

Mediatisation and Rallies during the 2019 Valencian Regional Election: Between ‘media logic’ and ‘political logic’

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses how political rallies develop in an age of intense mediatisation in which politicians and media influence one another. In this connection, we look at the Regional Elections held in the Valencian Autonomous Community in April 2019. For the first time, these coincided with a General Election, so that even more was at stake than usual. We wanted to know how political rallies were designed and what impact they had on both social networks and on television. The data were obtained through a qualitative observational analysis of the key rallies of the main parties taking part in the elections (PP, PSOE, *Compromís*, *Ciudadanos*, *Unidas Podemos*, and *Vox*). We combined that approach with a quantitative methodology for content analysis of the various rally postings made by parties and their leaders on their official Facebook and Twitter accounts. We also studied *À Punt*'s TV coverage of the same rallies in its news. On the one hand, the results

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indicate that election rallies continue to be highly ritualised events. Political parties carefully plan their rallies, always mindful of how these will be reported in today's highly fragmented media systems — especially in social networks. On the other hand, our study suggests that information on rallies is still tightly controlled by the parties — something that is commonplace in Spanish election campaigns.

Keywords: election rallies, political ritual, election campaign, regional elections.

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INTRODUCTION: MEDIATISATION AND RITUALISM IN ELECTORAL RALLIES

Rituals and symbols are key factors in political communication, as a host of studies in many fields have shown, especially those in Sociology and Anthropology (Navarini, 2001). In fact, as Mazzoleni argues, there is no such thing as politics without ritual: “Ritual is, by its very nature, a kind of political language, a highly formalised communication that is governed by expressive rules that reflect the cultural organisation of a given society or political context” (2010: 132). To some extent, adds the author, political ritual is a language through which the competition for power is manifested in a more tangible, visible, and even theatrical form (Mazzoleni, 2010: 136). While there is no politics without rituals, neither are there rituals without symbols (understood as non-material meanings and values that clothe aforesaid rituals, legitimising them and giving them meaning). Although modern politics has traditionally been considered as a sphere shaped solely by rational deeds, several authors have highlighted the importance of symbolic, affective factors in political actions (Lakoff, 2016; Richards, 2010).

Election campaigns are highly symbolic events. They bring together a whole host of ritualised communication deeds channelling political activity. Rallies feature mass audiences at public venues where the candidate gives his or her election speech (López García, Gamir Ríos and Valera Ordaz, 2018: 132). Such rallies have always

been one of the commonest and most successful kinds of election events. That is why this paper analyses their role in election campaigns in general, and specifically in the April 2019 Valencian Regional Election. The latter is of particular interest given that it was a ‘double first’. That is because it was the first time that the Regional Election was: (1) held separately from the Municipal Elections; (2) coincided with Spain’s General Election.

The purpose of political rallies during an election campaign has changed markedly over the last few decades. Following the historic classification proposed by Norris (2000), in the so-called ‘pre-modern campaigns’, rallies were the first stage of political communication (Blumler and Kavanagh (1999)), the goal being to gather citizens so that the candidate(s)/party could explain his/its policies and interact with the general public. This goal made sense in a setting where: (1) the public was sufficiently politicised to attend rallies to discover a candidate’s policies; (2) rallies strengthened voting decisions, creating the fleeting impression of closeness between politicians and citizens. The latter function was particularly important at a time when the media were much less influential than today. From this standpoint, rallies were key rituals for conveying the political message to the citizenry.

From the 1950s and 1960s onwards, the media’s consolidation in conveying the political message, particularly through television, led to new models, languages, and

new users of political symbols and rituals. As Dayan and Katz (1995) explain, during this stage, the impact of rituals and ceremonies on society was conditioned by their media representation. The media's ability to constantly act as the go-between in the general public's knowledge of the social world has been termed 'mediatisation' (Couldry and Hepp, 2013; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). This concept, on which there is a large body of academic literature, does not allude to the media's role in mediating between events and the public, neither does it try to define or quantify the impact of the media's message on the audience. Instead, it seeks to critically analyse the media's interdependencies with other cultural, social, and political actors in interpreting this sphere (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2015; Esser and Strömback, 2014).

There are two theoretical approaches to mediatisation, which have converged somewhat of late (Couldry and Hepp, 2013: 196). On the one hand, there is the so-called 'media logic' approach, which is to say that the media impose forms of representation on other social actors, whose protagonism depend on their compliance with said forms. This especially affects political subjects, who must design their measures and policies as media events so that they can be conveyed to society as a whole. On the other hand, there is the so-called 'constructivist perspective' (Berger and Luckmann, 1996), which stresses the importance of the media in modelling communication of social and cultural life. This approach stresses that we interpret and experience the social world through a set of messages, discourses, images, texts, and sounds. In modern societies, all these inputs overwhelmingly come from the media, which play a major part in our daily lives. The power attributed to the media's power to 'create' reality stems from processes, historical contingency, and institutional and technological complexity.

