing dialogue with leaders of opinion, image and awareness. This should be achieved through involving domestic public opinion in defining and implementing foreign policy and through promoting initiatives that provide direct knowledge of Catalonia in international public opinion; 3) To promote international actions by Catalan organizations, and this should be achieved by providing support for Catalan organisations' international affiliation and creating a body for ongoing dialogue between the government and Catalan organisations; 4) To relaunch Catalan Communities Abroad as agents of public diplomacy through establishing mechanisms to support Catalan communities so that they can contribute to Catalonia's international outreach and creating coordination mechanisms with the Council of Catalan Communities Abroad; 5) To promote culture and language as assets of Catalonia's image; and 6) To generate synergies with the international actions of local governments and other public entities in Catalonia (Government of Catalonia: Foreign Action Plan, 2010-2015).

This strategy is evidently showing the determination of the Catalan government to institutionalize their public diplomacy efforts, and promises to utilize a structured approach towards achieving foreign policy objectives. As a sub-state entity, Catalonia has to rely mostly on rather cost-effective and subtle, soft-approach diplomacy tools. No Spanish region has the right to establish its own diplomatic missions abroad, independent from the Spanish

¹Catalan Autonomy Statute of 2006, specifically in decrees 421/2006 and 42/2008

national diplomatic infrastructure. Hence, as stated in the Catalan Foreign Action Plan, developing a network of delegations within an integrated and consisted model for delegations abroad is among the key foreign policy objectives (Foreign Action Plan, 2010-2015, p.108). Furthermore, unlike the Scottish case, the starting position of Catalonia is rather different. As Jaume Clotet, the Press Secretary of the Secretariat for Foreign and European Union Affairs within the Catalan government states, “[t]he Scots didn’t feel threatened. They don’t need to prove who they are to the world” (2015).

This perception has an important implication in the Catalan’s digital strategy. The main narrative is focused on the concept of ‘stateless nation branding’ (Xifra, 2014). In that sense, although largely famous for its cosmopolitan capital city Barcelona and the world renowned football team FC Barcelona, the Catalan government strives for more than just cultural diplomacy. It envisions developing itself as a responsible and competitive international player abroad. This kind of “niche diplomacy” (Henrickson in De San Eugenio and Xifra, 2014 p.14) is implemented because the Catalan’s will is strong to be part of “liquid geopolitical context” (2014, p.14). Therefore, the attention and the influence which they try to attain globally are fit for the purpose of their ‘strategic narrative’ (Roselle et al.).

In order to carry out their digital diplomacy strategy abroad, the autonomous Catalan government has created a collaborative body in the form of a public-private partnership, “designed to foster dialogue and build relationships between the citizens of Catalonia and the rest of the world” (2015). The Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia (DIPLOCAT) as a unique form of cooperation between the Catalan government and a private sector subject “enables DIPLOCAT to be a transversal and act as a bridge between the public and the private sector facilitating the co-ordination, the links and the conversation between the Government of Catalonia and the various civil actors in the Catalan society” (DIPLOCAT, 2015).

DIPLOCAT is an organic network of public institutions incorporating the Catalan government, provincial councils, city councils, association of municipalities, and federation of municipalities. Furthermore, it includes financial, economic and entrepreneurial entities such as micro, small and medium companies, chambers of commerce, trade unions foundations, and business associations (2015).

What is of significant importance for this research is the determination of DIPLOCAT to use “the power of digital media as a soft power diplomacy tool to foster dialogue and incorporate various opinions and influence on the issue of Catalan independence” (DIPLOCAT-Digital Diplomacy, 2015). Naming their digital strategy as public and participatory, they seem to reinforce its importance stating that “nowadays, countries cannot ignore this potential, regardless of the size of their population, area or GDP” (DIPLOCAT-Digital Diplomacy, 2015).

The public private partnership model used for this purpose is unique and relatively novel approach to ‘escape the legal boundaries’ and ‘unconventionality’ of the situation that sub-state actors are dealing with. In order to analyze how the Council is conducting their foreign policy agenda, especially the digital diplomacy strategy, Albert Royo, the Secretary General of the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia, pointed out in an interview that DIPLOCAT carries out a ‘triangle shaped strategy’ (2015).

The first pillar of this strategy is focusing on academia, which is effectively expended through organizing academic debates and conferences in universities around the globe. This, according to Royo, gives additional prestige and credibility of the international debate about Catalonia and helps them draft abstracts on what is going on in the academic circles and how to further include other institutions that are interested in debating on this issue.

