POLITICS, HACKERS AND PARTISAN NETWORKING. MISINFORMATION, NATIONAL UTILITY AND FREE ELECTION IN THE CATALAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Política, hackers y redes partisanas. Desinformación, utilidad nacional y libre elección en el proceso independentista catalán

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Abstract

Misinformation, post-truth and fake news are the consequence of the complex interaction between technological disruption, collective interpersonal communication and sociopolitical action. We analyzed the impact of content produced by the hacktivist Julian Assange [1] and his *WikiLeaks* organization in support of the Catalan independence process in the last quarter of 2017. A total of 1,708,087 unique results were retrieved from multiple streams of Internet data, of which 99.85% is from *Twitter* with a 93% viralization rate. The 50 most viral tweets were analyzed qualitatively to identify the underlying misinformation patterns. The research findings show 1) the extent to which such misinformation favors the internal logic, coherence and survival of the independence worldview, whose main value lies in its national utility and 2) misinformation does not use the coercion of lies or falsehoods typical of totalitarian propaganda, but the freedom of citizens to voluntarily engage.

Keywords

Misinformation; Post-truth; Independence movement; Catalonia; Political worldview; Partisan networking; Assange; *WikiLeaks*.

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Resumen

La desinformación, la posverdad y las noticias falsas son la consecuencia de la compleja interacción entre disrupción tecnológica, comunicación interpersonal colectiva y acción sociopolítica. Se analiza el impacto de los contenidos producidos por el hacktivista Julian Assange [1] y su organización *WikiLeaks* en apoyo al proceso independentista catalán durante el último trimestre de 2017. Se capturaron 1.708.087 de publicaciones únicas en Internet, un 99,85% en *Twitter*, con una tasa de viralización del 93%. Los 50 tweets más virales de los temas de investigación se analizaron cualitativamente con el objetivo de identificar los patrones de desinformación subyacentes. Los resultados de la investigación 1) en la medida en que la desinformación favorece la coherencia y supervivencia de la propia cosmovisión identitaria, su principal valor reside en su utilidad nacional y 2) la desinformación no persigue la coerción de la mentira o la falsedad, propio de la propaganda totalitaria, sino la libertad de los ciudadanos para elegirla de forma voluntaria.

Palabras clave

Desinformación; Posverdad; Movimiento independentista; Cataluña; Cosmovisión política; Redes partisanas; Assange; *Wikileaks*.

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1. Introduction[1]

Today, the production and dissemination of meanings is mediated not only by professional media and social platforms, but also by the users that contribute to their continuous exchange within an information ecosystem that impacts on our construction of reality. Cohabitation and competition between social media platforms and professional media enable collective interpersonal communication and has profoundly modified the way in which we communicate and how we share meanings (**Del-Fresno-García**, 2014; 2017; **Del-Fresno-García**; **Daly**, 2018). The communication behind Internet is the result of a "complex interaction between communication and social practices and technological infrastructure" within an instant and massive network communication system (**Del-Fresno-García**; **Daly**; **Segado-Sánchez-Cabezudo**, 2016). The quantity and quality of the information that we can access as citizens are the two other variables that influence how we perceive, understand, decide and behave.

Despite the enthusiastic rhetoric regarding how the Internet would spread and elevate the level of informed political and social debates (**Wills**; **Reeves**, 2009; **Bekkers** *et al.*, 2011; **González-Bailón** *et al.*, 2011; **García** *et al.*, 2012; **Steenkamp**; **Hyde-Clarke**, 2014; **Sandoval-Almazán**; **Gil-García**, 2014) or the quality of democratic governance (**Benkler**, 2006; **Shirky**, 2008; **Noveck**, 2009), this view has been questioned as a result of increasing partisanship and the struggle to establish new relations of definition (**Beck**, 2016) and influence in global and local public agendas.

Truth is a central concept for science, philosophy, ethics, decision-making theories, communication and cooperation, among others. However, it is being challenged by the production, on an unprecedented scale, of false content —popularly known as fake news. Fake news has led to the emergence of a concept as a sign of an era: *post-truth* (**Drezner**, 2016; **Flood**, 2016; **Freedland**, 2016; **Alcorn**, 2014), defined as

> "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (*Oxford University Press*, 2016).

Fake news, *alternative facts* or *misinformation* are information disorders and reveal the difficulty for citizens to draw the line between fact and fiction, in spite of all the available information.

Peter Hernon foresaw misinformation as a problem in the sphere of the Internet because

> "it is easy to alter information content and to pass a forgery as genuine" (**Hernon**, 1995, p. 134).

The *World Economic Forum* (**Howell**, 2013) and the EU (*European Commission*, 2018) identified misinformation as a global problem and one of the emerging threats to democratic societies, but misinformation is a more multifaceted and complex concept than merely fake news or inaccurate information (**Karlova**; **Lee**, 2011). Even if it is partially or completely false, misinformation is a species of information since

> "informing does not require truth, and information need not be true" (**Fox**, 1983, p. 193).