Election campaigns over these years underwent a stage of "modernisation" (Norris, 2000), in which the biggest changes went hand-in-hand with growing mediatisation. This has reached such a pitch that some speak of *media campaigns* in explaining these transformations, often overlooking the key role that political subjects

still play in their design and execution (Mazzoleni, 2010). In any event, we are now living in an age in which campaign organisation and communication is increasingly professionalised and placed in the hands of political advisors (or, less flatteringly, 'spin doctors'), who draw up sophisticated political and electoral strategies (Maarek, 2009). Furthermore, 'image management' is no longer the preserve of the wealthy few but rather, has become a basic necessity for ensuring election success. This development is in keeping with the advent of television as the main channel for conveying and legitimising political discourse. As far as voters are concerned, 'being on the telly' means being on "the political landscape" (Maarek, 2009).

In this second stage, the demands and pace of the new and popular medium of television greatly boosted both the appeal and fragmentation of political information both in and beyond election campaigns. In any case, TV's dramatic, leisure-oriented nature meant that election campaigns were presented as if they were shows (Edelman, 1988). The best-known TV genre — advertising — came to epitomise modern election campaigns, as did debates among the candidates (Canel, 2006; Barranco Sáiz, 2010). The importance of image in the medium meant that attention now tended to focus on the candidate, eclipsing the political party. This "personalisation" (Bennett, 2012) drew on both candidates and on entertainment strategies that made political information accessible to a wide range of audiences. Since then, simple straightforward messages delivered in an almost telegraphic form — 'sound bites' as we would say now — became the norm. This information could then be used to come up with attention-grabbing headlines. This approach was complemented by a sensationalist treatment of candidates' personal lives (Casero Ripollés, Ortells Badenes and Rosique Cedillo, 2017; Holtz Bacha, 2003). These have all become everyday practices in TV coverage of politics. These practices converged over time into "infotainment" [that is, a combination of 'information' and 'entertainment'] (Thussu, 2007; Langer, 2000), which comes in endless varieties. In relation to political discourse, we can find it in purely news programmes (such as news and interviews] but also in programmes that are more akin to entertain-

ment, such as talk shows and ‘magazine’ slots (Berrocal Gonzalo, 2017; Mazzoleni and Sfardini, 2009).

This ever more mediatised electoral setting (in which the public depend more on the media to explain what is going on in the campaign) has led to less public interest in going to rallies and listening to political speeches. This in turn has given rise to a different kind of rally, which is largely ‘pre-fabricated’ and for show. For several decades now, rallies have become little more than circuses put on for the media’s benefit (Contreras, 1990). Their purpose is just to put on a display of public support of a given manifesto and to make sure the media put over the message. Thus those attending rallies are now almost wholly drawn from the party faithful, who pack the stands and cheer on their leaders, showing the party’s strength before media audiences. Thus rallies are no longer held to convince those in the stands (for these are party hacks and supporters) but rather to persuade those at home who watch a brief, edited version of the proceedings in which the media give ‘the highlights’. If we put this in terms of electoral strategy, rallies are no longer political acts to convince to rally-goers but rather are little more than “position statements” (Mazzoleni, 2010: 150). Although rallies are not used to win votes, rallies and party members still play the ritual, ‘theatrical’ role of yore.

Finally, the third stage of political communication is the one in which we now find ourselves. In it, the electoral campaign has undergone further mediatisation so that those taking part not only include the media and leading politicians but also citizens themselves. Their messages now criss-cross the digital world. As sundry studies have shown, the causes behind this mediatisation of politics are many and complex. Strömback (2008), for example, sees today’s mediatisation as a four-stage process in which the media are also influenced by other political actors. For Strömback, the important thing is knowing the degree of interdependence between politics and society regarding the media (Strömback, 2008: 228). Mazzoleni and Schulz raised a similar point a few years back (1999: 247), arguing that although the media occupy centre stage in modern political life, political institutions still

have control over political processes. That is why this paper delves into the features, functions, and goals of political rallies today, and the extent to which they are mediatised in modern electoral campaigns.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND HYPOTHESIS

To reach our goal, we shall analyse the major rallies of the main political parties in the Valencian Regional Election held on the 28th of April 2019. The parties are: PSPV-PSOE, PP, Compromís, Ciudadanos, Unides Podem, and Vox. We chose the Valencian setting because its Regional Election coincided with the Spanish General Election. The Valencian President — Ximo Puig — chose to bring forward the Regional Election to coincide with the nationwide election. The fact that both elections were to be held on the same day gave the major parties a somewhat stronger presence in the region than if only the General Election had been held in April. In fact, of the five major national parties, two chose Valencia to close their election campaigns on Friday the 26th of April, while another (PP) held a rally on the morning of the same day (even though its campaign had already closed in Madrid). This was highly unusual in national campaigns given that Madrid is the country’s information hub and is thus the natural choice for major rallies.

