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Chair of Political Sociology

The relationship between populism and the use of digital tools in contemporary Italian politics.

SUPERVISOR

Prof. Michele Sorice

CANDIDATE

Francesco Pace

Matr. 083852

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Introduction

Nowadays, populism and populist parties are reaching increasingly large support to the extent that populism does now seem mainstream. Current politics and democracies are characterised by a populist zeitgeist (Mudde, 2004; Mudde, 2007). Accordingly, the 2018 Italian general elections confirmed this trend, as they resulted in a government establishment entirely composed by populist forces. This will be the starting point of this analysis, which deeply delves into the main ingredients that lead populism to flourish and addresses the main causes that brought about a populist government in Italy. Similarly, populism is treated both as an ideology and as a style of communication in order to inquire on the way in which populism is communicated and in which way it persuades voters. At the same time, digital media tools have profoundly changed the way in which professional politicians communicate with citizens (Kriesi, 2014). Hence, this dissertation further digs into populism and populist communicative features in order to establish how they adapt to the media and social media environment. By the same trends, this thesis pursues an analysis of the two Italian populist parties in power and their peculiar bonds with digital media tools.

As a result, the first chapter poses its attention to the Italian government formation after the 2018 elections. It firstly offers a clear-cut definition of populism, before analysing the Italian political background before and during the election. Moreover, a paragraph will be entirely devoted to the role media, particularly social media, played during the electoral campaign. In chapter two, the distinctive features of populist communication are acknowledged. Correspondingly, particular interest is dedicated to populist communication through the media by, firstly, analysing the different interaction that it has with news media and social media, and then by establishing if there is an affinity between populism and social media both in delivering populist messages and in persuading social media users. Finally, the third chapter explores the political offer from an ideological point of view of the 5 Star Movement and Lega, respectively. Moreover, their bound with digital tools is ascertained. As a matter of fact, this thesis also focuses on the attempt reached by the 5 Star Movement to build a direct democracy though an online platform. Similarly, it concentrates on the communicative skills of the Lega' leader and on his use of social media tools to enlarge his party's electorate.

Ch.1: A populist Government in Italy

1.1. Definition of populism

The phenomenon of populism decisively characterizes the political international panorama. Populism is the result of failure of politicians in Paul Taggart's (2006) opinion, who considers populism as a simple answer to a difficult question. Accordingly, populism is conceived as a response to the dissatisfaction with political mainstream that have not successfully dealt with a series of circumstances such as globalization or immigration (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). Furthermore, populism flourishes on the people's political malaise which coincides with lack of participation (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008. Sorice and De Blasio, 2018). In this sense, politics is perceived as distant and irrelevant, while politicians as self-serving and corrupted. Contextually, populists are viewed as saviours of democracy by equipping with "common-sense and straightforward solutions to complex problems" their discourses, to recruit politically disenchanted people (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, p. 1). In no coincidence, populist is an outburst to a sense of extreme crisis (Taggart, 2006).

The starting point of this analysis lies in offering a clear-cut definition of populism, which will serve as basis for all arguments made in this work. Similarly, the definition offered should not be considered as a mantra, but rather as a useful tool able to link theory with reality without falling into stereotypical portrayals. For this reason, this work adopts the definition offered by Cas Mudde (2004) who immediately distances populism from both opportunism and demagogy. According to Mudde (2004), populism is defined as " *an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people*" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543; Mudde, 2007, p. 23). This clear and simple vision of populism emphasizes how populism contrasts with both elitism and pluralism, as the first can be considered its opposite, while the second is inextricably linked with a full acquiescence of individual needs and wishes that distinctively mark heterogenous societies. With this in mind, the main features of populism can be listed.

Firstly, populist ideology is built on a division between two homogenous and antagonist groups: the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite". This distinction is based on moral. According to Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008), a line is drawn between them, as the only people's blame, being the only power holders, is having allowed the "elite" to govern. The "people" consider the "elite" as betrayers who stabbed in the back their voters by pursuing their own self-interests. The morally "pure" people should detach themselves from every demand for a compromise raised by the morally corrupted "elite", by advocating the "sovereignty of the people" (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008. Mudde, 2004). Populism grounds on the conception which sees politics as a means to implement general people's claims. Hence, it is up to people to bring back their home

country to its original condition, a concept which Taggart (2006) linked to the meaning of "heartland", where people lived before corruption and evil started to permeate its meanders. Equally important, people's antagonists do not consist of elite's members, only. People's homogeneity assumes that those who do not share people's common identity fall in the category of "others". Notably, the "others" are perceived as enemies or rivals that go against the inherently people's good (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). Crucially, people's identity can be classified according to race, class or national identities. Consequently, minorities should be isolated since they claim different interests in respect to those endorsed by the homogenous "people" (Mudde, 2004), spotlighting the contradiction between pluralism and populism. Likewise, the "elite" can entail a greater subset of actors, as it commonly includes financial actors, the media or the judicial system, other than politicians (Robba and Roncarolo, 2018). While, the "others" frequently include immigrants, homosexuals, ethnic minorities or religious groups. (Robba and Roncarolo, 2018. Sven Engesser, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser and Florin Büchel, 2017).