Misinformation is even more important in its intersection with social and political communication due to its potential performative character (**Austin**, 1975 [1962]) insofar as it pursues actions that aim to transform reality and has implications for democracy. Misinformation events can be the product of cascading network dynamics (**Del-Vicario** *et al.*, 2016) or intentionally produced according to a specific ideological, political or partisan agenda (*Der Spiegel*, 2017; **King**; **Pan**; **Roberts**, 2017; **Romano**, 2017; **Anthony**, 2016; **Willis**, 2016), which is the topic of this research. The immediacy of communication and the ubiquitous nature of technology (**Virilio**, 1991; 1995; 1996) have given rise to increasingly frequent and intense misinformation events, which not only

transform the how of communication but also the meaning of what is being communicated and therefore threaten to reshape the very perception of social reality. Moreover, a recent study has highlighted that the risk associated with misinformation online also rests on the fact that this type of content is disseminated in *Twitter*

> "significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects [are] more pronounced for false political news" (**Vosoughi**; **Roy**; **Aral**, 2018, p. 1146)

and that information combining truth and lies has a more efficient and specific behavior when the central theme is political.

In more abstract terms, misinformation is a type of empirical evidence of the power struggle to establish relations of definition in the public agenda and, therefore,

> "shifts the focus on power and domination from 'power relations of production' (in the Marxist sense) in modern global capitalism to 'power relations of definition' in world risk society" (**Beck**, 2016, p. 97).

In the absence of a universally accepted definition, misinformation is assumed to be content which is

> "false, inaccurate, or misleading […] designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit" (*European Commission*, 2018, p. 10)

or

> "to deceive people" (**Lazer** *et al.*, 2018, p. 1094)

as a way to gain political advantage (**Rojecki**; **Meraz**, 2016; **Harsin**, 2006) with interests in building and extending certain perceptions of reality (**Del-Fresno-García**, 2018). This research analyzes the impact and typology of the misinformation content produced by hacktivist Julian Assange and his *WikiLeaks* organization in support of Catalonia's bid for independence in the new media, particularly *Twitter* from September 25 to November 15, 2017.

2. The Catalan Independence Process: Assange and *WikiLeaks*

Catalonia's bid for independence from the rest of Spain has historical roots. From a sociological point of view, the movement includes a broad spectrum of up to 77 different social stakeholders who promote

> "the process of self-determination" (**Ordeix**; **Ginesta**, 2014).

This institutionally-driven movement picked up speed after the regional elections of 2015, when the pro-independence coalition (*Junts pel Sí* [Together for Yes] and the *CUP* [Popular Unity Candidacy]) won 47.8% of the votes and, thanks to the electoral law, 72 of the 135 seats in the parliament, giving them the majority. What paved the way for a unilateral process on September 6, 2017 was the passing of the *Law on the referendum on the self-determination of Catalonia* (*Ley del referéndum de autodeterminación de Cataluña*) to call for and hold a referendum on October 1, 2017 and the *Law on the juridical transition and foundation of the Catalan Republic* of September 8, 2017 (*Ley de transitoriedad jurídica y fundacional de la República Catalana*) popularly known as the laws of rupture with Spain that were approved by an urgent procedure where

> "the pro-independence majority trampled the parliamentary minority" (**Luque**, 2018, p. 25);

the declaration and simultaneous suspension of independence on October 10, 2017 and the unilateral declaration of independence,

> "a postmodern attempt at a self-coup" (**Luque**, 2018, p. 63) or "a postmodern coup d'état" (**Gascón**, 2018) on October 27, 2017;

the subsequent passing and enforcement of Article 155 of the *Spanish Constitution* by the government of Spain with the dissolution of the *Catalan Parliament*; and the suspension of the *Catalan Government* and the call to hold elections on December 21, 2017. Following these events, the pro-independence parliamentary majority —supported by 47.5% of the votes in the December 2017 elections- have maintained their weight in the institutional push for independence throughout 2018, throwing Spain into the first major socio-political crisis of interdependence and coexistence in the country's 40 years of democracy.

WikiLeaks was "founded by its publisher Julian Assange in 2006," who was granted asylum by Ecuador in 2012 and has remained in the Embassy of Ecuador in London since then. Assange defines *WikiLeaks*' mission as

> "a giant library of the world's most persecuted documents. We give asylum to these documents, analyze them, promote them and obtain more" (**Sontheimer**, 2015).

After having released large amounts of confidential information originating from third party leaks or *WikiLeaks* hacking since 2006 (**Hern**, 2017; *WikiLeaks*, 2017; **Buncombe**, 2017; **Rothe**; **Steinmetz**, 2013; **Dunn**, 2013; **Lynch**, 2013; **Nicks**, 2012), both *WikiLeaks* and Assange have gained notoriety and had a media impact worldwide. There is a large body of research on both Assange and *WikiLeaks*. Topics include the confrontation between *WikiLeaks* and organizations such as *Bank of America* (**Uysal**; **Yang**, 2013); allegations of Assange and *WikiLeaks*' alliances with Trump's election campaign against Clinton; the *UK Independence Party* and Brexit (**Cadwalladr**, 2017); how the *WikiLeaks* ethos does not comply with the principles of investigative journalism and ethical or information verification problems (**Benkler**, 2013; **Landert**; **Miscione**, 2017); or *WikiLeaks* as "free irresponsible press" (**Benkler**, 2011). Although throughout their history *WikiLeaks* and Assange have made their motives known when publishing confidential information, prior to the events analyzed here, no relationship in support of the Catalan independence movement had been identified, nor the objective reason for such active intervention in a political project completely unrelated to *WikiLeaks* or Assange's mission and goals in the past.