The second aspect of this strategy, he elaborates, is focused on the foreign press. Namely the central press offices of all foreign media are generally based in Madrid. This

position, as Royo states, gives no “correspondence possibility for the Catalan perspective” and therefore the push for foreign media presence is on the top of the Catalan government agenda. This is done through writing op-ed pieces by the President of Catalonia in the foreign press. As he states, “we started to see [...] what kind of evolution happened in the mainstream media which turned out to be a very positive thing to do” (Royo, 2015).

The third pillar of the Catalan’s public diplomacy strategy is focused on communication with foreign political actors and foreign parliaments in order to offer “accurate information for Catalonia” (Royo, 2015). With the goal to open channels of wider communication in all European countries, “in the last nine to twelve months, he says [...] we have been working quite a lot on this [...] by inviting members of foreign parliaments to visit us or by going there and addressing the chambers, holding bilateral meetings, holding public discussions in parliaments” (2015).

What is very important to note is that DIPLOCAT’s digital diplomacy strategy is mainly reliant on social networking platforms. The special body that has been created in order to serve this purpose has enabled Catalonia to reach out to massive popular support among audiences from foreign countries. According to Royo, digital diplomacy played a key role and it has become gradually one of the main tools of their public diplomacy strategy as he states that “[I]t is helping us to strengthen the impact of our actions” (2015). The international publicity campaign, Royo states, if paid, would cost approximately one million dollars (2015).

DIPLOCAT manages several social media accounts, such as Twitter, Facebook, Google Hangout, Pinterest, and YouTube. Through these accounts, it seeks to engage audiences in subjects that show the determination to “strengthen the relationship between civil society and Catalonia [...] and to display Catalonia’s vocation as a serious, responsible and committed international player” (Royo, 2015).

The assessment of the digital diplomacy outreach is being monitored by tracking the social media statistics data. Evaluation of digital activities is measured by online content diffusion such as number of opened emails, number of clicks to the web news content, most viewed news items and other similar web metrics. Figures relating to the origin of their newsletter's visits for example, revealed that seventy-five percent of the visitors are foreigners, mainly from the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and France.

Royo acknowledges though that as from a capacity standpoint, DIPLOCAT has not developed a profound social media analysis model to this point. "*Really*", he says, "there is a lot of room for further improvement there" (2015). Hence, there is no current mechanism to assess the impact of their digital diplomacy strategy. According to DIPLOCAT, the limited capacity to do an in-depth social media monitoring and assessment is deficient as the strategy has been implemented just a year ago (2015).

The reference for the Catalan digital strategy is not what many would assume to be Scotland or Quebec. According to Jordi Arrufat, the Public Diplomacy Advisor in charge of the digital diplomacy strategy, they seem to be using their very own, unique approach to digital diplomacy as they believe the Catalan case is distinctive in itself (2015). Thus, the strategy is only inspired and adopted by other successful examples of digital media strategies. The role models are found in the Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Finland. As Arrufat states, "we look at the Sweden's official Twitter page (Sweden.se), Finland (@ourfinland) and Chile, as a model of our future improvement (2015). He further explains that, "digital diplomacy is about communicating a policy...where we try to interact and not just react." This is also reaffirmed in their webpage as said earlier, where they underline the strong emphasis on "[l]istening to what the other side has to say. Social media are ideal for dialogues and the exchange of ideas" (DIPLOCAT-Digital Diplomacy, 2015).

The strategy has changed in a way that the focus is not only on official Twitter accounts operated by public officials, but rather interacting with those who generate debate about Catalonia online. Therefore, it is said, “we monitor who is talking for Catalonia and we interact with them” (Arrufat, 2015). In a sense, the Catalan government is developing proto-analytical capacity to derive information from open source intelligence, and this becomes even more pronounced with the utilization of digital platforms.

For the purpose of internal, the communication process requires fast and effective consultation, an almost rapid response mechanism, particularly because of the instantiate nature of social media accounts, like for example twitter. Thus, it requests online interaction, but at the same time ensuring that messages are being conveyed in timely and accurate manner. Additionally, the scope of their target reach is focused on Europe as a whole, rather than on specific countries or regions. This diplomacy method acts as a “substitute for classic government policy which Catalonia since not being a nation state cannot exercise formally” (De San Eugenio and Xifra, 2014).

However, one should be cautious and not overplay the 'digital card' when making structured conclusions. Although the analysis have shown several positive outcomes for the digital strategy of the Catalan government, a balanced approach towards the research question requires a curious attention to the conclusions drawn from these interviews. “Digital media is agnostic”, and serves both to adversaries and enemies, and their utilization does not always provide only positive outcomes *per se*.