First, we shall analyse rallies based on a qualitative approach based on on-the-spot observation of each rally, with the sole exception of the Compromís closing rally held on the 26th of April (instead, we chose to attend the key rally held by Coalición Valencianista on Saturday 13th April). We paid special attention to the organisation of each rally, the staging, the key themes, and any other detail of a symbolic or ritual nature that one would only notice by attending the event.

We shall then look at how the various parties holding these rallies managed communication in social media — especially in Facebook and Twitter. We chose these social media because they are the ones currently most used in Spain (*The Social Media Family*, 2019). The gathering of the Twitter and Facebook corpus

was made possible by the Netlytic application, which allowed us to download all the tweets and posts published in real time by the political parties and their main leaders. All of the tweets and posts published on the day following the main rally in Valencia and the day after that were gathered for later analysis. In total, the corpus comprised 640 tweets and 85 posts. The social media were then manually examined, using quantitative methodology to analyse contents.

Last, we checked media coverage of these rallies by the news programmes of À Punt, Valencia's public television network. To this end, we looked at the treatment of these events in the TV station's main news (broadcast shortly after the rally), whether in the first or second edition of the news. We considered issues of a discursive nature regarding text and image to discover what elements the news prioritised and highlighted in the rallies of each political party. Here, one should note that the time spent on the electoral coverage of a given party is governed by the Central Electoral Board (Junta Electoral Central — JEC), with the time spent on a given party being proportional to the seats it won in the previous elections.

Based upon this analysis, in which we mixed various methodologies (a quantitative content analysis, and a qualitative approximation covering observation and discourse type), we came up with the following research questions and hypotheses:

H1: Rallies have become smaller events and are not aimed at those attending but rather try to create content to feed the media (both television and social media).

Q1: In this respect, to what extent are rallies still important rituals in today's electoral campaigns, especially in the case of emerging political parties?

Q2: Bearing in mind that the Central Electoral Board (JEC) sets the time that television networks can spend on a given political party during elections campaigns, how much mediatisation is there in news on election rallies?

RESEARCH RESULTS

The observational analysis of rallies

Compromís, the Valencian coalition, held its rally in Valencia at the beginning of the campaign on Saturday the 13th of April. The place chosen was an open-air one—the City of Valencia's Turia Gardens, close to the Music Palace (*Palau de la Música*). The venue allowed the public to attend in concentric rings around the stage. Those closest to the stage were seated, those further away were standing. The rally featured key figures in the coalition and focused on the candidates for the two elections: Joan Baldoví, Head of the Party List for Valencia, and Mónica Oltra, candidate for the presidency of The Valencian Regional Government. It was an election campaign that caught Compromís off-balance for the party had strongly opposed the decisions taken by Ximo Puig—the Valencian President—to bring forward the Regional Election. The rally mobilised party members and sympathisers in a campaign they would rather have fought later on. There were worries about the Regional Election falling on the same date as a General Election (in which Compromís did much worse than in the regional and municipal elections). In addition to this rally, Compromís' candidates returned for the closing campaign held on the 26th of April.

For the national elections, the first party to hold its main rally in Valencia was another coalition in our sample: Unidas Podemos. Its rally was held on the 17th of April. It had been planned for Valencia's Port area but there were last-minute changes and it was rescheduled for one of the halls in The Valencia Trade Fair. The setting was rather grey and depressing (outside Valencia's city centre and in a large, empty industrial warehouse to boot). This was made worse by the sparse turn-out of some 1,900 souls. This compared poorly with the turn-out for other parties' rallies with similar number of seats in Valencia (such as Ciudadanos, and Compromís) and with the historic rally in Pabellón de la Fonteta (stadium) in December 2015, which drew over 10,000 people (filling the stadium, and with 2000 listening outside). Going back to the grey warehouse, there was a circular dais in the centre

which the audience sat around. Sundry speakers (we counted no fewer than thirteen) took turns to speak until the star — Pablo Iglesias — gave his speech. His discourse was intended to surprise and to show off Unidas Podemos as a progressive political party whose mission was to serve citizens' interests ('folk', in the language commonly used by Unidas Podemos). Iglesias demanded "an opportunity" to change things.

