

“Annus Horribilis” and its impact on the royal image: How scandals influenced Queen Sofia of Spain’s press coverage in newspapers *El País* and *El Mundo* from 2012 to 2014

Ewa WIDLAK
ewa.widlak@gmail.com
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Carles PONT SORRIBES
carles.pont@upf.edu
Universitat Pompeu Fabra

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Abstract

The present article analyzes press coverage on the Spanish Queen Sofia of Greece during a time when an outburst of scandals involving different members of the Spanish Royal Family took place. Its main objective is to display changes in the media treatment of the royal spouse caused by these scandals. Research for this article principally involved using content analysis and semiotics to examine coverage on the Queen between 2012 and 2014 in two newspapers, *El País* and *El Mundo*. Documentary research and in-depth interviews were also used. Paradoxically, findings indicate that when the media most heavily criticized the Crown, the Queen’s image improved.

Keywords: Spanish press, monarchy, Queen Sofia, scandals, crisis, *El País*, *El Mundo*.

“Annus horribilis” y su impacto en la imagen de la monarquía española. La Reina Sofia en los diarios *El País* y *El Mundo* (2012-2014)

Resumen

El presente artículo analiza la cobertura de prensa de la Reina Sofia durante el periodo de erupción de una serie de escándalos en los que se vieron implicados varios miembros de la Casa Real española. El objetivo principal de este trabajo es estudiar los cambios operados en el tratamiento mediático de la esposa real en el contexto de dichos escándalos. La investigación se apoya principalmente en el análisis de la cobertura de prensa de la Reina en los diarios *El País* y *El Mundo* entre 2012 y 2014, utilizando los métodos del análisis del contenido y de la semántica. La investigación documental y las entrevistas en profundidad completaron este trabajo. Los resultados principales demuestran que ante el deterioro de la imagen de la Corona, la de la Reina apuntó paradójicamente una mejoría.

Palabras clave: prensa española, monarquía, Reina Sofia, escándalos, crisis, *El País*, *El Mundo*.

Standard Reference

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1. Introduction

Being Queen of Spain is not a political responsibility, but rather a symbolic function. The Constitution does not assign her any particular role (Abellan Matesanz, 2003) and there is no law that would do so. Nevertheless, the Queen of Spain plays an important public role in the Spanish media and abroad. She publicly represents Spain and the Spanish Crown, especially in the fields of social actions, culture, and international cooperation. Additionally, the Queen receives support from the King's Office: the Queen's Bureau forms an integral part of the General Secretary of the Royal House, and as of 2014, the Queen's salary has become part of the Crown's budget as well.

Although the Queen lacks hard political power, she enjoys public visibility, which is essentially based on her social status. Despite the fact that her function is rooted in absolute monarchy, the Queen Consort's present-day role in Spain's parliamentary democracy is comparable to that of the modern first lady in other democratic systems. Like other spouses of heads of states, she is "a celebrity by extension", "a secondary character who exists publicly only in relation to the main character" (Le Bras-Chopard, 2009). Like other women whose popularity is strongly connected to their husbands', the Queen of Spain uses her fame to accomplish one essential goal-staging the power of the King and the institution he represents before the public. In this way, her role goes beyond simply accompanying the King at official acts and visits. Ultimately, the Queen participates in creating a positive image for her husband by acting in the fields of emotion and proximity, usually inaccessible to a head of state who is concentrated on national and international politics. She complements her husband's image and builds a feeling of trust that her husband can take advantage of to win over public opinion (Le Bras-Chopard, 2009).

The Queen's dominant representative duties imply strong ties with the media. Indeed, in many countries the media serves as a connector between a spouse of a head of state and the public opinion (Beasley, 2005; Burns, 2008), just as it does for the Queen of Spain. Of course, putting the Queen in the spotlight is also a double-edged weapon, which could harm both the King and the Queen. The media holds a key position in the battle between supporters and detractors of politicians and political factions (Beasley, 2005). Consequently, political spouses like the Queen can quickly become targets of media attacks that aim to tarnish public perceptions of their husbands (Burns, 2008). Furthermore, since the Queen solely exists in the public eye because she is the spouse of the head of state, her image inevitably depends on the popularity her husband enjoys.