This study poses two research questions:

H1) from a quantitative point of view, what is the volume of content generated and promoted by research subjects in the dissemination of the Catalan pro-independence worldview, and is it significant?, and

H2) from a qualitative point of view, what kind of utility does the misinformation disseminated by the research subjects have for the Catalan pro-independence worldview?

3. Method and data

Although Big Data techniques tend to focus all the scientific attention on the search for massive correlations, Big Data also opens up many still unexplored paths for qualitative research in the social sciences when attempting to understand and explain the creation, negotiation and dissemination of meanings in the Internet era. For social researchers it is a challenge to understand events of great impact and scale in societies where (mis)information is produced and disseminated at an incredibly high speed thanks to the Internet. We use a naturalistic approach to capture and observe the magnitude and force of the local and global impact of this sociopolitical and informational phenomenon. Qualitative analysis was used to better understand the role of the subjects' meanings and symbolic intermediation between the facts and the different actors of the pro-independence worldview, as well as to identify the most predominant misinformation patterns. This type of analysis becomes even more necessary when dealing with such a rapid and massive exchange of (mis)information such as that captured and analyzed in this study.

To this end, from September 25 to November 15, 2017, the climate of opinion regarding the Catalan independence process in social media and mass media was captured using Big Data technology. From this large dataset, we created a specific query for this research topic, which was formalized in Boolean logic as: *assange OR julianassange OR WikiLeaks* to retrieve all mentions of the keywords. False positive results were excluded (e.g., "us intelligence" OR "black men" OR weinstein OR feminis* OR clinto* OR haiti OR FBI OR iraq OR kurdis* OR nuclear OR mannin* OR obama OR brazile OR JFK OR trump OR "united states") in order to avoid all the content unrelated to the research topic. Finally, a qualitative analysis was performed of the 50 most viral contents created by the study subjects from which we iteratively inferred the dominant categories.

A quantitative methodology relying on Big Data technology is used, which enables the empirization of the research problem in order to analyze the data qualitatively. Such a complex social and political phenomenon as the one analyzed here cannot be considered completely scientific if it does not address or take account of how meanings are created, represented and disseminated, focusing the analysis on who says what; how, when and where it is said, as well as how it is spread by audiences.

4. Findings

The *ad hoc* query obtained 1,708,087 unique publications, which accounted for 3.5% of the total content captured. When disaggregated by keywords, the following results were obtained: *julianassange*, 1,395,796; *WikiLeaks*, 290,362 and *Assange*, 110,540. The sum of these three figures, 1,796,698, is greater than the number of unique publications because the same keyword may be mentioned on more than one occasion (1,05) in the same content.

The temporal distribution of social media activity (Figure 1) reveals a significantly large volume on September 30, 2017 and October 1, 2, 3 and 4, 2017, with 430,264 unique publications. In addition to these publications, which account for 25.2% of the total, the rest of the study period showed a high average activity. Regarding the distribution of content according to the medium used, 99.8% of all content was created and disseminated in social media, of which 99.3% (1,694,070 unique posts) was published on *Twitter* with a very high viralization rate (percentage of tweets sent over a given period of time that were retweeted at least once) of 93%, followed far behind by *Facebook* (0.4%), *Forocoches* (0.1%) and *YouTube* (0.04%). However, the own activity of both subjects was 100% on *Twitter*. The estimated maximum potential audience in social media is 1,047 million impacts. In addition, a total of 2,413 unique publications, only 0.1% of the total, were from professional media, with an estimated maximum potential audience of 95.9 million impacts.

Twitter was the backbone for contagion due to its economy, efficiency and simplicity, since users who have little technical know-how but are highly motivated contribute to the large-scale cascading effect which multiplies dissemina-