A day before the campaign closed, Vox held a rally in the Science Museum (sited in Valencia's futuristic City of Arts and Sciences). There was a lot of media buzz before the event, given expectations that the Far-Right party would make big gains, and given the success of its rallies held elsewhere. One of Vox's strengths is its use of social media and it completely filled the venue to the point where some people were left outside. Vox's leader, Santiago Abascal (the party leader and main speaker) briefly spoke to them through a loud-hailer.

The size of the rally was not only spread through Vox's social medial but also by TV and radio, which covered the rally and went overboard in stressing the massive attendance. We do not know how Vox's other rallies went but we can say that the story of a stadium so chock-a-block with supporters that others were left outside was a lie. In fact, Vox shut the entrance gate when the stadium was still only two-thirds full. Even so, the usual scene took place, with Santiago Abascal addressing those left milling around outside (some 500 people) with a loud-hailer. Then the rally proper began.

There were three speakers at the rally (where attendance far outstripped that of other parties with the sole exception of PSOE). The speakers were: (1) the presidential candidate for the Valencian Regional Government, José María Llanos; (2) the man topping the party list for Valencia in the General Election, Ignacio Gil Lázaro; (3) Vox's leader, Santiago Abascal. When Abascal began his speech, the gates of the stadium were opened so that those outside could come in. They all found a seat and this was little wonder for the stadium was still one-third empty. The earlier scene with The Leader addressing those outside with a loud-hailer

was thus no more than a clever propaganda stunt to suggest a stadium packed to the gunnels.

The other three political parties held their rallies on the 26th of April — the last day of the campaign. However, in Partido Popular's case, the rally that officially ended the campaign was held in Madrid. PP scheduled a rally on Friday evening, hoping that the party's national leader, Pablo Casado, would attend but he finally decided to close the campaign in Madrid. In the end, PP hurriedly organised a rally for Friday morning at the Marina Beach Club venue, which Casado attended. The closing rally for the Regional Election was held on Friday evening, as planned. Having two rallies gave an impression of improvisation and differences between the party's national and regional management. To make matters worse, Pablo Casado turned up at the Marina Beach Club meeting an hour later, forcing the previous speakers to pan out their speeches before a sparse audience (some 400 people, who only filled half the venue). The staging of the event, instead of conveying political strength, revealed rifts and organisational problems.

Ciudadanos closed its campaign in Valencia in exactly the same place as Compromís — the Turia Gardens, near the Music Palace. Apart from the unusual nature of the venue, the rally itself was undoubtedly one of the most unconventional of those covered in this paper. Ciudadanos held activities in the Turia Gardens throughout the day, including a race between party candidates (which, as was wholly foreseeable, was won by Albert Rivera). Apart from Rivera, others taking part included: the presidential candidate for the Valencian Regional Government, Toni Cantó; the head of the party list for Valencia, María Muñoz; and the candidates for Madrid, Inés Arrimadas and Edmundo Bal. Despite the festive stage-setting, the rally was poorly attended, racking up more or less the same number as Compromís two weeks early — some 2000 people).

Last, PSOE held its closing rally in Valencia's Parque Central (central park). In many respects, the Socialists' meeting was the most like the rallies of the past. First,

it was the one that had the highest turn-out (some 10,000 people) and the organisation was impeccable, marshalling an army of Socialist party members and sympathisers in Valencia. The speakers were: the Mayoral candidate for Valencia, Sandra Gómez (even though municipal elections were not being fought); Spain's Minister for Employment, and Secretary of the PSOE, José Luis Ábalos; Ximo Puig, the President of The Valencian Region; the presidential candidate in Spain's General Election, Pedro Sánchez. In Sánchez's case, his arrival during the rally was perfectly staged. He entered the stadium through the central passageway, waving to party members left and right. He was cheered on until he reached the stage. His entry lasted over five minutes and, like the rest of the rally,

conveyed political strength and confidence in winning the elections — a message pressed home by the succession of speakers.

Analysis of the rallies in the social media

As one can see, the political parties used their social media accounts to spread information on forthcoming rallies. Of the 640 tweets published between the day of the rally and a couple of days later, no fewer than 298 (47%) were published after the event. As Table 1 shows, Compromís' presidential candidate for the Valencian Regional Government, Mónica Oltra (69%), and Ciudadanos (84%) were respectively the politician and the party that were most heavily promoted through Twitter.