CHAPTER 3: THE CATALAN SOCIAL MEDIA PUBLIC DIPLOMACY DATA

The purpose of this chapter is to elaborate in detail the social media tracking data provided by DIPLOCAT. It is an overview of all of the social media accounts they operate.

Namely DIPLOCAT runs several social media accounts on the major social media platforms. It is responsible for operating one Facebook account, three Twitter accounts, one Google Hangout account, one Pinterest account and three web sites within their digital public diplomacy strategy.

DIPLOCAT launched a Facebook page, Catalonia Votes (<https://www.facebook.com/catalonia.votes>) over a year ago in April, 2014. The aim of this account is to make information available to the international community in English, German and French about Catalonia, on issues related to Catalonia's right to vote and the November 9th Independence vote. The website remains active for the same purpose until the plebiscitary election on September 27th (Catalonia Votes, 2015). During the first year the website has received a total of 147976 visits by 108935 users. The web page currently has around 7000 followers. Regarding the origin of visitors, in recent months the web has stabilized at around 78% of foreign visits and 22% of domestic (Catalan) users. Outside of Catalonia, the main body of followers comes from the USA (10%), then UK (9%) and France (9%) are at the top, followed by Germany (8%) and Spain (8% – not counting Catalonia), and then Canada, Ireland, Russia, Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands (DIPLOCAT, 2015).

3.1. Twitter accounts

3.1.1. @ThIsCatalonia account

DIPLOCAT runs several Twitter accounts. The Twitter account @ThIsCatalonia is the official account of the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia devoted to foreign audiences. Council-related or third-party news relating to Catalonia are provided in English or other, additional languages in order to reach specific audiences following the pattern set by other

Public Diplomacy Twitter profiles such as @ThisisFinland or @ThisisChile. These accounts are used as a good example for @ThIsCatalonia. This is done for several reasons: 1) It is about sharing affirmative news related to the Catalonia; 2) It is user-generated content, Chilean/Finnish or not; 3) It also includes, from time to time, content generated by the government or other public institutions from the country; 4) The content is written in English, not in Spanish (Chile) or Finnish (DIPLOCAT, 2015).

The Twitter account @ThIsCatalonia shows that anyone who is writing articles related to Catalonia can be included in the communication policy, not only in the field of politics, but also on economy, culture, travel, (DIPLOCAT, 2015). The account (@ThisCatalonia) tweets at least twice per day, with 7025 followers so far. It mostly follows accounts with which “search to interact”. Thirty percent of the follower’s profiles are people or organizations established in places other than Catalonia or Spain, mainly in the UK, USA, France or Brussels and it generates interest mainly from journalists, politicians and diplomats (DIPLOCAT, 2015).

3.1.2 @catalangov account

The @catalangov Twitter account is the official account of the Government of Catalonia and is aimed primarily at a foreign audience wishing to acquire information on Catalonia and the political activity of its government. The nature of its content is generally informative, combining news on the activity of the Catalan Government with historical and factual information on Catalonia in order “to raise awareness of its unique context in history” (DIPLOCAT, 2015). Tweets often redirect to Government of Catalonia, (www.catalangovernment.eu), the international version of the Government’s official website.

Tweets are predominantly written in English to reach a larger audience but the use of other languages has also been seen on certain occasions to convey specific messages to particular groups of followers (DIPLOCAT, 2015). This Twitter account was launched in early September 2014. The number of @catalangov tweets ranges from three to eight per day.

A higher frequency of tweets is usually attributed to a significant event, such as an important press conference or a particular speech. This account currently has 5,080 followers². Of these, roughly 60% are based in Spain, 20% in the US and Canada and more than 15% on the European continent. (DIPLOCAT, 2015)

3.1.3 @CatalanVoices account

The Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia also runs a Rotation Curating Twitter profile. Namely, @CatalanVoices is “the main tools of participatory public digital diplomacy run by the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia” (DIPLOCAT, 2015). It started out in March 2013. This account is run by a different person every week following the concept of “Rotation curation”, originally invented by the @Sweden Twitter account. (DIPLOCAT, 2015) The @CatalanVoices account can be managed by anyone who has lived in Catalonia for at least three months regardless of their nationality and as long as they have some previous experience managing a Twitter profile. Curators tweet in English about their day-to-day life and their thoughts and opinions on life in Catalonia. The curator is not usually a person in the public eye.