The King and Queen's simultaneous influence is particularly interesting in the context of recent events that modified public perception of the Spanish Crown. King Juan Carlos I and the Crown in general have recently suffered the most important image crisis since the restoration of the monarchy in 1975. This crisis is negatively reflected in media portrayal of the King. Under these circumstances, one cannot but wonder how the media-portrayed image of Queen Sofia of Greece has changed in relation to the scandals affecting different members of the Royal Family. Finally, it is pertinent to ask oneself whether the Queen's new image improves or damages public perception of the Crown.

2. Research aims and scope

The research used three principal methods: press analysis, documentary research, and in-depth interviews, all of which offered pertinent answers to the initial questions.

The primary method of investigation consisted in analyzing press clippings of different scandals concerning the Royal Family in which Queen Sofía appeared. It was decided that general newspapers, being the most prestigious and high-impact mediums in Spain, should be the data sources (Imbert, Vidal, 1986, Seoane, Sueiro, 2004, van Dalen, 2012). Among different titles, two general newspapers, center-left *El País* (Imbert, Vidal, 1986) and center-right *El Mundo* (Ramírez, Robez, 1991) were selected. The choice was based on two conditions. Firstly, *El País* and *El Mundo* are the two general information newspapers with the highest distribution¹ and readership². Secondly, the ideological contrast between these publications allows us to, on the one hand, illustrate the strong political partisanship of different newspapers in the Spanish media (Hallin, 2012), and, on the other, to get a bigger picture of how the media represents Queen Sofía.

The articles selected from these publications were those that both narrated scandals and other events damaging the image of Juan Carlos I or of the Spanish Crown, and contained words or phrases referring to the Queen (such as "Reina Sofía" or "Doña Sofía"). Moreover, only the articles published in the periods of peak media coverage on the Crown's problems between April 2012 and January 2014 were included in the research data. The first peak corresponds to April and May 2012 (covering scandals related to King's trip to Botswana, the royal grandson's accident with a firearm, and the royal son-in-law's corruption scandal); the second, from March to June 2013 (covering the King's health problems and a corruption scandal involving one of the King's daughters); the third peak takes place in September (regarding the King's health problems and the same corruption case); and the last peak goes from December 2013 to January 2014 (focusing again on the King's health problems and on the corruption case).

The analysis mixes two methods of investigation: content analysis (Taylor, Bogdan, 1984, Wimmer, Dominick, 2010) and semantic analysis (Barthés, 1964, Eco, 1978), offering complementary quantitative and qualitative text analyses as well as a qualitative analysis of the pictures accompanying the texts. These two methods were chosen to help define the media-projected image of the Queen and to understand the role and importance the media has attributed to the Queen in this particularly difficult period for the Spanish Crown. Each of the selected articles was analyzed according various factors: the interest the newspapers have shown on the subject (frequency of

¹ According to the Office of Justification of Diffusion, *El País* closed 2013 with an average daily distribution of 172,400 copies. During the same period *El Mundo* had an average daily distribution of 133,140 copies.

² According to information on 2013 readership in Spain from "*Marco general de los medios en España 2014*", *El País* and *El Mundo* reached a turnout of 4.6 million and 2.8 million readers, respectively. "*Marco general de los medios en España*" is an annual publication edited by the Association for Communications Media (Asociación para los medios de comunicación).

publication and the articles' place in the newspaper), the emphasis given to the Queen (noted from 1 to 4, 1 being an article about Queen Sofia and 4 being a single mention of her name), emphasis given to other members of the Royal Family (noted with the same system), the subject matter (namely the primary and secondary subject matters of each article), semantic analysis of the pictures accompanying the text (focusing on connections between the message of the picture and the message of the text), the description of the Queen (whether adjectives have been used, analysis of grammar structures, connotations, rhetoric, etc.) and the general contextualization of the events described in the articles.