Table 1 Twitter coverage of rallies in Valencia

Party / Candidacy	Rally date	Dates analysed	Number of Tweets	Tweets on the rally on VLC	% published on these days
Compromís	13 April	13 and 14 April	89	48	54%
Mónica Oltra	13 April	13 and 14 April	62	43	69%
PP	26 April	26 and 27 April	58	27	47%
Isabel Bonig	26 April	26 and 27 April	7	4	57%
PSPV-PSOE	26 April	26 and 27 April	54	23	43%
Ximo Puig	26 April	26 and 27 April	24	6	25%
Ciudadanos	26 April	26 and 27 April	70	59	84%
Toni Cantó	26 April	26 and 27 April	48	15	31%
Unides Podem	17 April	17 and 18 April	146	39	27%
Rubén Martínez Dalmau	17 April	17 and 18 April	21	2	10%
Vox	25 April	25 and 26 April	26	16	62%
José María Llanos	25 April	25 and 26 April	35	16	46%

Source: The Authors.

Table 2 Facebook coverage of rallies in Valencia

Party / Candidacy	Rally date	Dates analysed	Number of posts	Posts on rally on VLC	% published on these days
Compromís	13 April	13 and 14 April	3	3	100%
<i>Mónica Oltra</i>	13 April	13 and 14 April	7	3	43%
PP	26 April	26 and 27 April	11	4	36%
<i>Isabel Bonig</i>	26 April	26 and 27 April	5	3	60%
PSPV-PSOE	26 April	26 and 27 April	6	3	50%
<i>Ximo Puig</i>	26 April	26 and 27 April	6	3	50%
Ciudadanos	26 April	26 and 27 April	2	1	50%
<i>Toni Cantó</i>	26 April	26 and 27 April	11	6	55%
Unides Podem	17 April	17 and 18 April	10	2	20%
<i>Rubén Martínez Dalmau</i>	17 April	17 and 18 April	6	1	17%
Vox	25 April	25 and 26 April	18	3	17%
<i>José María Llanos</i>	25 April	25 and 26 April	0	0	0%

Source: The Authors.

In the case of Facebook, of the 85 initial posts published by parties and candidates between the rally and afterwards, 32 (38%) were about the event itself. Although this is far fewer than Twitter, some data stand out, for example, all of Compromís' posts were spent on promoting and managing communication of the party's main rally. PSPV-PSOE and its candidate, Ximo Puig, took more or less the same approach (50% of posts) as did Ciudadanos, whose candidate Toni Cantó was the politician who published most posts over the 11-day period and wrote most about the rally (6). This reveals the intense political activity in social media. Unides Podem shows the other side of the coin, with its leader (Rubén Martínez Dalmau) publishing very few posts on its rallies (20% and 17%). Despite the party

having two of the most active accounts in Facebook, only 10 and 6 posts, respectively were published. This also applies to Vox. Of the 18 posts published by Vox, only 3 covered the rally (17%). Even more remarkably, José María Llanos, Vox's presidential candidate for the Valencian Regional Government published nothing on Facebook.

From the data gathered, one can say that Twitter is the tool that is most used for these kinds of events. This is hardly surprising given the nature of the application since one can reach more people through public hash tags, channelling conversations on a specific topic. Even so, Twitter is also used in some corporate accounts to amplify messages published by the national party or

Picture 1 Social media posts on the rally's success

Source: content published on Twitter and Facebook.

by star politicians at both national and regional levels. This was mainly the case in Ciudadanos' account for the Valencian Region, whose original content only made up 14% of the news published on the rally (51 tweets of the 59 published on the rally were re-tweeted to other official party accounts). Vox and Compromís also used this approach, albeit to a lesser extent. By contrast, Unides Podem, PSPV-PSOE and PP hardly used this strategy.

With regard to the content shared on social media, it is common to combine two kinds of messages. These are ones: (1) citing what presidential candidates (whether for the national or regional governments) said at a rally, which usually sums up the key points in the party's

manifiesto; (2) showing photos, videos, include texts giving thanks and restating that the rally was a great success (at least in media terms). Looked at like this, a rally is always a big hit, showing the high hopes the party has of winning the election (Picture 1).

Television analysis of rallies

Our audiovisual analysis will follow chronological order. Compromís was the first party to hold its main rally of the campaign. It did so on the morning of the 13th of April. On this occasion, it was covered by the midday news, which starts at 14:30 P.M. The pro-Valencian group held its rally in the Turia Gardens near the Music Palace. The event was the first on the TV news and it was shown in the headlines, with

a picture of the main party leaders going up to the stage and being cheered by party members and other supporters. There were also several wide shots of the scene and of the audience.

The Compromís rally (04:02 minutes) also opened the news coverage of the campaign, even though the party did not have most seats in the Valencian Parliament. This was odd and the same treatment was not applied to the other parties. There was also live coverage even though the rally was already over. The reporter mentioned some of the proposals made at the rally, such as an office to recover public money in corruption cases, and free school lunches. The news shows several general shots of the stage and the audience waving party flags, along with the odd Valencian flag. The report conveyed a triumphant, festive event with sound bites from the candidate for Castelló, Vicent Marzà, and for Alicante, Aitana Mas. Oltra also spoke and was received with cries of “President! President!”. The report ended with a scene of all the candidates clapping the audience while flags were waved and the campaign music thundered through the stadium. The news report added new pictures of the rally to open the thematic block on the General Election, with the voice-over of the party’s Valencian candidate for the General Election, Joan Baldoví, demanding greater Central Government funding for the region.