The main purpose of @CatalanVoices is “to provide direct knowledge about Catalonia by those who know the country best – the people living there” (DIPLOCAT, 2015). The account has currently 3.668 followers out of which around 40% of live abroad, mainly in the UK, United States and Australia. @Catalanvoices followers mostly belong to the so-called “creative class”, which includes writers, graphic designers, publicists and film makers (DIPLOCAT, 2015).

3.2 Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts allows for several participants without geographic proximity to broadcast their conversation live via Google+ and later being uploaded on YouTube channel.

² Data until February 23rd, 2015

The main goal of the DIPLOCAT's Google Hangouts is "to hold brief debates with Catalans and citizens from all over the world about Catalonia-related news in general or globally relevant topics to which Catalonia can contribute expertise or best practices. It is about showing that Catalonia can join the Global debates at a small cost" (DIPLOCAT, 2015).

3.3 Pinterest

The Pinterest account 'This is Catalonia' uses "the power of imagery in order to make Catalonia known by an even larger audience" (DIPLOCAT, 2015). Photographs grouped in categories are open to selected Pinterest users who complement the mosaic of images through their contributions. With 2387 followers, DIPLOCAT's main goal using Pinterest is to attract visitors to the website (DIPLOCAT, 2015).

3.4. www.diplocat.cat

The website www.diplocat.cat is the official site of the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia, which contains detailed information about the institution and its activities. It also includes a brief presentation of Catalonia, intended to foreigners. The content is published in Catalan, Spanish and English. Some of the content is also published in French, German and Occitan³. "The website is aimed both to a local audience interested on our activities and to an international audience, especially our international partners and the general public interested in our activities abroad" (DIPLOCAT, 2015). This website receives an average of 4,283 visits per month.* Most of its audience comes from Catalonia (57%) and from the rest of Spain (18%), France, the US, Germany, the UK, Belgium and Italy. International audience represents, overall, 25% of the visits.⁴ (DIPLOCAT, 2015)

³ Occitan is the third official language of Catalonia, spoken in the Aran Valley

⁴Most visited contents by the international audience:

- <http://www.diplocat.cat/en/activities/training/election-observation-training>
- <http://www.diplocat.cat/en/catalan-issues/debates-about-catalonia/517-self-determination-processes-in-the-european-union-the-case-of-catalonia-madp-chair-of-sciences-po-paris-france>
- <http://www.diplocat.cat/en/about-us/mission-and-objectives>

Catalonia	57.0%
Rest of Spain	18.0%
France	3.2%
United States	2.4%
Germany	2.3%
United Kingdom	2.2%
Belgium	1.7%
Italy	1.1%
Brazil	0.9%
Netherlands	0.8%

Table 1: Percentage of website visits from country of origin * Data from 1 June 2014 to 31 January, 2015.

(Source: DIPLOCAT)

3.4.1 www.cataloniavotes.eu

The website www.cataloniavotes.eu is a thematic website aimed to explain to an international audience the current political developments in Catalonia regarding the self-determination process. It contains in depth information about Catalonia, its people and their commitment to decide the political status of the territory as well as daily news to keep our audience updated. All its contents are published in English and most of it is translated in French and German. The website was launched in April 2014. Since then, it has received 134,866 visits, which represents an average of 14,347 visits per month*. An estimated 48.8% of the visitors come from abroad, especially from the UK, the US, Germany and France. Again, 37.5% comes from Catalonia and 13.6% from the rest of Spain⁵.

⁵ Most visited contents by the international audience:

- <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/why-a-independence-referendum-incatalonia/>
- <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/independence-referendum/>
- <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/expo-speakers/>
- <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/about-catalonia/>
- <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/history/>
- <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/catalonia-independence-referendum-newsroom/>
- <http://www.cataloniavotes.eu/they-also-did-it/>

Catalonia	37.5%
Rest of Spain	13.6%
United Kingdom	7.1%
United States	6.6%
Germany	5.9%
France	5.0%
Canada	2.1%
Belgium	1.6%
Netherlands	1.2%
Ireland	1.2%
Switzerland	1.2%
Italy	1.1%
Australia	0.9%
Russia	0.8%
Sweden	0.7%
Denmark	0.7%

Table 2: Data from 21st of April to January 31st, 2015 (Source: DIPLOCAT)

3.4.2 www.catalangovernment.eu

“Government of Catalonia” (www.catalangovernment.eu) is the international version of the Catalan Government’s official website. It was launched in early September 2014. The web site is designed to inform a foreign audience on the latest news regarding the political activity of the President, the Executive Council and the twelve Ministries of Catalonia’s executive branch. Information on the history of the Catalan Government, its presidents, and the Palau de la Generalitat is also available on the website, along with press releases, presidential speeches, and official statements.