The second method of investigation, documentary research, offered a general context and allowed for the bigger picture to come through in the investigation. Above all, it served to retrace the history of the Spanish Crown, paying special attention to Queen Sofia. It also helped define the role of a public person's spouse and analyze interactions between politics and media, especially with regards to the lionization of public life. Regarding the first topic, it is no surprise that the King has always attracted the most the public attention. However, for some years, a rising interest in the Queen can be noted. Notwithstanding the absence of scientific publications on the Queen (akin to biographies on the King by Preston (2004) or Powell (1995)), journalistic publications on the Queen have been soaring in the Spanish market (Peñafiel, 1994, 2006, Carol, 2012, Eyre, 2012). The Queen even participated in a series of interviews that were quoted in a controversial book by Pilar Urbano (2009). As for the spouses of public people, a deficiency of texts analyzing the role of the consort queen in Spain's monarchy hindered the investigation work. Consequently, it was decided to turn to texts studying the role of female spouses in presidential or semi-presidential systems and extract information that could apply to the modern queen consort. The third and final theme concerning media and politics served to understand new mechanisms governing the relationship between the two estates and its impact on the public view. The lionization of Spanish politics (Sanders, Canel, 2004) has had a deep impact on the media and on public posture regarding public people's right to privacy (Maciá Barber, 2009) and this seems particularly relevant in terms of the recent media coverage on the Royal Family.

The third method used in this investigation involved in-depth interviews with two specialists on the Royal Family's media coverage. This particular approach allowed for analysis of possible royal influences on agenda setting, and allowed us to obtain detailed descriptions of the relationship between the Secretary of the Royal House and journalists. The first interview was held in September 2012 with Pilar Eyre, a journalist and author of various books on the Spanish Crown. The second interview took place in October 2012 with Marius Carol, director of *La Vanguardia* and former *La Vanguardia* correspondent to the Royal House. Interviews were initially intended to account for the bulk of research in this paper, but a very low response rate among journalists (only two of the thirty journalists and publications invited participated in the interviews) obstructed this plan. Thereupon, in-depth interviews became a peripheral method, and were solely used to understand or further explain particular points of interest in the research.

3. Transforming the King and the Crown's public image

3.1. Protection of the young Spanish democracy as the foundation of the monarchic legitimacy

According to Balmer et al. (2006) modern monarchies are powerful, internationally renewed brands. Crowns, whose reputations are based on decades and sometimes centuries of constant effort, are often the most popular national institutions, and their members' public activity brings measurable benefits in the fields of business, tourism, and public image.

In Europe, monarchies transmuted after World War I. The center of power shifted from dynasties to the people and democratic institutions. Thus, monarchies lost their power and since then, have strongly depended on public and parliamentary approval and consent for institutional support. This particular situation has required a constant effort on behalf of royal houses, mainly via long-term management and symbols that strengthen the crowns' positions in the public imagination (Balmer, 2006).

In Spain, Juan Carlos I was able to create this strong symbolism and legitimize his rule during the democratic transition (Beckner, 1996; Preston, 2004; Demange, 2010). The King, who was named head of state in the will of the deceased dictator, Francisco Franco Bahamonde, had to find a new place for the Spanish Crown in the new democratic reality. Although he was an important stakeholder during the political transformation (Preston, 2004), in reality, just one night had a profound impact on his public image. On February 23, 1981, a military coup broke out in Spain. A few hours after the coup, King Juan Carlos I appeared on TV, wearing the Chief of the Spanish Army uniform, defending democratic values, and calling the army to obey. At that precise moment, he altered his image from being a successor of Franco to being a defender of the Spanish Constitution (Powell, 1995, Preston, 2004, Vilallonga, 1993). In this manner, he not only strengthened his political role, but also succeeded in creating the myth of a leader who was able to protect the Spanish whole (Vilallonga, 1993). As analyzed by Herrero de Miñón³ (2006), Juan Carlos I was able to emphasize the Crown's symbolic role of state representative by demonstrating the Crown's continuity despite regime changes. He demonstrated his authority as military leader and showed the plasticity of the Monarchy, which was able to simultaneously incarnate the unity and diversity of Spain.