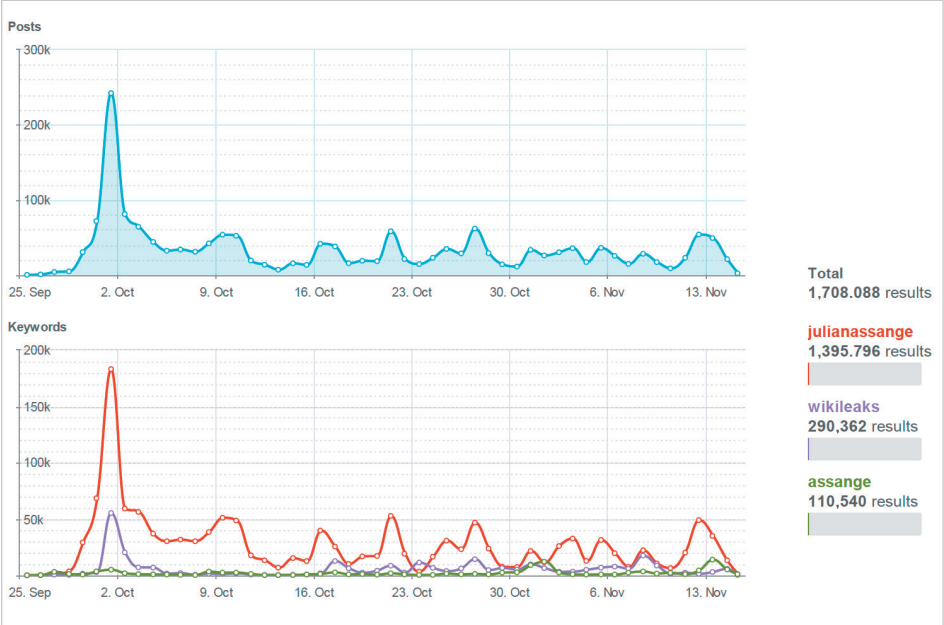
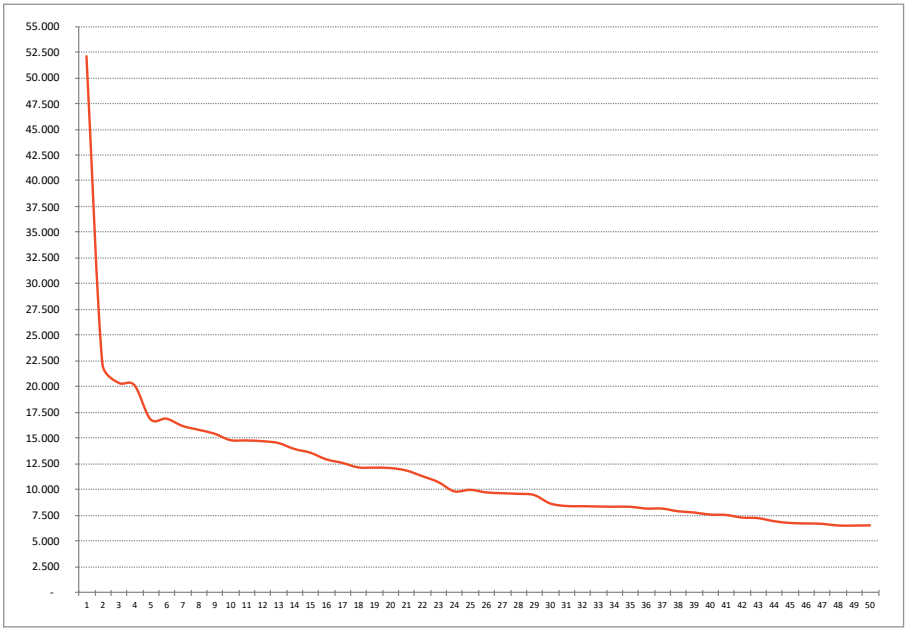


Figure 1. Temporal distribution of social media activity

tion on the net (Vosoughi; Roy; Aral, 2018). Moreover, retweets (RTs) constitute an explicit act of intentional and conscious communication to maximize the diffusion and reach of the content (**Del-Fresno-García**, 2014). Due to its ease of use in mobile devices, *Twitter* functions as a sort of central nervous system of the Internet and as the medium of intersection between other media and content (**Dorsey**, 2012).

For the qualitative analysis, the 50 most viral tweets of the research subjects were selected, of which 6 were posted by *WikiLeaks* and 44 by Assange. Considering estimates that only 6% of all tweets are republished (**Elmer**, 2013) and less than 1 of every 200 tweets have a RT one hour after being published (**Geere**, 2010) helps to measure the impact of the subjects' communication, which has extended beyond the period of analysis of this investigation. The dataset allows measuring the impact of Assange and *WikiLeaks* in disseminating the pro-independence worldview, as demonstrated by:

- The very significant quantitative impact of the 50 tweets since they comprise a total of 594,249 RTs with an average of 11,885 RTs per tweet.
- The fact that 43 have more than 7,000 RTs, 37 more than 8,000 RTs, 29 more than 9,000 RTs, 23 more than 10,000 RTs, 9 more than 15,000 RTs, 4 more than 20,000 and 1 more than 50,000 RTs (Figure 2 and Table 1).
- The very high frequency of the hashtags used (Figure 3 and Table 2).
- The distribution of the RTs by date, which shows a parallel trend to the temporal distribution of the activity (Figure 4), especially on October 1, 2017, the day the Catalan independence referendum was held.



RK	RTs	Date	Profile
1	52.157	1-oct	As
2	22.179	1-oct	As
3	20.382	1-oct	Wk
4	20.142	1-oct	As
5	16.831	25-oct	As
6	16.882	1-oct	Wk
7	16.180	12-nov	As
8	15.801	5-nov	As
9	15.426	3-nov	As
10	14.796	8-nov	As
11	14.762	30-sept	As
12	14.692	12-nov	As
13	14.513	16-oct	As
14	13.934	6-oct	As
15	13.571	14-oct	As
16	12.923	21-oct	As
17	12.580	27-oct	Wk
18	12.141	20-oct	As
19	12.115	16-oct	As
20	12.077	9-oct	As
21	11.840	23-oct	Wk
22	11.290	2-nov	As
23	10.714	21-oct	As
24	9.812	30-sept	As
25	9.957	11-nov	As

RK	RTs	Date	Profile
26	9.707	24-oct	As
27	9.627	2-nov	As
28	9.571	11-nov	As
29	9.451	27-oct	As
30	8.633	19-oct	As
31	8.383	3-oct	As
32	8.367	2-oct	As
33	8.335	3-oct	As
34	8.313	1-oct	As
35	8.310	2-oct	Wk
36	8.137	3-nov	As
37	8.132	14-oct	As
38	7.871	4-oct	As
39	7.754	25-oct	As
40	7.548	1-oct	Wk
41	7.513	27-oct	As
42	7.257	21-oct	As
43	7.205	9-oct	As
44	6.906	1-oct	As
45	6.734	3-oct	As
46	6.686	20-oct	As
47	6.649	21-oct	As
48	6.485	26-oct	As
49	6.479	10-oct	As
50	6.499	1-oct	As

Figure 2 and Table 1. Distribution of RTs of the 50 most viral tweets: number of RTs, date and subject.