Secondly, what Mudde (2004) stresses in his work is that populism should not be conceived as an ideology like socialism or liberalism. Rather, it is a "thin-centred ideology" which embodies few crucial factors. Surely, the dichotomy between "people" and "elite" is among these. De facto, what characterizes populism is its ease to merge with other "established ideologies". In Paul Taggart (2006)'s terms, this aptitude makes populism extremely flexible for it appears to be shaped by the context in which it flourishes. Consequently, Taggart (2006) defines it as "host ideology" since it can be combined with every different political ideology, from the left to the right. Furthermore, in restoring people's sovereignty to pursue the common "good", the heartland in Taggart's (2006) terms, both the means used by each populist movement and the beliefs joining it may differ. As a result, populism appears to be highly chameleonic.

Thirdly, another feature of populism lies in the presence of key political leaders or figures who exploits a diffuse political malaise to convey their messages in an effective and simple manner. The leader must have the qualities to instil confidence towards change to his followers and represent himself as "one of them". Equally, the leader needs to be seen as an ordinary man capable to solve problems not properly discussed or faced by the elites with direct recipes. (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008). Consequently, by knowing the people's needs, he/she oversimplifies difficult questions by telling the people what they are thinking or, rather, what they want to know; he helps building a sense of community. Moreover, the use of media is a tool that characterizes populist leadership. Correspondingly, the communication style is predominantly unorthodox, straight and even offensive. It is designated to reduce the distance between the audience and the spokesman by expressing closeness with political issues that grip the electors. Hence, personal charisma and media savvy are two unavoidable ingredients in populist leadership (Ibid.). Similarly, those who oppose leader's view tend to be considered against the "people", too, in the same way as the "establishment" (Ibid.).

Fourthly, as already mentioned, populism is the result of a reaction to an extreme crisis (Taggart 2006). A crisis can rise after the occurrence of radical changes, which instil to people a sense of moral decay (Ibid.). Equally, populism is conceived as the outcome of the lack of participation: when citizens do not feel represented anymore by established parties, they are prone to react (Sorice and De Blasio, 2018). Here, the figure of the leader is crucial, since he/her exploits people's reactiveness to call for social mobilization (Mudde 2004), a sort of "bottom-up participation" in Sorice and De Blasio's (2018, p.3) terms. For Sorice, De Blasio (2018) and Urbinati (2013), populism is not a revolutionary movement, but a "*mutation of representative democracy*", since it thrives in a political system where citizens are ultimately sovereign. Moreover, the push for a "better" government, rather than for a more representative government (Taggart 2006) is reduced to a demand for "direct democracy" emphasized by a bottom-up participation (Sorice and De Blasio, 2018). The point of strength of a populist movement is its far-fetched political features, especially characterized by an anti-party sentiment, which arises from a spread political malaise against established parties. Yet, through institutionalization and entrance into the political process, populism can lose its political attraction. This clarifies the increasing difficulties populist movements have in ensuring long-term grasp to voters (Taggart 2006).

1.2. The 2018 General elections: the emergence of a populist government

The 2018 Italian General elections marked the undisputed insurgence of two populist forces: 5 Star Movement (5SM) and Lega. These anti-establishment political actors subsequently managed to form a coalition government which resulted in the official nomination of Giuseppe Conte as Prime Minister. Although Conte had no previous political experience, his assuring academic qualifications – Conte is a University Professor of Law – led him to become the head of government of the first all-populist government in the history of Italian politics (Baldini and Giglioli, 2019).

After the 2018 Italian general elections, the 5 Star Movement (5SM) emerged as the first national party by reaching the 32%[1] of electoral share. However, the centre-right coalition, led by Lega party (17%), collected the 37% of seats both in the two Houses. Finally, the centre-left coalition, awarded far less voters' support (22%), with its leading party, the Democratic Party (PD), collecting only 18,7% of voters' preferences.

On the one hand, the formation of a coalition government composed by 5SM and Lega showed the capacity of populist forces to capitalize on the demand for change raised by the majority of the electorate. Indeed, The Lega Leader, Matteo Salvini, succeeded in driving its party towards its best historical result at the national election, overtaking Forza Italia and, thus, becoming the most voted party on the right-hand political

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[1] Source: Home Affairs available at: http://www.interno.gov.it/it/speciali/2018-elections

spectrum. Similarly, the 5SM stood out as the first national party and it also exceeded its astonishing 2013 election result (25%) by becoming the first choice for a third of the Italian electorate (Paparo, 2018). This was a stunning outcome for a party which was only founded in 2009.

On the other hand, the 2018 Italian elections highlighted the increasing difficulties faced by their political competitors in presenting themselves as a valid alternative to the populist wave. In fact, the 2018 general election saw the clear defeat of traditional parties like Forza Italia (FI) and the Democratic Party (PD) (Bellucci, 2018). While FI was relegated to the second place in the right-coalition, the PD reached its lowest electoral results of the post-Fascism era. Moreover, the PD 2018 electoral result saw a drastic reduction of electoral support if compared to that reached in the 2016 European election, when it collected about 40% of votes casted. Coupled with it, the figure of its leader, Matteo Renzi, who was Prime Minister in the previous legislature, seems to be waned.