The King's role as guarantor of the Spanish democracy not only generated massive popularity for the monarchic institution (generally expressed in yearly Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) polls on the trust people have in Spain's political institutions), but also permitted the King to enjoy a certain degree of media complicity, especially regarding his private life (Zugasti, 2007; Preston, 2004; Powell, 1995; Chicharro, 2013; Falcón, 1998; interview with Pilar Eyre, 2012). The media's attitude came about in large part due to persistent fears of another tentative coup destabilizing the country. As long as the shadow of a new overthrow was visible, the Spanish press would not attempt to weaken the King's authority nor decrease his popularity. Consequently, the media's willingness to support the Crown eventually turned into a certain form of self-censorship and in some extreme cases, blatant concealment

³ Miguel Herrero Rodríguez de Miñón (PhD in Spanish Constitutional Law) is one of main authors of the Spanish Constitution.

of information. One of the most illustrative examples of this behavior was when *¡Hola!* magazine purchased nude pictures of the King in 1996. Falcón (1998), who describes this situation in her book, explains that the editor-in-chief of the gossip magazine bought said photos from a paparazzo with the sole aim of hiding them from other media players in order to protect the monarch's public image.

3.2. From silence to scandals: A degrading monarchic image

In the beginning of the 21st century, media self-censorship began to gradually relax and the initial signs of a sullyng image of the King and the Spanish Crown could be observed. Their degrading image can be explained by various political, social and media factors.

At the political level, the consolidation of the Spanish democracy dispelled the specter of a future coup and consequently invited the media to rethink the public role of the King. With the solidification of the Spanish state and with the memory of the King's intervention during the coup slowly receding (Preston, 2003), the media started to act more freely toward the King and adopted a more aggressive behavior (Powell, 1995). In parallel, the political game evolved as well. After years of *entente cordiale* with Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez and good relations with Prime Minister Felipe González, Juan Carlos I had to cope with two prime ministers, José María Aznar and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who attempted to increase their political leadership on national and international planes (interviews with Marius Carol and Pilar Eyre). These top political leaders' attitudes opened the way to criticizing and challenging the King, which had previously seemed inconceivable.

On the social level, new generations of Spaniards have become more critical and demanding of Spanish institutions and media. Born and raised in a democratic state and having easy access to information, they have claimed more media control of their political leaders, especially after the breakout of the financial crisis in 2008, when huge manifestations due to public disapproval of political elites took place. Consequently, media boundaries have moved, and the media is expected to cover private and public aspects of politicians' lives (Maciá Barber, 2009).

As regards the media, for many years, the Royal Household of Spain did not have a genuine long-term communications strategy for press relationships and the institution's relationships with journalists were highly unbalanced. Restrained access to direct information, and pressure on journalists and editors forced journalists to restrict themselves to positive coverage of the Crown. Furthermore, journalists and editors often had to look for secondary sources of questionable reliability for information on the Crown. Though journalists appeared to be on equal footing, the Crown often provided information to its favorite journalists in private (interviews with Marius Carol and Pilar Eyre). Moreover, the Crown, which was accustomed to the media's favorable attitude, had not prepared a solid crisis plan. When a crisis came about, the Royal House's delayed reaction increased the gap between the Crown and Spain's citizens.

As a result of these changes, the image of the Spanish Crown became tarnished and was marked by perceived anachronism and disconnection from modern Spanish society. The Crown's popularity progressively stagnated. In 2011, the first visible sign of unpopularity appeared when the CIS published its annual poll on public trust toward

national institutions. For the first time, less than a half of its respondents declared that they trusted the Crown.