Unidas Podemos’ main rally was held on the 17th of April in one of the halls of the Valencia Trade Fair. The rally also opened the party’s campaign and was featured in the headlines of the evening news, which began at 8.30 P.M. The TV showed the party’s presidential candidate in the General Election, Pablo Iglesias, as he entered the hall, smiling and waving to party members and other supporters. This was followed by several wide shots of the candidates climbing on to a small circular dais, with the audience gathered around them below. Unlike Compromís’ rally, the Unidas Podemos one did not open the campaign block of the news slot but correctly appeared in the order reflecting the number of seats the party held in the Spanish Congress (as required by Spain’s Electoral Act). Accordingly, it was scheduled after news cover-

age of PP, PSPV-PSOE, Compromís, and Ciudadanos. Information on the rally took up the whole of the news item (02:18 minutes), with a recording by the journalist who was following the event live. In the background, viewers could see Pablo Iglesias during his speech and the audience, who filled the small hall. The narrator explained some of the proposals. These included: (1) exhumation of those murdered and buried in unmarked mass graves during The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and in the repression that followed; (2) closure of Immigrant Internment Centres; (3) regulation of flat rental prices; (4) raising the minimum wage.

Both Iglesias and the presidential candidate for the Valencian Regional Government, Rubén Martínez Dalmau, appealed for tactical voting and criticised the misuse of the State apparatus for political ends. Sound bites from each were broadcast. Martínez Dalmau was shown from the back, with a bland background whereas Iglesias’ face was shown, insisting in the straightforward nature of his party’s proposals. During the newscast, there were several pictures of the two politicians with their arms around each other’s waist, the other arm raised with closed fist. The audience also raised their arms and fists (in the old pre-Civil War Republican salute), waving the party flags, and the odd person shouting “Yes we can!” The camera shots all gave the impression of a full hall.

It was then Vox’s turn, which gave its main rally in the Valencia Regional on the afternoon of the 25th of April. On Valencian public TV, The news on the rally (32 seconds) appeared at the end of the nightly electoral campaign block. At that moment, Vox had no seats in the Valencian Parliament. The coverage consisted of a couple of cell phone pictures of the rally with a caption “Vox holds its main rally in Valencia, filling the Science Museum”. The news section stated that the party’s national leader (Santiago Abascal) had been received with shouts of “President!”. In the pictures Abascal appeared, making his way with difficulty through the crowds of people cheering him and filming him with their ‘phones. The presenter also said that over five thousand people had attended

the rally. When it came to the political content, Vox's proposals to slash taxes and the public administration were highlighted, to scrap the Gender Violence Act, and to defend Valencian from the El Puig Norms.

The three other parties — PP, PSOE, and Ciudadanos — held their main rallies on the 26th of April, which was the last day of the election campaign. The central section of the public broadcasting TV news that night began with a report on the PP rally in Marina de València (03:20 minutes). The information began with a live feed from the meeting which at that moment had just finished. The reporter summarised some of the proposals made at the rally, such as amending the law to make life sentences permanently reviewable. She also highlighted the call by the presidential candidate for the Valencian Regional Government to concentrate the Centre-Right vote to ensure the unity of Spain. The report was titled "The PP campaign closes" and was illustrated with various scenes of the rally showing PP politicians.

The live feed gave way to a short extract from the rally in which Bonig said "The Valencian Region is a bulwark against secessionist nationalism". After the statements, there was a report on the rally that had been held in the same place that morning and that had been planned as the main rally in which the PP's presidential candidate in the General Election, Pablo Casado, demanded the Central-Right vote to stop PSOE winning. He stated that PSOE had struck a deal with pro-Catalan independence parties, promising to pardon their imprisoned politicians. The video included Casado's argument that his party was "the one that creates jobs". It also highlighted the PP's proposal to lower taxes for the middle class and to form an 'Andalus-style' government with a pact between PP, Ciudadanos, and Vox. The footage of the rally coincided with the image given by the party, especially when the candidates were shown against the background of the Valencian sea-side. By contrast, there were hardly any shots of the audience. The venue in which PP held its rally was fairly small compared with the venues chosen by other parties. The morning rally was also shown in the midday news, with all of

the election coverage being on the PP. Thus the rally paid handsome dividends in terms of media coverage.