4.1. Qualitative analysis: Misinformation patterns

The following misinformation patterns have been identified from the content analysis (see Table 4), where it is important to recall that "even if it is partially or completely false, misinformation is 'a species of information'" (**Fox**, 1983, p. 193):

0) *External sources*: Two tweets were not classified as misinformation as they contained data from an external source whose credibility is not analyzed in this research.

1) *Intentionally confusing the part for the whole* (Fact check: Catalonia is a part of Spain. Catalonia is not reduced solely to nor is it a symbolic property of the pro-independent

citizens). Assange adheres to the narrative and pro-independence worldview, equating it with all of Catalonia and ignoring the existence of the other half of society, which is also Catalan and not pro-independent or "the Catalan people" or by justifying decisions of the pro-independence segment in the name of a non-existent, unanimous and uniform "popular mandate". At the same time, he objectifies the other, the collective enemy, through oversimplification as *Madrid* or *Spain*. A total of 23 of the 50 contents analyzed can be considered to be of this register.

2) *Constructing the perception of Spain as a dictatorship or non-democratic state* (Fact check: Spain is a democratic country recognized as such by the international community and is an EU Member State): Assange questions the existence of a democracy in Spain in absolute terms and extrapolates it to a crisis of European democracy, opposing the independence worldview as a pacifist movement unprecedented in history since Gandhi. A total of 27 of the 50 contents analyzed can be considered to be of this register.

3) *Catalonia as a place where extraordinary events occur*: (Fact check: what is happening in Catalonia is understood by the EU and the international community as a local problem in Spain). Although Assange was not present to witness the events first hand, he projects the independence movement as a historical subject and Catalonia as place where power relations are being redefined, paving the way for a new era. Eleven of the 50 contents analyzed can be considered to be of this register.

4) *Overblowing or distorting the events:* (Fact check: the reality has proven not to coincide with what has been described as opinion is confused with truth) 18 of the 50 contents analyzed can be considered to be based on partial facts. The real scale of the events is modified to make them exceptional or partisan emotional.

5) *Fake information*: (Fact check: the information posted over the course of events is partially or totally false) 16 of the 50 contents analyzed can be considered as being partially or entirely fake.

6) *Using images as opinion, as tool for affective polarization*: 23 of the 50 contents analyzed can be considered performative as their aim is to

	Keyword	Results
1	@julianassange	1.356.851
2	spanish	470.803
3	catalonia	420.138
4	catalan	322.942
5	spain	306.123
6	police	278.388
7	spain's	246.437
8	@wikileaks	213.970
9	voters	213.732
10	#catalonia	195.191
11	catalonia's	190.913
12	independence	179.094
13	president	171.985
14	political	137.696
15	government	121.991

Hashtags	Results
#catalonia	194.962
#catalanreferendum	52.447
#barcelona	39.006
#catalunya	32.314
#1o	22.791
#cataluña	18.382
#catalan	14.299
#freejordis	10.613
#referendum	10.297
#freedom11n	9.698
#n11	8.778
#referendumcat	7.881
#cataluyna	7.449
#catalonianreferendum	3.968
#o1	3.212