Nevertheless, a genuine institutional crisis⁴ began in April 2012 when the media covered the injured Juan Carlos I's return from his trip to Botswana. Media coverage after the King arrived at a Madrilenian hospital exposed shocking facts on the King's luxurious travels. For instance, the King hunted animals (though he was honorary president of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), which fights for animal rights), had marital problems, and was involved in an alleged extramarital relationship with one of his close coworkers. The media had already released another story on the royal son-in-law's corruption case, which also tarnished the Crown's image. The media started to use the expression *Annus Horribilis* (Horrible Year) to describe the Royal Family's fragile situation. As other scandals regarding different members of the House of Bourbon kept erupting, and with the Royal Household's delayed response, the Crown's public image was continuously deteriorating. The *Horrible Year* spilled over to 2012 and is still going on in 2014, resulting in a prolonged rupture between the Crown and Spanish society.

4. Analysis of press coverage on Queen Sofía

4.1. General description of the press clipping

The press clippings that met with the selected conditions⁵ amounted to a total of 108 articles: 37 articles in *El País* and 66 in *El Mundo* (detailed monthly information is presented in Table 1). Among the four detected peaks, the first one (lasting from April to May 2012) was the highest. At the beginning of the crisis referred to as *Annus Horribilis* 45 articles were released. The second peak, corresponding to the period from March to June 2013, resulted in 31 articles. In September 2013, 13 articles were published, and finally, in December 2013 and January 2014, 14 articles were included.

Month and year	Number of articles in <i>El País</i>	Number of articles in <i>El Mundo</i>
April 2012	8	20
May 2012	7	10
March 2013	5	4
April 2013	4	4
May 2013	3	3
June 2013	3	5
September 2013	4	9
December 2013	1	3
January 2014	2	8
Total	37	66

Table 1. Number of articles in the coverage of Queen Sofía related to royal scandals (per month)

⁴ By crisis, we understand a breaking or abnormal situation characterized by uncertainty and threat (Boin, 2005; Dobry, 2009). In this particular case, the Spanish Crown's legitimacy stands on both parliamentary and popular approval (Balmer et al., 2006). Losing public trust can be considered a sign of an institutional crisis for the Crown.

⁵ The conditions for selecting press articles on Queen Sofía were that they (i) cover a scandal or a potentially image-damaging situation for the Spanish Crown and (ii) be published during a period of peak media interest in those matters.

During the monitored period, despite the fact that the Queen never authored a scandal herself, her name appeared in the context of image-damaging situations caused by other members of the Royal Family. In these cases, the newspapers would describe her presence (or absence) among the members of the Bourbon family facing the issues. In some cases, the media looked to analyze her reaction to such controversies.

In April and May 2012, news on the King's accident during his safari trip to Botswana dominated Crown press coverage. In the space of a few days, the scandal turned into an important image crisis and contributed to the breakout of other scandals connected to the royal trip. Consequently, the King's accident and his stay at the hospital fed the debate on whether he was capable of remaining in the Spanish throne. Moreover, information on the trip being financed by a Saudi businessman raised questions about links between the business world and Juan Carlos I. In addition, the fact that the King had hunted law-protected elephants provoked the ire of ecologists. Notwithstanding, the media did not limit itself to solely covering the public side of the scandal. For the first time, they broke the unwritten rule on the non-disclosure of the King's personal matters and went public with the news that the King, who traveled to Botswana on his personal time, was accompanied by one of his close coworkers, Corinna zu Sayn-Wittgenstein. Rumors about a royal romantic affair spread through the Spanish media. Moreover, the Queen's distant attitude toward her husband fueled the media's interest in their private matters.

Furthermore, besides the "Botswana gate", which overshadowed the rest of the coverage, the Queen was mentioned in two other scandals involving members of the Royal Family: in April, the twelve-year-old royal grandson Felipe de Marichalar y Borbón shot himself in the foot while illegally playing with a fire arm; during the same period, new details on a corruption case involving royal son-in-law Iñaki Urdagarin negatively impacted the image of the Crown and provoked the first profound divisions within the Royal Family.