Regardless, other than showing a clear demand for change and a consequent delegitimization of the governing party, the electoral results manifested a change in the Italian party system: with the advent of 5SM, a three-party system was built (Baldini and Giglioli, 2019). Moreover, the balance of power itself constituting the system was subverted (Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini, Paparo, 2018). If compared to the 2013 election, the rose from the second position to the first one. Similarly, the 5SM rose from the third to the second one. While, the left-hand coalition dropped from the first to third rank. Hence, the three political poles around which voting patterns were shaped underwent significant changes in terms of voting preferences, emphasizing the clear electoral instability in the Italian elective process (Ibid). Furthermore, electoral instability was pronounced by an acute electoral volatility, which in Italy reached 26,7 %, its second highest value (Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini, Paparo, 2018). Yet, to Bellucci (2018), this is the result of a general trend occurring in democratic system which concerns party change and party de-alignment.

Coupled with electoral instability and the consequent electoral volatility, the decisions made by citizens in the ballot boxes decisively resemble a visible correlation with the geographical variable. As such, territory assumed a key role in shaping voter's preferences. Whereas Lega received an overwhelming support in the North (26,7% of total votes), 5SM obtained a remarkable success in the South (43% of total votes) (Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini, Paparo, 2018). Despite under the Salvini leadership Lega has mutated from an ethno-regionalist party into a national, anti-immigration one (Passareli and Tuorto, 2018), its strong appeal to the North is linked to two different connecting factors. Firstly, Lega has historically been advocated for a secession of the Italian Northern regions and, especially under its founder Umberto Bossi, the regionalist movement headed by Lega, which at the time was called Northern League, was distinguished by its regional electoral support (Biorcio, 2012). Coupled with it, the Italian Norther Regions have always been the most economically developed and rich of the country. Secondly, during the electoral campaign, the Lega leader Salvini and the right-coalition in its entirety intensely sponsored a tax law reform (flat tax), which was

particularly seductive for the most affluent voters (Baldini and Giglioli, 2019). While, by considering that the unemployment rate is far higher in the Southern regions, the proposal made by the 5SM for a basic income (reddito di cittadinanza) had a pivotal role in determining a visible support there (Ibid). Therefore, the geographical variable assumed a determinant function in shaping voters' patterns (Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini, Paparo, 2018).

However, the path towards the government formation was not smooth. Although a new electoral law was approved in 2017, the so-called "rosatellum", no clear majority of seats was reached by neither party (Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini and Paparo, 2018). Hence, between the voter turnout and the formal oath behind The President of The Republic, nearly three months passed to allow the establishment of a parties' coalition. Similarly, several alternatives were shaped, from a right-coalition minority government, an alliance between the right-coalition and 5SM, to an alliance between 5SM and the left-coalition (Baldini, Giglioli, 2019). Moreover, The President of The Republic, Sergio Mattarella, tried to advocate for a government whose members of the executive would have been directly chosen by him (Ibid). The governmental crisis was solved through the establishment of a coalition government composed by Lega and 5SM which, at least, guaranteed a solid majority in both the Italian chambers (Ibid.). Similarly, they publicly agreed to pursue a common government program. Although it was an unexpected result, none of the two parties could claim the position of the head of government being filled by its own candidate (Ibid). As a result, both the leader of the two parties entered to executive. While Salvini was nominated Interior Minister, Luigi Di Maio, the 5SM leader, became Labour Minister of Labour and Economic Development (Ibid). Surprisingly, The President of The Italian Republic appointed Giuseppe Conte as head of government.

The figure of Giuseppe Conte emerged during the 5SM attempt to form a government with Lega. While Lega broke its electoral alliance with FI and Fratelli D'Italia (Brothers of Italy), it was aware of the imbalance between the number of 5SM elected MPs in respect to Lega elected MPs (Baldini, Giglioli, 2019). Contextually, the 5SM proposed first to the Lega, and, then, to The President Mattarella, Conte as head of government. Although Conte, as already mentioned, had no previous political experiences, he perfectly fitted the character of guarantor of the common government program (ANSA, 2018). Being a University Professor of Law and a lawyer, Conte expressly showed high competence and undisputed legal qualifications. Moreover, the 5SM clearly manifested a vehement propension towards meritocracy and the practical problems resolution in a competent mode (Invernizzi Accetti, Bickerton, 2018).

1.3. The role of social media during the 2018 electoral campaign

The last electoral campaign was extremely influenced by the side-effects of two long-term unproperly treated crises (Bellucci, 2018). Firstly, Italy is still struggling to recover from the 2007-2008 economic crisis.

Consequently, it has been forced to adopt austerity monetary measures, especially due to the ongoing rising Italian public debt (Baldini and Giglioli, 2019). Secondly, Italy (and Europe in its entirety) is facing a never-ending migration flows from the Mediterranean Sea, whose debate on possible causes and solutions has, accordingly, drastically divided the public opinion. As a result, these two gripping issues fuelled anti-party sentiments and party-disenchantment (Bellucci, 2018).