Figure 3 and Table 2. Cloud of keywords and hashtags

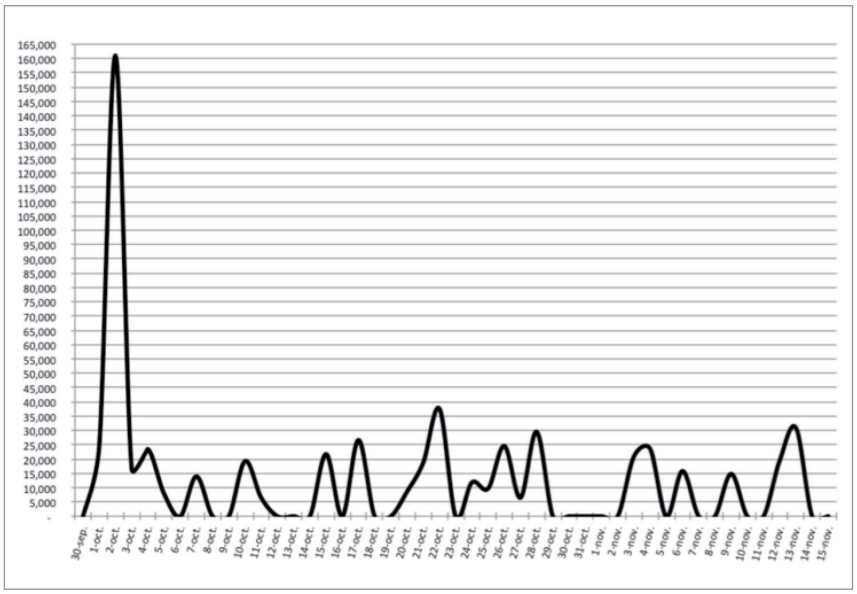


Figure 4. Distribution of viralization (RTs) by date

Table 4. Categorization of contents by subject

| | Tweets | | |

re, even when distorted. When analyzing political content, misinformation tends to be validated, provided it is solid, credible and useful to one's own worldview, regardless of its veracity (**Weeks**, 2015). In a socio-political context like the one studied here, the partisan gap predominates, revealing the clash between the independence worldview based on identity values and the majority of the population, which does not support the bid for independence. Although it could be a subject of interest, it is not our place to make any claims about the subjects' motivation in our analysis. We focus on the significant impact and dissemination of misinformation as measured in the very high number of RTs. Thus, the following characteristics are inferred:

1) individuals tend to accept and share that content which is coherent with the independence logic, which constitutes sociopolitical evidence of the theory of bounded rationality (**Simon**, 1957);

2) the verifiability of what is communicated appears to be less relevant than its plausibility, thus deepening polarization and causing a cascade of reactions, as revealed by the viralization rate;

3) *the others* tend to be perceived as simple negative objects;

4) regardless of its veracity, every event tends to be understood or reconfigured by means of ideological filtering, provided it is useful to one's own worldview.

Misinformation makes sense and acquires full meaning through the desire to maintain the coherency of the worldview, the use of facts and arguments to keep it intact and a disproportionate outpouring of energy to combat or refute the opposing worldview, that is, by making the own worldview more stable and resistant to contradiction. Thus, we can rule out that the utility of misinformation in this context resides in attempting:

1) not to attract or convince *the others,* since in a context of identity partisanship such as the one analyzed it is unlikely that the logic will permeate the opposing worldview and

2) persuade like-minded audiences given that they are already convinced.

The will to power of the pro-independence worldview has as its aim to transform reality. Due to its performative nature, the misinformation presents the entire mobilization and hence the misinformation itself as legitimate acts, which are put forth as defense or resistance against the others, who are built and perceived as a ubiquitous and hostile enemy. Therefore, the criterion of truth as a universal value —as both a proposition and facts- tends to be secondary. The data show that each misinformation event only needs to be plausible, not true, to be accepted as certain within the pro-independence worldview.

Another conclusion is that whenever a misinformation fact is advantageous or favorable, it must be valid, not because it is true but because it is useful as a political weapon for the partisan worldview. Moreover, in so far as a misinformation fact favors consistency, the main value lies in its national utility in search of the construction of a narrative that justifies restricting the *demos* of Catalonia to the pro-independence *demos*.

At the same time, and hence the importance of the widespread use of *images as opinion* as a tool for affective polarization, an unrefuted paradox is assumed: since the pro-independence emotions and feelings are real, it is concluded that the objectives are also real and, therefore, shared emotions matter. That is, emotion and feelings are equated with truth and legality. This is how the epistemology —and also the legality- of post-truth is fabricated by pro-independence worldview.

As stated above, misinformation is a more complex phenomenon than simply substituting truth for lies, as was the case with totalitarian propaganda. Mass totalitarian propaganda used the technological means of its time, which also entailed innovating the mechanics of the production and distribution of falsehoods. Misinformation and post-truth are the result of the success of the complex interaction between technological disruption, collective interpersonal communication in the network and sociopolitical action. Based on the data, the second conclusion of this investigation shows that, in order to maximize diffusion and effectiveness, misinformation techniques need not rely on the coercion of lies, but rather seem to depend more on citizens' freedom to voluntarily choose the misinformation.

It is highly likely that misinformation has formed part of the whole process to build the reality of the pro-independence worldview, but is not limited to it, since misinformation influences the behavior and decisions of those who adhere to it due to its performative nature. This is one of the risks associated with misinformation: the systematic production of discourse capable of modifying and channeling affective polarization and free behaviors so that they are consistent with a worldview. In other words, it is a question of how the frequency and routinization of misinformation can eventually influence the very structure of knowledge and the way in which the human mind creates meanings by making it difficult to separate facts from emotions or intentionality. Misinformation could be understood as a legacy that has evolved from 20th-century totalitarianisms to the liberal democracies of 21st-century post-Internet.

Enlightened rationality presupposes that more educated people are more immune to misinformation because they have more precise knowledge and beliefs, a greater capacity for critical thinking and a greater capacity to verify the facts. However, the research shows that this assumption is far from being corroborated since the transversal nature of culture and knowledge of the thousands of profiles involved is very significant in the pro-independence group. Therefore, the distortion introduced by the misinformation events associated with identitarian-political worldviews, due to their national utility and free choice, would not be corrected with more information or education.

The primary limitation of this research is that the misinformation phenomenon is not exclusive to the pro-independence worldview, but something which has become generalized in the struggle for power to establish power relations of definition based on the events that were happening. Moreover, although limiting the analysis to highly central subjects in the independence network is both necessary and of interest, it is nonetheless insufficient to understand a political and social phenomenon like the one analyzed here.