A year after the fateful events in Botswana, the media's mentions of the Queen once again appeared extensively in press coverage on royal scandals. From March to June 2013, the newspapers thoroughly covered Juan Carlos I's health problems, and also covered the Spanish Crown's plummeting popularity, which was exacerbated after the corruption scandal involving Iñaki Urdagarin and his wife Infant Cristina. Moreover, AshleyMadison.com, a website for married people to engage in "discreet encounters", led a controversial ad campaign that clearly alluded to the King's matrimonial problems.

In September 2013, all of these controversial topics came back. This new wave of negative press was fed by Juan Carlos I's second hospitalization and new information on the corruption scandal involving the King's daughter, Infant Cristina.

Two months later, in December 2013, coverage involved image-damaging news again. Indeed, the press continued to reveal decreasing public approval rates of the monarchy and disclosed further problems within the Royal Family, prompted by the corruption scandal involving the Kings' daughter. In addition, the King was hospitalized again, and his 76th birthday reinvigorated questioning of his capacity to rule the country.

Analysis on the newspapers' emphasis of the Queen confirms that Queen Sofia is a person of interest to the press. Indeed, the newspapers gave her a privileged place in articles. To further define her place in the media, the space and emphasis given to the Queen in each article is measured on a scale going from 1 (simple name mention, corresponding to a small space and no emphasis on her person) to 4 (article title and the most of the article devoted to the Queen, strong emphasis). Then, mathematic formulas of arithmetic mean ($\bar{x} = \frac{\sum x}{n}$ where \bar{x} corresponds to the mean, x to the values and n to the number of values) and median ($\tilde{x} = \frac{n}{2}$, where \tilde{x} corresponds to the median and n to the set of values) were used.

This method applied to the clippings of articles from *El País* and allowed us to observe that 23 articles dedicated to the Queen involved her throughout most of the text, with 19 of them also mentioning her name in the title of the article. In the other seven articles, at least one paragraph per article was devoted to her. Finally, in the last seven articles her name was simply mentioned. Consequently, the average visibility of the Queen in the press clippings from *El País* was situated at a high level of 1.94 with a median importance of 2.

On the other side, *El Mundo* seemed to attach a lesser, though still high, importance to the Queen. Queen Sofia was the protagonist of 31 articles: her name appeared in 24 titles and in the next seven she appeared extensively throughout the text. She was the subject of brief one-paragraph-length mentions of interest in 11 articles. However, in a large amount of articles the Queen does not enjoy any strong visibility: in 24 of the *El Mundo* press clippings her appearance was limited to a simple mention of her name. Thus, the average and median visibility of the Queen in *El Mundo* situates her at 2.53 and 3, respectively. Although it is difficult to fully explain the gap between the two newspapers, we can assume that the result was influenced the Queen's low visibility in the articles from *El Mundo* in April and May 2012. With the passage of time, the right-wing newspaper started to pay more attention to the Queen, offering her more extensive exposure. However, this late focus did not compensate for the initially low interest in the Queen when compared to *El País*.

As regards the articles' tones, neutral ones dominate. A total of 69.4% of all the articles in *El País* and 85% in *El Mundo* were neutral. The press coverage on the Queen is generally poor in adjectives or other forms of stating approval or disapproval of the royal spouse. Positive articles come in second with 16.6% and 9% respectively, and exceed negative articles, which represent 14% and 6% respectively. However, in an attempt to retain neutrality, the majority of articles with marked positions toward the Queen are published in the "Opinion" section of the newspapers.

4.2. Portrayal of Queen Sofia by *El País* and *El Mundo*

The analysis of the portrayal of the Queen in *El País* and *El Mundo* led to a categorization of her image in terms of the four comprehensive roles assigned to her by the newspapers: mother, wife, and queen; negotiator and peacekeeper; spokesperson and preferred ambassador of the Royal Family; and ordinary woman.