The site intends to focus on content that may be relevant to an international audience with special attention to foreign affairs and international trade. Information on policies or government programmes concerning Catalans living abroad, or which may be of a particular interest to international correspondents, is also provided through the website. Additionally, www.catalangovernment.eu offers a weekly newsletter to subscribers with the most relevant

articles, info-graphic publications and general facts that may be of interest to an audience wanting to know more about Catalonia and its Government⁶.

It is evident from the social media analytics data provided by DIPLOCAT that social media accounts are being used for several key foreign policy objectives:

1. Informing and engaging foreign audiences related to Catalonia - cultural, political, academic and institutional context;
2. Transmitting official news from the Catalan government - news in political and historical context;
3. Organizing online debates and discussions related globally relevant topics.

As a result of the above presented data, we can state that social media accounts are the main tool of the digital diplomacy strategy for DIPLOCAT. It is important to draw the attention that this strategy does not provide any impact assessment. It is therefore limiting to the level that all conclusions can be drawn based upon the provided data and the interviews with the members of the Catalan government and DIPLOCAT.

Taking this limitation of the results in mind, it is possible to make several important conclusions:

First, that the use of social media platforms does engage foreign audiences online. The social media analytics show continuously increasing number of followers on all social media accounts as well as number of web site visits.

Second, social media platforms serve as a useful tool for sub-state actors in order to produce content, inform and engage with various audiences and attract attention to the targeted audience.

Third, the digital strategy is important part of the Catalan's public diplomacy strategy because it is helping the government to increase awareness for their foreign policy agenda, to legitimize and create international support for the nation-branding aspirations and to engage

⁶ It should be noted, that "Government of Catalonia" is not a translation of its Catalan counterparts (govern.cat or president.cat), but a website dedicated to an international audience with the mission to inform the English speaking world on the governmental activity of an institution that dates back to 1359. (DIPLOCAT, 2015)

the diaspora in the prominent members of the Catalan society in order to create a positive image abroad.

However, as these conclusions are based merely upon the data generated by DIPLOCAT, additional space for further scholarly analysis remains to be done so that more exact results can be produced.

Therefore, it is important to further explore what virtual conversations are relevant for the Catalan government and which of the social media accounts provide wanted results. This is important so that future strategies can incorporate the outcomes into a more cohesive digital strategy which will improve effectiveness and efficiency to the resources provided for this purpose.

Therefore an additional effort is needed to develop a model with sound analytical approach which can deliver sophisticated impact assessment results for the success of the digital strategy. Thus a well thought, strategic and tactical evaluation strategy should focus on the desired target audiences both domestic and international. Furthermore the efforts should be concentrated on the maximization of social media outreach and to develop a model which can track how digital creates difference in the real life power tool.

Until this becomes possible, relying on data provided solely derived from digital media platforms is not sufficient so that drastic conclusions can be drawn of its success. Thus careful positive conclusions can be made, but the question of whether this digital power is converted in real power, remains difficult to be answered.

As a result, the concept of soft power has to be critically observed as the only objective approach towards providing relevant analysis for public diplomacy outreach effects. Even working diplomats have expressed cynicism when talking of the relevance and real-life effects of digital strategies. Therefore, the importance of diplomatic practice should be expected to meet halfway from soft to hard power. Thus, a rather quiet but still favored, old-

fashioned reputation of “people-to-people” communication exists. While the concept of soft power generates credible support in the academic discourses, it seems that the shift from soft to smart power (i.e. combination of soft power and hard power) is inevitable if one wants to preserve the realistic approach of international relations arena.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this thesis research was to explore the growing relationship between digital media tools and public diplomacy practice for sub-state actors. For the purpose of exploring this issue two research questions have been posed:

1) *What is the role of the digital media platforms in reshaping public diplomacy practice on sub-state level? And:*

2) *How does the growing utilization of digital platforms by sub-state actors help in promoting public diplomacy objectives?*

In order to be able to answer these questions, this research has focused on a case study of Catalonia (Spain) and the review of the public diplomacy strategy obtained by the Public Diplomacy Council of Catalonia (DIPLOCAT), an external body conducting the public diplomacy strategy for the Catalan government (*Generalitat*).