Finally, the misinformation events seem to have found an adequate breeding ground in the social, economic, political and ethical tensions and uncertainties arising from the effects of globalization. We encourage future studies to understand not only how much, how and to what extent misinformation is amplified, but also to identify the factors of human judgment that strive to accept and spread misinformation, the psychological foundations of its acceptability and its relationship with (dis)affective polarization. Just as misinformation events have been identified in the non-pro-independence media, channels and profiles where conclusions on the national utility and the free election of misinformation could be verified or falsified.

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Annex

[As1] "This is the real Spanish state--and why Catalonia wants to leave it."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/914428231977197568

[As2] "Dear @JunckerEU. Is this "respect for human dignity, freedom and democracy"? Activate article 7 and suspend Spain from the European Union for its clear violation of Article 2. Art 7: https://t.co/1Dr7yCRHOH Art 2: https://t.co/flpyclfchz"
http://bit.ly/2LO1LMB

[Wk3] "The face of Spanish democracy today: masked government agents seize ballot boxes and abuse voters in #Catalan-Referendum"
https://twitter.com/wikileaks/statuses/914434331694764032

[As4] "Spanish National Police strike with batons Catalonian fire fighters trying to protect ##Referendum voters."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/914472222965805056

[As5] "Spain's plan to annex Catalonia is extremely disturbing. - arrest elected government, replace with viceroy - emasculate parliament - seize media - seize police - seize embassies - seize funds – ban demonstrations - modify education system to make pro Spain - seize internet"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/923186790542004226

[Wk6] "Spain's National Police brutalize voters in Catalonia polling center (a school) today in an attempt to suppress #CatalanReferendum vote."
https://twitter.com/wikileaks/statuses/914434002345431040

[As7] "Panoramic view of close to a million people in Barcelona last night chanting "Puigdemont president" (@KRLS)"
http://bit.ly/2LRby4B

[As8] "80 years ago Franco used the Gestapo to capture Catalonia's president in occupied France. Now, Franco's political heirs can issue a European Arrest Warrant across 27 European states at once. Progress!"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/927177876562219008

[As9] "1. Dissolve parliament 2. Call new elections 3. Imprison the opposition Spanish 'democracy' in action. #Catalonia"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/926401448329580544

[As10] "Why I am so interested in Catalonia: Attacks on WikiLeaks: electronic+physical spying, censorship, judicial corruption, arrests, extradition, imprisonment, exile, financial blockades, fake news+propaganda, pressuring allied states. Attacks on Catalonia: Exactly the same."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/928179512629694465

[As11] "The world's first internet war has begun, in Catalonia, as the people and government use it to organize an independence referendum on Sunday and Spanish intelligence attacks, freezing telecommunications links, occupying telecoms buildings, censors 100s of sites, protocols etc."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/913925030685405185

[As12] "Watch this video of last nights protest of around a million people calling for Spain to release Catalan political prisoners. Then follow this link to see how this vast crowd was depicted on the front pages of Spain's biggest "newspapers" https://t.co/qT1s6l2Q0A"
http://bit.ly/2LQSROi

[As13] "Spain just created its first high level political prisoners over Catalonia's referendum. This evening it jailed (for 'sedition') the heads of the rather fittingly named ANC (Catalan National Assembly, @assemblea_int) and Catalonia's cultural promotion organization @Omnium."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/920014024246530048

[As14] "How Spanish police treat women: Suffocate them -- and 'grab them by the p**sy'. #Catalonia"
http://bit.ly/2LPRhMD

[As15] "What is occurring in Catalonia is the redefinition of the relationship between people and state. The most disciplined Gandhian project since Gandhi. Its results will spread everywhere."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/919293097556750336

[As16] "Spain's PM has responded to Catalonia's calls for dialog with a plan (announced today, minimizing press coverage) to remove its president and cabinet and to take over its institutions by force, effectively granting control of Catalonia to a party with just 8% of the vote."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/921724434754482183

[Wk17] "This is the moment Catalonia declared independence from Spain today."
https://twitter.com/wikileaks/statuses/923965128072101888

[As18] "Madrid has decided it doesn't like the Catalonian government so it's going to violate the Spanish constitution and compel Catalonia to have an unscheduled election--but only after taking over Catalonia's main media outlets by force to ensure that its proxies win."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/921437853632081920

[As19] "Spain's creation of high level EU political prisoners this evening is the predictable consequence of @JunckerEU's abject failure to condemn Rajoy's brutal crackdown against peaceful Catalan voters--just as I and many others warned. You signed this blank cheque, Jean-Claude."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/920030064653361153

[As20] "EU silence has now led to this: Spain's ruling political party just made a barely veiled threat to have Catalonia's current president shot."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/917390193883340806

[As20] "132 videos of Spanish police attacks against Catalan voters in the referendum of October 1, 2017"
https://twitter.com/wikileaks/statuses/922257331940978688

[As22] "Jailing of 8 Catalan ministers for "rebellion" (15-30 years) is corrupt. Charge requires violence but the only violence has been from Spain."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/926170131788632066

[As23] ""El nivel de independencia judicial de España, por debajo del de Kenia, China o Arabia Saudí #Cataluña #Catalunya"
http://bit.ly/2LOtaOE