According to data collected by ITANES (Italian National Election Studies), the electoral debate evolved around four main concerns: unemployment, tax, immigration and corruption (Bellucci, 2018). At the same time, parties fashioned a climate of profound conflict, rather than offering a constructive debate on problem solving. Parties were most concerned on opposing the other parties' view rather than agreeing on the same matter. This logic urged Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini and Paparo (2018) to identify a clear parties' tendency to particularly focus on positional issues, which are those matters where political actors can adhere to different opinions, instead of valence issues, where political actors frequently hold common positions. In this framework, the main oppositional and anti-establishment parties, namely 5SM and Lega, exploited the inflamed and hostile climate in which the electoral campaign developed. Similarly, they persuaded voters by offering the image to be of the most competent on the content-related issue which most concerned the electors. They ultimately scapegoated the mainstream parties, mainly PD, for having unsatisfactorily dealt with those matters when they were in power, which can attest the populist nature of 5SM and Lega's character (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, the electoral campaign was surely characterized by an unscrupulous use of media from the political leaders of the Italian political scene. Equally important, it saw a drastic reduction of public space-speeches, also due to the removal of electoral reimbursements, which prevented party to organise large-scale events (Chiaramonte, Emanuele, Maggini and Paparo, 2018). Correspondingly, media offered considerable coverage to political leader to spread their messages. Moreover, although messages spread through mass media may follow a different sort of logic in respect to those conveyed through social media[2] (Sven Engesser, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser and Florin Büchel, 2017), the nonappearance of TV debate between leading candidates allowed political leaders to directly speak to voters, disregarding the kind of media employed.

Accordingly, by assuming that populists aim to lower the distance with their voters, the use of media permit populist leaders to show proximity with the people (Sven Engesser, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser and Florin Büchel, 2017). Media and, particularly, social media have been a tool for populists to flourish and disseminate their messages without intermediaries (Bartlett, 2014) by adopting their own "populist communication"[3]. As a matter of fact, during the electoral campaign, social media have been extensively used by Italian political figures as well.

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[2] The difference between social media and mass media will be clarified in section 2.3
[3] Chapter 2 is devoted to this issue

By analysing the findings reached by Bobba and Roncarolo (2018), social media had an undeniable strength in helping populists to persuade their messages receivers. Bobba and Roncarolo (2018)'s research was focused on Facebook posts shared by the main Italian political leaders a month prior the election day. While Salvini, Di Maio, Berlusconi and Meloni were considered populist leader, Renzi and Grasso were ascribed to belong to non-populist parties. Hence, the research took into account the posts shared by both populist leaders and non-populist ones. Moreover, Bobba and Roncarolo (2018) used the same method deviced by Jagers and Wallgrave (2007) to distinguish a populist post from a non-populist one according to the presence of three elements: "the others", "the elite" and "the people". What arises from Bobba and Roncarolo (2018)'s research is that populist messages are the most alluring (they receive more "likes") in respect to non-populist ones. In particular, FB users appealed the most those posts which showed both three elements, which were called "complete populist messages", and those ones containing references to "the others", especially immigrants, which represented excluding populist messages (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007. Bobba and Roncarolo, 2018). Yet, no significant difference was registered regarding a specific leader among those taken into consideration in terms of likeability. For instance, Renzi's messages did not proof to be more repulsive than those transmitted by Di Maio or Salvini. Henceforth, the last electoral campaign was conducted in an antagonistic environment in which the use of media, especially social media, to attract voters was vital. Moreover, populism had a considerable advantage in spreading messages through social media.

Ch.2: The populist communication on social media

2.1. The tenants of populist communication

In the previous chapter populism was defined as an ideology (Mudde, 2004). The work, thus, started by assigning to populism a "discursive" definition - a Manichean view that oppose the people's common good to the corrupt elite - which considers populism as a "set of ideas" (Hawkins, 2009). Following the "discursive" definition of populism, other than as an ideology, other labels have been used to conceptualize populism. Accordingly, populism has been described as a strategy (Weyland, 2001. Betz, 2002), a discourse (De la Torre, 2010. Hawkins, 2009), a political logic (Laclau, 2005) and a political style (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). That said, conceiving populism as a political style does not preclude the possibility to consider populism as an ideology, as well (Maldonado, 2017). Similarly, this approach will be used to interact with the populist communication phenomenon.

Equally, populism is a set of ideas which have to be communicated in order to affect the audience (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, and Stanyer, 2018). In other words, disseminating populist ideological views requires effective communicative tools (Ibid.). Hence, by referring to populism both as an ideology and as a style, the focus is on discovering the path that lead populist ideas to being processed and used as specific features of a communication scheme. Style, here, is considered as a "communicative repertoire" that characterizes populist actors (Maldonado, 2017).

According to Jagers and Walgrave (2007), populist communicative style features three crucial components: people-centrism; anti-elitism; excluding the "others". The first element indicates the assiduous reference that populists envisage with people. Exhibiting close proximity with the people is fundamental for populists. This can be obtained by using different techniques, which entails wearing casual dresses or employing informal language (Ibid). Alternatively, this can be obtained by simply "talking about the people": populists usually show concern for people' interests and concerns (Ibid.). Similarly, they portray themselves as the only bearer of people' will, who entered to politics only for pursuing people's good. Accordingly, this expedient serves as effectively call for a social mobilization (Mudde, 2004; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007).