The information on PSOE in the evening news (02:31 minutes) on the same day consisted of a live connection to the closing of the campaign in Valencia's Central Park (Parque Central). The reporter noted that according to Ximo Puig, the party's presidential candidate for the Valencian Regional Government, Sánchez was of key importance to the region. Puig also called for undecided voters to opt for the Socialist Party to stop Right-Wing parties coming to power. The report was captioned "'Puig and Sánchez end the campaign in Valencia'", showing footage of the festive atmosphere at the rally as the public awaited the arrival of the candidates.

The live broadcast gave way to a video showing the preparations for the rally. Mention was again made of the importance of the occasion given that the rally was the final event in the campaign and would take place at a venue that symbolised the change of government in both the city and the region. According to Puig, the goal was to stress the successful management in the Valencian region during the last legislature and to underline the Socialist Party's commitment to 'The Mediterranean Rail Corridor'. Nevertheless, Puig's statement was not made at the rally but instead at an earlier event. Sánchez was not shown at the rally so in this respect, his presence had no media impact. The report then went on to cover Sánchez's visits to Castelló and Alicante during the election campaign, showing the candidates at the rallies. This time, Sánchez did appear at a rally, albeit at one held in Toledo the same day, and at which he slated PP and Ciudadanos for having repeated the lies of the Far-Right. Sánchez asked for the votes of undecided electors. In this case, the footage was provided by the PSOE and relayed by satellite.

The last item in the news coverage was the end of Ciudadanos' campaign in Valencia (02:07 minutes). À Punt TV had a live broadcast from the Turia Gardens next to the Music Palace. The report was placed in the campaign news block that Ciudadanos was allocated

in keeping with its number of parliamentary seats. The reporter noted the number of people attending the meeting and highlighted the appeal for unity and equality made by Inés Arrimadas in her speech. The caption given to the report was “Rivera and Cantó also close their campaign in Valencia”. In the footage supplied by the party, one saw the candidates arriving, being cheered by the audience, and a packed venue. The live broadcast gave way to a video covering the morning race held by Ciudadanos in the City of Valencia, and which occupied all of the news on the party in the midday newscast. At the end of the race, Rivera said that the goal was to put on a final sprint before the elections so that he could head a Liberal, Constitutionalist government without having to rely on support from separatist parties, and that would throw Sánchez (Spain’s incumbent President) out of power. The evening news broadcast the same sound bite put out in the midday news but the statements at the main rally held that evening were not included. The video footage showed Ciudadanos candidates running in a group along the Turia Gardens athletics circuit, with Rivera being the first to cross the Finishing Line in what was a metaphor for the election race.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Our study revealed the wide range of electoral choices given to voters, the host of technological devices for conveying information, and the way the media’s waning role way has begun to change the form taken by rallies.

From this standpoint and in response to our first hypothesis (H1), rallies in the present stage of political communication are not run as shows put on solely for the media’s benefit (even though parties strongly bear the media in mind). Rather, rallies have become a mechanism for firing up the party’s own supporters and sympathisers, and for showing enthusiasm and faith in victory. The reason why rallies now play this role is that the media have changed, fragmenting and diversifying (Chadwick, 2013). What can be seen now (unlike what happened in the past) is that

rallies have become events that fill up TV time, with vital spin-off for social media. Thus stage-setting no longer depends solely on the interests and criteria of the traditional media but also takes into account a party’s political strategy.

Other forums for holding campaign events have sprung up given that parties can no longer mobilise the general public as they once did (or they simply find that it is no longer worthwhile doing so). That is why parties now focus on both the traditional and the new media to put their messages across. As we have seen, this strategy generally leads to parties prioritising smaller events (which are both cheaper and easier to fill). The result is many more events than before, and whose purpose is to fill the news agenda and spawn an endless flow of messages aimed not just at the media but also at party members and the general public. The carefully programmed, choreographed rally is thus largely a thing of the past. In modern rallies, leaders preach to the converted, putting over a message that is carefully tailored for the consumption of the mass media, which have no choice but to both attend and to cover the events.

The 2019 Valencian Regional bears these points out. With the exception of the PSOE’s rally and possibly that of Vox, the party rallies were not the mass events and demonstrations of strength seen in days of yore. It was not so long ago that most political parties could fill Valencia’s Bull Ring without breaking into a sweat. One party — PP — even went so far as to fill the whole of the Mestalla football stadium in 1996. Despite changes in staging and new communication strategies, rallies are still ritual events for: (1) conveying an image of success and triumph to the party faithful and to society at large; (2) providing content within a ‘media’ framework. This is why rallies are planned to be as spectacular as possible. These events are strongly ‘personalised’, the speeches given must be short and make a big impression. The symbolic gestures historically used at rallies — flag-waving, the leaders’ entrance accompanied by cheering, applause and the rest of the ballyhoo — remain unchanged.