[As24] "The world's most exciting slumber party is happening right now in Catalonia as the population has occupied more than 2000 voting centers to protect them from now until Sunday night. This weekend will give birth to friendships, romances, marriages--and perhaps a nation."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/913943904571060225

[As25] "More:" [images of one of the demonstrations]
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/929413853716336640

[As26] "Claims of fake news are the new fake news. The last week has seen the NYTimes, Wash' Post and Guardian credulously reprint a story from Spanish establishment rag El País which insinuates that the prolific, widely shared and authenticated videos of Spain's violence are fake."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/922825723898982400

[As27] "Catalonia's Vice President and six other cabinet ministers have been arrested for 'sedition' and 'rebellion' by Spain and are now in jail. Extradition warrants (EAWs) for president @KRLS and other members in Belgium have been ordered. #Catalonia"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/926124434494312448

[As28] "Massive million strong angry crowd tonight in #Barcelona calls for Spain to free #Catalonia's political prisoners. #Freedom11N"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/929445168385753089

[As29] "An enormous defining Gandhian struggle will now commence in Catalonia to secure their declaration of independence against the full weight of the Spanish state, from the use of force, to financial interdiction, censorship, computer hacking, intelligence, propaganda and diplomacy."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/923907250833514496

[As30] "How to lose #Catalonia Step 1 Brutalize their voters. Step 2 Arrest their civic leaders. Step 3 Abolish their Parliament. (h/t @SMarwickYes)"
http://bit.ly/2LOo58Q

[As31] ""Europe, if you do not speak up about Spain's brutal attacks on peaceful voters, next time, having made brutality the European norm, who will speak up for you?" [As31]
http://bit.ly/2LRdqu9

[As32] "Official Catalan referendum vote results as announced on TV3 Votes: 2.262,424 Yes: 2,020,144 (90.09%) No: 176,565 (7.87%) Blank/spoiled: 2.92%"
http://bit.ly/2LOtGfy

[As33] "Think you had a bad day? Want to be cheered up? This woman went to cast her vote in Rajoy's Spain on Sunday. #Determination #CatalanReferendum #Catalunya"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/915238209965223937

[As34] "This is the real Spanish state--and why Catalonia wants to leave it. Masked government agents seize ballot boxes and abuse voters. #CatalanReferendum #ReferendumCAT #1o"

https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/914429999188496384

[Wk35] "Catalonia says 'Yes' to independence from Spain with %90.09 of the vote. Around 80% of polling stations managed to stay open."
https://twitter.com/wikileaks/statuses/914631188882522112

[As36] "Spain's 10 Catalan political prisoners as of last night. 8 cabinet ministers now added to 2 top civil society leaders jailed 2 weeks ago."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/926393691060793349

[As37] "President of Spain's Supreme Court demands that Catalonia shutdown its inquiry into Spanish state violence against voters -- the images of which shocked the world."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/919199506004152321

[As38] "Marches against Spanish police violence in Catalan cities yesterday following the crackdown on Sunday"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/915509973886672896

[As39] "RAC1: Seven drunk Spanish police agents smash up #Barcelona bar because the waiters spoke Italian (they thought it was Catalan)"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/923293477625925633

[As40] "Catalan voters in Sabadell push back Spanish police this morning trying to stop #CatalanReferendum #referendum-CAT"
https://twitter.com/wikileaks/statuses/914435472465768449

[As41] "Finland prepares parliamentary vote to recognize Catalonia"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/924018752554926083

[As42] "1,066: Final injury figure for Catalan voters subject to attacks by Spanish forces on Oct 1. - 23 more than 79 years old - two less than 11 years old - 82.5% bruises and lesions - heart attack, brain trauma, fractured femur, shot in the eye, blackouts"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/921535842702843906

[As43] "The last Catalan president to declare independence was Lluís Companys who was executed by Franco after the Gestapo captured him. Here, Catalonia's foreign minister complains that Spain's ruling party PP has must made the same threat against president @KRLS"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/917384081784139776

[As44] "The images Madrid feared start to emerge from its assault on Catalonia's polling stations; Voters chant "I will vote!" ("votarem") #CatalanReferendum"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/914393738667020288

[As45] "It takes a Catalan village: Parishioners sing to hide vote counting from Spain's military police in Sunday's referendum on Catalan independence. #CatalanReferendum #1o"
http://bit.ly/2LNVbWy

[As46] "A bet against WikiLeaks is a losing bet. WikiLeaks has a perfect authentication record. El País claims Spain has no political prisoners while Catalan civic leaders are in prison right now for the definitive political crime of 'sedition'. El País is a joke."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/921450107018637312

[As47] "Spain's judicial independence is worse than that of China, Kenya and Saudi Arabia according 2017 rankings from the World Economic Forum #Catalonia"
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/921800393146937345

[As48] "Big day in Catalonia developments 1. President @KRLS offered Spain to call elections for Dec 20 2. Spain went back on its earlier offer and would not agree to no election interference (e.g taking over the media with 155) 3. Election offer dropped. DUI rumored for tomorrow 2pm."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/923619039578075138

[As49] "If at first you don't succeed, try like a Catalan (trying to vote)."
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/917535053185536000

[As50] "LIVE STREAM: voters in #Barcelona confront Spanish police trying to shut down polling stations #CatalanReferendum".
https://twitter.com/JulianAssange/statuses/914411354878038016