The triple role of mother, wife and Queen is the principal function newspapers assign to Queen Sofia of Spain. As the Royal Family acts in both private and public

spheres, Queen Sofía is perceived through the lens of her place within the Bourbon family and in the institution of the Crown. According to the newspapers, while executing those functions, Queen Sofía proved her great devotion toward her family and the Crown and demonstrated her willingness to sacrifice. As written in *El País*, "It is difficult to see doña Sofía losing her smile in public, even if the situation is unpleasant. Her sense of responsibility keeps her feelings in check."⁶ However, since 2012, the newspapers have covered the Queen's problems with tying her private and public roles. Firstly, both *El País* and *El Mundo* criticized Queen Sofía for her ambiguous attitude toward the Duke and Duchess of Palma de Mallorca, who were accused of corruption. She was accused of being dominated by her maternal feelings and of being unable to make well-thought-out decisions. Secondly, the uncovering of the King's affair in 2012 provoked a sharp reaction from the Queen, who used to be renowned for her composure. The media extensively commented on her absence from the hospital during the first four days following the King's accident. In addition, the King's announcement that he would cancel the commemoration of the royal couple's fiftieth wedding anniversary revived unhappy royal marriage coverage in the news.

Nevertheless, media coverage on the royal couple's matrimonial problems had a paradoxically positive influence on Queen's image in the newspapers. The press started to portray a woman who was recognized by her husband for her public actions, even though he had abandoned her in the private realm. The image of the Queen in the newspapers became marked by suffering and loneliness, two emotions with great potential for arousing empathy and compassion, and seen by modern politicians as an asset in creating proximity with citizens (Fasser, 2002, Revault d'Allonnes, 2008, Boltanski, 1993).

The role of peacekeeper and negotiator is the second role the press assigns to Queen Sofía. Although this role generally takes place in the family environment, the role holds great importance for the country as it ensures the monarchic institution's stability. It also pushes her toward the position of genuine leader of the Bourbon family, as she is the one to stabilize and deal with the Royal Family members' competing interests. This function was enhanced during the *Annus Horribilis*, when family bonds weakened. Many articles highlighted the Queen's efforts to reconcile the Duke and Duchess of Palma de Mallorca with the King and with Prince Felipe. Furthermore, some feature stories that analyzed the Queen's functions more deeply stipulated that she had assumed a similar role from the very beginning of her accession to the throne. The articles claimed that Queen Sofía made constant efforts, "working, withstanding and pacifying the family"⁷ to help her son Felipe succeed his father as the next king of Spain.

The role of ambassador for the Royal Family refers to the Queen's representative function as a member of a public institution. During the studied period, the Queen progressively increased her function in this role. In April and May 2012, her role was limited to occasional statements before the press concerning the health of other mem-

⁶ El País, "*Cincuenta años de contrato*", May 11, 2012

⁷ El País, "*Cincuenta años de contrato*", May 11, 2012

bers of the Royal Family. A real breakthrough came in December 2012, when *El Mundo* published a feature article⁸ analyzing the results of a poll conducted by the Elcano Royal Institute, which measured the popularity of the Spanish political class. The results showed that the Queen was not only perceived as the most popular member of the Spanish Crown, but also as the most popular politician in Spain. Data on Queen Sofia's high popular approval appeared in the press several times in 2013, thus enhancing the Queen's positive image. The press started to describe the Queen as "Spain's best ambassador abroad", stressing that the Queen had never caused a scandal and that she had multiplied her public duties since the beginning of the *Annus Horribilis*. A cycle of similar news the subsequent year (thanks to a new poll, which reiterated the preceding year's results) was often shown in contrast to the low level of public trust toward the King and the Crown, reinforcing a perception of an empowered Queen on the public stage. Furthermore, analyzing *El País* revealed an amplification of the Queen's duties: in 2012 the left-wing newspaper, which apparently did not attribute much importance to the Queen as a political stakeholder, portrayed her as a mere assistant to her husband⁹. One year later, the newspaper presented the Queen as an independent contributor to Spanish representation abroad and showed her as a regular participant in cooperation projects¹⁰.