The second element that compose the populist communication style pictures the drastic divergence between the people and the elite. As already mentioned in the second chapter, the elite is pictured by populists as self-interests seekers which are inevitably distant from the people (Albertazzi, McDonnel, 2008. Jagers and Malgrave, 2007). Moreover, the elite are blamed by populists for having caused the problems which grip the people (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007).

Finally, while anti-elitism refers to the vertical dimension, the third component of the populist communicative repertoire refers to the horizontal one. Since people are – monolithically – homogenous, those who claim different interests and who do not share peoples' peculiarities remain secluded (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). Furthermore, they are considered people' enemies, as there irreconcilably lies a remarkable difference between people's demeanour and qualities in respect to those presented by the "others" (Ibid.). Henceforth, populists scapegoat them for all the adversities and setbacks that the people face by representing them as a social threat to keep away from (Ibid.).

Remarkably, as already mentioned in the last paragraph, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) employed these three elements to individuate five different types of populist messages. Thus, those messages including both three elements were labelled *complete* populist messages, while those comprising a reference to "the people" were called *empty* populist messages. Likewise, when the message's content referred to "the others" or both to "the others" and to "the people", an *excluding* populist message was sent. Identically, references to "the elites" or both to "the people" and to "the others" define a message as *anti-elitist*. Finally, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) named contentious populist messages those mentioning both "the elite" and "the others".

In this framework, Engesser et al (2017) idealized two other elements to shape a deeper pattern according to which delineate the populist communication style. They, firstly, considered people-centrism as divided in two concepts: advocating for the people and emphasizing their sovereignty. These two concepts can be easily linked to what Jagers and Malgrave (2007) referred to as people-centrism. therefore, populists assiduously refer to the people (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007) by both commending people's good and values and highlighting their absolute power (Engesser, Ernst, Esser and Büchel, 2017).

Furthermore, Engesser et al (2017) devised a second common element that populists embody in their peculiar communicative style. Populists continuously invoke the heartland, which is the same concept conceived by Taggart (2006), during their speeches. This expedient assists populists in mobilizing people by instilling emotions among the audience (Engesser, Ernst, Esser and Büchel, 2017).

Clearly, the style which remarks populist in their communicative action heavily resembles the definition of populism given at the beginning of this paper. As already mentioned, populism is an ideology which must be expressed in order to reach its objectives and intents. As a consequence, there is no coincidence in a similarity between populist ideology and style that this analysis stressed. Indeed, this convergence of meaning strengthen the point: populism must be communicated (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, and Stanyer, 2018).

Moreover, the figure of the leader in delivering populist messages assumes a key role. Since populism rests on the existence of a person able to drive together people against a common enemy, the leader must show effective, powerful and striking communicative skills. While these skills are shaped by the factors previously

described which compose the style of populist communication, the leader employs an emotional language (Maldonado, 2017) that allows him to "personify" with the people and incite these latter against its rivals. Equally, behind the moves made by populist leader there lies the basic instinct to construct a social identity in which people can feel recognized. Similarly, populist leaders are both charismatic and flamboyant (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008) with a powerful narrative which mark them as "outsiders" (Maldonado, 2017).

Coupled with charismatic leadership, populist communication and populism as well relies on media coverage (Albertazzi and McDonnel, 2008). Conversely, populism needs both a charismatic and media savvy leadership (Ibid.). The role of the media is crucial in order to understand how populist ideas are communicated. For this reason, the following paragraph will deal with the role assumed by media when used by populists.

2.2. The difference between news media and social media

The term media refers to a broad range of mass communication means. Generally speaking, they play a double role, as they both offer politicians the means to spread their messages and to voters to receive them (Wettstein, Esser, Engesser, Wirth, Wirz, Schulz, Büchel, Ernst, Caramani, Manucci, Bernhard, Steenbergen, Haenggli, Dalmus, and Weber, 2016). Similarly, they surely help populism in disseminating their messages and have noteworthy backed the upsurge of populism (Albertazzi, McDonnell, 2008). Contextually, the media eco-system can be divided in two broad areas: mass media and social media (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann and Stanyer, 2018). This paragraph focuses on the differing interactions applying both between mass media and populism and between this latter and social media. Moreover, the difference between the two kinds of media will emerge.

Interpreting the relationship between populism and mass media is strenuous. While mass media provide coverage to populists, they are frequently included among those elite-institutions that populists are aimed to attack (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann and Stanyer, 2018). According to McQuail's (2010) taxonomy, mass media are able to attract and direct public attention, shaping reality and conferring both status and legitimacy (McQuail, 2010). Surely, they act as mediator between voters and political institutions (Wettstein, Esser, Engesser, Wirth, Wirz, Schulz, Büchel, Ernst, Caramani, Manucci, Bernhard, Steenbergen, Haenggli, Dalmus, and Weber, 2016), and, hence, between voters and populists, too.

Among the first scholars who tried to understand the tie between populism and mass media, Mazzoleni (2003) assumes that there is a kind of "complicity" between popular mass media and populist movement, as they share the aim of reaching the broadest possible audience. In this case, media's actions are dictated by "market imperatives", which look at the obtainment of advertising resources as the primary aim. They, hence, find in populist actors the inputs for the construction of personalised narratives that intensely emotion the

audience. By contrast, Mazzoleni (2003) stresses that mainstream media have a preponderant inclination to defend the "status-quo". In other words, they act as protector of the elites from anti-elite movements.