In this study and in response to the first research question (Q1), these functions were seen in all meetings although some fulfilled these better than others. For example, from this standpoint, the PSOE clearly emerged best from the comparison. Its rally was not only attended by more people but it also strongly conveyed an image of success and high hopes of victory — something that was clearly communicated in both the politicians' speeches and the general atmosphere. The same was true of the Vox rally, whose usual ritual and theatrical flourishes were perfectly planned to foster collective enthusiasm among the party's followers. This collective euphoria was packaged within the image of 'a full house' — an impression the party was keen to put over even when it was patently false (as we have shown). With regard to the remaining parties, two of them — Compromís and Ciudadanos — met expectations with up-beat, open rallies (two of them being held at the same venue). The rallies were canonical in various ways yet also had innovative touches (Ciudadanos' 'race'). By contrast, the other two rallies (Unidas Podemos and PP) were poorly organised and the PP's last-minute changes of plan led to a second rally in an attempt to make good the blunders in the first one. The first rally seemed sparsely attended — something that was easy to miss on the TV coverage given that the party's communication teams supplied the footage so that the rally would appear in the best possible light.

From the media standpoint, the rallies did their job, generating lots of messages in the social media — something that the parties and candidates did their best to foster (although some did more than others). The rallies were also echoed on TV, occupying all the time the À Punt public broadcasting network spent on each party within the campaign section. Nevertheless, it is worth noting the treatment of Compromís' rally on the day of the rally and in the following electoral section when by rights the Central Electoral Board' (JEC) norms ruled out such coverage. The length of the report is also noteworthy for it was the longest report on any of the party rallies, as were the excerpts of the speeches given by Compromís' leaders (4). Yet the fact is that from this point on, the public TV network

scrupulously followed the JEC regulations. By contrast, the PSOE and Ciudadanos rallies were not as heavily covered on TV as the respective parties would have liked. In fact, À Punt did not give any excerpts from the speeches of the leaders of these two parties from the main rally. Instead, the excerpts given were taken from earlier events. This is somewhat surprising given that rallies are largely held to provide high-impact TV footage of the leader and the party with a view to garnering votes.

It is possible that these parties grasped that there was much more at stake in the social media than on mainstream TV, or that social media was much better for spreading political content. The number of tweets on rallies supports this idea (especially if one looks at the accounts of Ciudadanos in the Valencian Region, and of its leader Toni Cantó). These accounts were very active but the same cannot be said of the Twitter accounts of PSPV-PSOE and Ximo Puig. In this case, other parties were more participative when it came to this platform. Facebook did not seem to be a key channel, although it must be said that all the parties and their respective leaders used this social network to talk about their rallies. Despite the clear benefits of such tools for political marketing (Bode and Vagra, 2017), research carried out on the Spanish case reveals that most of the leaders in the main parties and their teams still disapprove of the social media. Both tend to be blind to their scope for creativity and communication (López García and Valera Ordaz, 2017). Our study suggests that this is indeed the case.

To end, in answer to Q2, we observed that the mediatisation of rallies is complex and that inter-dependencies between media and politicians suggest a two-way street (Hjarvard, 2016). Thus, on the one hand, the coverage of Compromís' rally by À Punt TV suggests some freedom when it comes to reporting on the election campaign. In this case, it might be taken as an example of the media's willingness to set the news agenda. This strong 'mediatisation' can also be seen in the fact that parties still plan their rallies in a way that takes media reporting into account. Yet, when they choose the content and staging, they not only

think about TV coverage but more and more about how they will be spread in social networks (where image and video are of key importance).

One should also remember that while the Valencian public TV network's coverage of Compromís' rally broke the rules, from then on it followed JEC guidelines to the letter (these rules set the order in which parties are reported on and how much time is spent on each). Furthermore, the TV network did not balk at saying that Vox's rally was 'full' when we saw with our own eyes that this was not so. On this occasion, the network preferred to toe the 'party line' rather than follow a basic journalistic criterion — namely that of checking the information and telling the truth. From

this standpoint, the party's aims prevailed over those of the medium (here, we can say that it was the party that 'mediatised' the medium rather than the other way round). This is a practice borne out by other studies on mediatisation in Spain over the last few years, where parties continue to control information during election campaigns (Casero Ripollés, *et al.*, 2016; Valera Ordaz, 2015; Casero Ripollés, Izquierdo Castillo and Doménech Fabregat, 2014). Other studies (Martínez Nicolás, Humanes and Saperas, 2014) nevertheless reveal towards growing freedom in the Spanish media when it comes to imparting political information. In the case of public broadcasting corporations, such freedom is vital if these institutions are to properly perform the duties they are charged with.

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