The selection of methodological approach towards answering the two research questions included semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with members of DIPLOCAT and the Catalan government. Furthermore, social media analytics provided by DIPLOCAT was used. Lastly, desktop research was used for the purpose of providing secondary source information related to this research.

The analysis give the opportunity to answer the above raised questions as follows: Regarding the first question, it can be concluded that the role of the digital platforms used by the Catalan government serves for three main public diplomacy purposes: 1) The utilization of digital diplomatic strategy by DIPLOCAT was implemented as part of the Catalan's Foreign Action Plan 2010-2015 and as such it has been used in order to achieve stronger international presence of Catalonia worldwide by communicating relevant content online; 2) Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Google Hangout, Pinterest and YouTube are used in order to relate messages to relevant audiences globally; and 3) The Catalan digital diplomacy strategy is developed as an effort to circumvent the dominant political narrative of

the Spanish central government in its political positions towards Catalonia's aspiration for national self-determination, both home and especially abroad. This is done through the Catalan effort to tell their side of the story to the world (Royo, 2015), in times when digitally and strategically they are able to do so.

Furthermore, several other public diplomacy tools are used in order to achieve greater international support of the Catalan political position. Such tools, envisioned by DIPLOCAT in their "triangle strategy" concept, are consisted of 1) academic debates organized with world known universities and other research institutions; 2) strong collaboration with the foreign press in order to influence the shift towards less state-centric press coverage; and 3) organizing foreign parliament visits to Catalonia and exchange programs in order to "tell the truth about Catalonia" (Royo, 2015). And the fact that the content of these efforts are promoted digitally speaks volumes about the great potential digital platforms offer to public diplomacy, especially when analyzed from the aspect of sub-state actor's position.

Linking this research to the theoretical framework elaborated in Chapter 1 of this thesis gives the opportunity to conclude that digital tools have been used to frame the agenda, persuade, and elicit positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes (2011, p. 20-21), as stipulated in Joseph Nye's concept of soft power approach in public diplomacy.

Furthermore, the conceptual framework of Soldatos is relevant for this case. This is so because as being *de facto* part of the Spanish country, the Catalans' foreign policy strategy seems extensively independent. Hence, despite legally operating under the administrative laws of the central government, a large portion of its foreign policies are based on self-orchestrated framework of actions, among which public diplomacy, where they seem to utilize their self-determination agenda extensively.

All being said, however, there is a space for constructive criticism when we analyze the connection of digital media tools and public diplomacy. For example, it remains unclear how strongly the digital communication strategy affects the public opinion inside and outside Catalonia. Scholarly research faces a challenge to clearly quantify the effect of digital strategy on public opinion.

Furthermore, this question faces with the alchemic challenge of explaining the conversion of soft power to tangible outcomes of real power. P.J. Crowley articulated this dilemma most clearly when he pondered over the challenge of "converting soft power into real power" in the world of foreign affairs (2015). Additionally, the challenge of nation-branding inside the country remains an open question and how that is to be addressed through the digital diplomacy dimension in the future.

It is also important to underline that DIPLOCAT does not have the capacity nor the model to conduct any impact assessment measurement on their digital strategy so far. Since this strategy has been adopted and implemented for only a year now, it seems logical to suggest that further policy evaluation is needed in order to be able to understand what digital diplomacy tools have shown to be successful so that development and improvements in the right direction can be made.

In order to be able to understand whether the digital diplomacy strategy of DIPLOCAT is transferrable policy to similar aspiring sub-state entities pursuing similar goals and objectives, this research draws several policy recommendations. First, digital diplomacy as a public diplomacy tool does generate positive outcomes in terms of engaging foreign audiences to the issue of independence and self-determination. In the case of Catalonia, as the analytical data have shown, the newly established agenda seems to grow the number of engaged users online,

Second, it can be argued that the use of academic discourse as a public diplomacy tool is quite successful in generating credibility to the debate itself. What is even more encouraging is that this discourse is easily introduced on digital platforms for the wider audiences to see, hear and engage. Furthermore, this serves as a policy opportunity to the Catalan government itself, where different academic views enable further adjustment of their public diplomacy objectives that eventually should influence strategy as well. This can be seen as a good example of how future or present autonomous governments can use the window of opportunity for pushing the agenda by incorporating the potential of the academia and digital platforms, for the purpose of generating issue credibility in the public diplomacy sphere.

Thirdly, other sub-state entities seeking similar foreign policy outcomes can look at the concept of public-private partnership as a form of conducting ‘informal’ foreign policy communication activities, which serve as a form of paradiplomacy tool for sub-state entities.

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