The fourth role attributed to the Queen by the newspapers, that of a common woman, is the least present. However it could potentially have a strong impact on readers, as it appeals to emotions and identification with the Queen (de Graaf, 2011, Dakhliya, 2008). Although the Queen is Greek, she shares her "Mediterranean character"¹¹ with Spaniards, most outstandingly: her love for the island of Mallorca and the sea. Furthermore, beyond this cultural proximity, the Queen seeks contact with common people as well. In articles describing her participation in local events, it is often written that Queen Sofia favors contact with the public rather than with politicians. In this particular context, the Queen's modesty and simplicity are often emphasized.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be observed that the *Annus Horribilis* had a positive impact on Queen Sofia's press coverage. Whilst most of the members of the Royal Family suffered from bad press, the Queen enjoyed a favorable attitude from the newspapers' behalf, mostly based on the victim status that the media attributed to her. Moreover, regular repetition of the information on Queen Sofia's high popularity contrasted with declining trust in the Crown and the King, which made the notion of the Queen's empowerment more widespread.

The attribution of various functions to Queen Sofia, some executed on the private stage (mother and wife), some on the public stage (queen, spokesperson, and best am-

⁸ El Mundo, "La Reina y el Príncipe superan al Rey como embajadores de la marca España", December 4, 2012

⁹ El País, "Cincuenta años de contrato", May 11, 2012

¹⁰ El País, "La Reina intenta recuperar la normalidad", April 7, 2013

¹¹ El País, "Del paraíso al infierno real", April 7, 2013

bassador of the Royal Family), and some hovering between the two spheres (negotiator and peacekeeper), illustrates the complexity of her character. In this context, different scandals gave way for the newspapers to explore different aspects of her multi-faceted image, which would normally be difficult to understand. The scandalous backdrop had two major consequences on the Queen's coverage: firstly, it reinforced the emotional aspect of her discourse, probably helping it cause a greater impact on readers (Kepplinger, Geiss, Siebert, 2012) and secondly, it led to the tabloidization of press coverage on the Queen.

It is also important to note that the scandalous backdrop is characterized by the presence of a narrative. Direct or indirect references to other scandals, which were found in a great deal of analyzed articles, created a continuous and evolving narrative line. This could be compared to the traditional narrative structure proposed by Propp (1928) in his study of folktales: the history begins with a sudden outburst of hardship(s), continues with the struggle of the hero of the talk, and finishes with a positive ending. In the studied coverage on the Queen, we can detect the initial sequence illustrating the scandal's explosion, the second phase in which Queen Sofía undertook efforts to save the image of the Crown and the Royal Family's unity, and the final and rewarding phase, symbolized by her progressive public empowerment and by the first signs of her family publicly acknowledging her achievements.

The analysis of press on the Queen in *El País* and *El Mundo* reveals differences in their attitude toward the Crown. *El País* covers events from an institutional standpoint in which the Queen's reactions have an impact on the public perception of the monarchical institution, as she is an important member of the Royal Family. In this discourse, her significance is attributed to her role as negotiator and peacekeeper, and the Queen is seen as a pillar of monarchic stability in Spain. On the other hand, *El Mundo* has adopted a societal angle in its coverage. The newspaper covers scandals while primarily focusing on the scandals' consequences on the Bourbon family. The Queen is generally seen as a mother and wife who sacrifices herself for the good of her family.

Finally, it can be affirmed that the Queen has positive, albeit minor, influence on the image of the Spanish Crown. According to Balmer's (2006) premise, the legitimacy of a crown resides in the citizens' approval of it. The Crown's positive image is thus the essence of institutional stability. In Spain, the demise of the King's popularity was matched by declining trust toward the Crown. We can hence presume that the scandals involving the King and other members of the Royal Family had adverse effects on the image of the Spanish monarchy. The Queen, who has surged in popularity since the beginning of the *Annus Horribilis*, is partially counterbalancing this negative aftermath. However, her increased popularity does not seem to have had a significant effect on public perception of the Crown, as the polls continue to show low levels of public trust toward the Spanish Crown.

6. References

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