Alternatively, another way to analyse the role played by mass media in delivering populist communication concerns examining populism "by and "through" the media (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann and Stanyer, 2018). The former implies that media act as properly populist actors by presenting themselves as "champion of the people". While, in the second media are only content bearer of populist communication. Here, populist actors are assisted by media to both mobilize people and disseminate their messages (Ibid.).

By contrast, social media provide populists with a "direct linkage" (Engesser, Ernst, Esser and Büchel, 2017) to the voters. They allow populist movements and their leaders to elude the mediation process fulfilled by mass media. As a consequence, populists can freely and undisputedly diffuse their messages and to more easily communicate with their adherents (Wettstein, Esser, Engesser, Wirth, Wirz, Schulz, Büchel, Ernst, Caramani, Manucci, Bernhard, Steenbergen, Haenggli, Dalmus, and Weber, 2016). Moreover, in this way voters are able to directly answer to leaders' messages, thus, creating an interconnective dimension where populists can readily shorten the distance which separate them from the voters. However, the absence of a "mediator" hinders the possibility to ensure transparency in the information given by populists. Sure enough, this kind of role is usually played by mass media, the so-called "watchdog" role outside institutions (Ibid.). Interestingly, political actors, especially populists, often succeed in setting the traditional media's agenda by directly using social media. This, in turn, consent to populist's tweets to echo among the media eco-system in its entirety (De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann and Stanyer, 2018).

Social media are, thus, innovative tools which are completely different from mass media, as they follow a dissimilar media logic (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018) and establish a completely different relationship between populists and the audience in respect to mass media. For this reason, the next paragraph will separately deal with the peculiar use populists make of social media to build support and with the communicative interactions so established.

2.3. The social media factor

The recent technological innovations have laid the foundations for the populists' employment of new tools to entice politically disenchanted voters (Gerbaudo, 2018; Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018). With the development of Internet and the spread of digital tools, populism can, now, rely on a "hybrid media system" (Chadwick, 2013) as populists can gain visibility assured by both mass media and social media. Social media proffer to populism and its actors new conduits of communication (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig Esser, 2017). As already remarked in the previous chapter, these kinds of media permit a direct contact with the

electorates, which populists can exploit to actively and inexpensively persuade their audience, bypassing the journalistic filtering performed by traditional (mass) media (Ibid.). Moreover, the non-hierarchical setting through which communication operates help to create a sense of community and partisanship among people (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig Esser, 2017; De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann and Stanyer, 2018), where leaders are perceived closer to them (Wettstein, Esser, Engesser, Wirth, Wirz, Schulz, Büchel, Ernst, Caramani, Manucci, Bernhard, Steenbergen, Haenggli, Dalmus, and Weber, 2016).

The "social media logic" utterly contrasts to that embedded with mass media. The mass media logic evolves around journalistic "gatekeeping", where professionals have the last word in deciding on what the public opinion should focus on and in providing information about it (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018). On the contrary, the "social media logic" evolves around the concept of "virality", where issues' popularity among social media users establish the relevance of information. Therefore, the social media communication grounds on interest (Klinger and Svensson, 2015). In contrast to mass media, which inevitably provide information to a specific territorial community, social media establish communication among a community which does not need to share the same geographical boundaries (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018). Rather, they share the same interests (Ibid.). Furthermore, the communication process of populists on social media is articulated on a dual basis. The first one, which resembles the one-step communication flow idealized by Bennett and Manheim (2006), grounds on the "direct" communication process activated by the leader, who share information or issue's opinions directly with his/her followers or friends. Then, if these latter promote the content shared by the leader, a two-step communication flow is established (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). In this way, populist messages re-circulate in the social media environment reaching a larger audience. In other words, from a "primary audience" populists reach a "secondary audience", which can be crucial in spreading populist ideas, as it is correlated with a higher visibility (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig and Esser, 2017). As a result, the connection with users is at the core of populist communicative style. This, in turn, is assisted by an intense personalisation of content performed by populist leaders, who, in order to foster viral diffusion, provide their messages with intensely emotional claims that stimulate social media users (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018).

Importantly, given the existence of "hybrid media system" (Chadwick, 2013), Engesser et al (2017) suggests that social media activity assumes an increasingly important role in the so-called hybrid communication strategy. If pursued by populist actors, a hybrid communication strategy foresees that messages can be spread both through mass media and social media (Engesser, Ernst, Esser and Büchel, 2017). Yet, while in the first case they have to be filtered and may be modified by journalists, in the second one they do not have to be in line with the traditional media logic (Ibid.). For this reason, messages spread through mass media resembles the official statements' style of communication (Ibid.). Whereas, on social media they hire a lurid and personalized tone (Ibid.).

As regards populist communication on social media, Ernst et al (2017) summarised the reasons behind which populism may find an ally to spread its ideological ideas in social media. Firstly, as populists consider themselves as spokesman of people's will, social media provide populist with a direct connection with their voters, without interferences. Secondly, people are more closely connected with populists, who establishing interactive relationships with aimed at fostering more solid bonds. Thirdly, social media allow populists to personalise their contents; populists are freer to deliver messages which instil emotions to the receivers and to show their behavioural and human side alongside the politically related one. Finally, populists can more easily approach with their followers and to incite them with their common "enemy" by using unconventional language (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig and Esser, 2017).

Several studies have been made in order to investigate the strength of social media in diffusing populist ideological ideas. Similarly, each study has been conducted by firstly defining a specific style of populist communication. Then, it has analysed the presence of those elements composing that specific style among messages shared on social media. Since this analysis has already sharpened the ingredients making up populism in its communicative form, it will now deal with giving some general insights on the use of populist communication on social media in an empirical manner.

Disregarding the specific elements considered worth of being present in a populist message, Engesser et al. pointed out in their qualitative study across four countries – UK, Italy, Switzerland and Austria – that populism on social media appear *fragmentally* shaped (Engesser et al., 2017). In other words, although all the elements considered in section 3.1 are present in populist messages, each populist message contains at most one or two elements. In Engesser et al's opinion, the fragmented form in which populism appears on Facebook or Twitter is due to a deliberate ambition to reduce the populist ideas' complexity so as to render them more easily understandable. Secondly, it allows social media users to malleate the message according to their political views. Finally, messages can readily reach adherents without being modified or distorted by political competitors or critical commentators (Engesser et al., 2017).

While, Ernst et al (2017), in their analysis across six countries – UK, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, France and United States – emphasized that opposition parties' communication patterns are more populist in nature than those registered among the messages spread by government parties on social media. Equally, those parties whose political beliefs make them stand at the two extremes of the left/right political spectrum spread messages more populist content-related in respect to centrist parties. Furthermore, other than agreeing with Engesser et al (2017), Ernst et.al (2017) about the fragmented fashion of populism, they pointed out that Facebook can be considered a more efficient social media than Twitter to effectively communicate populist assertions. As a matter of fact, users' greater closeness and interaction, the unrestricted number of characters per message and the non-elite distinguishing trait identify Facebook as more suitable for the communicative efforts performed by populist actors.

Contextually, Bracciale and Mazzoleni (2018) accomplished a research study in the Italian political leaders' communication – Matteo Salvini (Lega), Luigi Di Maio (M5S), Giorgia Meloni (Brothers of Italy), Silvio Berlusconi (FI) and Matteo Renzi (PD) – on Facebook. According to them, Italian political panorama is characterized by a hyper-mediatized feature which demarcates the communication employed by populists. To put it differently, populist leaders zealously interact with their constituencies through social media. In addition, Bracciale and Mazzoleni (2018) discovered a peculiar pattern shared by all Italian leaders: the extensive employment of populist rhetoric also from non-populist leaders. Bracciale and Mzzoleni call this phenomenon "endemic populism" as it surrounds both the general political discourse and the strategic narratives used by Italian leaders to gain electoral support. Markedly, on the one hand, this is a momentous evidence of the weight assigned to social media by populist leaders in diffusing populist messages among the Italian electorate. On the other hand, it shows how populism is ubiquitous in Italian politics. Moreover, it enriches the analysis on the populist communication per se, as it is a communicative style not necessarily employed only by populists, but, rather, it can be exploited by political figures which are very far from being defined as populists.

In brief, social media, thus, play a primary role in spreading populist ideology. Although these can occur in a fragmented form (Engesser et al., 2017), populist actors decisively rely on social media to persuade voters. Moreover, what emerges from the political communication on social media performed by Italian leaders is the presence of an "endemic populism" (Bracciale and Mazzoleni, 2018). In other words, message diffused through social media by Italian leaders are vehemently bound to a populist communicative repertoire, which is a trend shared by both populist and non-populist actors.

Ch.3: The 5 Star Movement and Lega

3.1. The 5SM as a techno-populist party

This paragraph focuses on the latecomer political entity of the Italian political panorama. Since its foundation, the 5SM has rapidly gained large electoral support and has offered food for thought to political analysts willing to study a political force that surely presents unorthodox features. Starting from its anti-establishment narrative and its aim to implement a direct democracy through the web, the 5SM' politics shows heavily debated features and innovative elements as well. Similarly, these peculiarities have led several thinkers to consider the 5SM as a techno-populist party (Mosca, 2018; Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, 2018; Deseriis, 2017).

In order to carry out an analysis of this new populist party and its relationship with digital tools, in the next sub-paragraph, the term "techno-populism will be reviewed according to the existing literature. Then, the other two sub-paragraphs will be devoted to filling the gaps between theory and reality by providing a content-analysis of the 5SM by emphasizing the trivial bond this party has with digital technologies, which is at the core of its presumed techno-populist character.

3.1.1. Interpreting techno-populism

Contrary to populism, scholarly literature focusing on techno-populism appears sparse and meagre. For this reason, this section is inspired by the major findings already elaborated by Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2018). In accordance with the work published by Michele Sorice and Emanuela De Blasio (2018), the analysis of the term should be performed on a dual basis. Sorice and De Blasio (2018) framed the issue on two different sides. While the first side grounded on the opposition between technocracy and techno-libertarianism, the other was drafted on the opposition between populism and technocracy. Equally, in Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2018) 's terms, techno-populism reflects two separate relationships: the first between populism and technocracy and the other between technocracy and technology. Followingly, while the first relationship develops on expertise, the other grounds on technological communication.

On the one hand, populism is associated to technocracy. This latter is used to describe the development of a system where expertise devises solutions to specific policy problems. Muller (2017) discovered an unusual bond between technocracy and populism. Accordingly, the existence of only one correct policy solution meets the existence of only one authentic will of the people. Consequently, the "common good" is obtained by joining the technocratic vision of politics with the populist discourse. For Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2018), the

existence of only one right policy solution does not offer any clear room for debate. Hence, technocracy grounds on meritocracy and competence.

On the other hand, technocracy relies on the role of technology. Technological communication represents an open and accessible space able to gather a "collective intelligence" to develop more effective solutions and to enhance problem-solving competences of the individuals as well. (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, 2018). In this way, the political ability to solve problems spreads amongst the community. At the same time, technology requires a set of technical skills to administer the political marketing so established, which could only be provided by great professionals, technocrats in nature. (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013)

However, techno-populism preserves another trivial bond between populism and technology. As already mentioned elsewhere in this article, distrust towards parties and politics generates a lack of representation. In turn, populism exploits a lack of representation by solicitating "pure" people to legitimise the populist leader and the populist movement as bearer of people's concerns, or, in Sorice and De Blasio (2018) 's terms, populism calls for bottom-up participation. Indeed, populist dialectic insists on direct democracy as a source of legitimisation (Ibid.). While, the spread of digital communication and innovative technologies, tenets of techno-libertarianism, serves as means to improve democracy (Ibid). All in all, via internet, direct democracy is achievable more effectively and with minor costs.

As a result, Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2018) explain how the word "techno" (techne in the original Greek) refers to a conceptualization of politics which involves the "epistemic search for the most effective solutions to a set of pre-given problems". In short, techno-populism refers to a consolidation of the populist discourse to a pragmatic problem-solving interpretation, strengthened by a technocratic conception of politics and the spread of communication technologies (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, 2018)

3.1.2. *An outlandish populist force*

Historically, the 5SM owes its origin to its leader and co-founder Beppe Grillo, a comedian and ex TV shows presenter of the Italian national broadcaster RAI. In 2005 Grillo created a successful blog where he shared his own political initiatives, together with touring among Italy and spreading his political messages. Moreover, through this blog, participants were also able to independently discuss about politics and organize meetings. During his shows, predominantly in theatre and city squares, Grillo mixed satire with careful and documented denunciation to raise consciousness among the public. He then launched the so-called V-days, where followers, organised through the web platform, met up to protest against the presence of sentenced MPs freely sitting in Parliament. (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013)

In 2008 and 2009 the first members of the Movement were elected at local level officially establishing the Movement on an institutional basis. Next, 5SM began to gain support and to stand for election both at local and regional level. In 2013, it participated for the first time to the general election and reached an impressive result. 25,6% of the votes registered was in favour of the 5SM which was able to send more than 150 representatives to sit in both The Chamber of Deputies and in The Senate. Since, the 5SM has remained one of the main parties on the national political panorama until earning the chance of assembling a government in the 2018 general election (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013).

In short, the global economic crisis and anti-party sentiment favoured the growing popularity of the 5SM which filled the void left by traditional parties (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). Due to the implementation of austerity measures, the increase of the tax burden and the ill-advised employment of resources in politics, it became a receptor of anti-political protest (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013, Diamanti, 2014). People considered institutions distant and shared a deep distrust towards politics and politicians. Importantly, the 5SM became a "catch-all party" since it gained the support of those who neither read his blog nor participated in his meetings, too. Similarly, it increased its electoral base attracting both the voters oriented to the left and those oriented to the right, regardless of the political cleavage. Likewise, after attracting the young and educated and employed, it succeeded in enlarging its electorate towards the middle-class self-employed people. (Diamanti, 2014).

One of the main features this analysis employs to describe a populist political entity resides in the presence of a charismatic leadership. Accordingly, the creator of the 5SM, Beppe Grillo perfectly fits this object. Although Grillo is not a MP, he is considered the real mentor of the Movement. Conversely, the figure of Luigi Di Maio is seen as the leader of the party in public office (Deseriis, 2017). By referring to his personal experience, Grillo has always depicted himself as extraneous to the establishment, rather a victim of it, excluded from the media as a person unacceptable to the powers-that be (Grillo was fired by the Italian broadcasting RAI after he portrayed the Socialists in government in the 80s as thieves in one of his TV shows) (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). Being a comedian, he knows the rhetorical techniques to entertain his audience. During his performances in city squares, with the use of verbal and non-verbal language he uses his body to strengthen his arguments. Moreover, the use of a rough or even vulgar language communicate proximity with the people and, at the same time, rejects a polished and refined language typical of the establishment. (Ibid.). In a nutshell, Grillo depicts himself as one of the "people".

However, while media savvy should be integrated with a charismatic leadership, the leader of the 5SM built his support by targeting the news media as much as the political system, considering the two categories a unique corrupt entity, or "castes" (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). From one side, Grillo targeted the political ruling class, which was portrayed as self-servant and mainly interested in defending its own privileges and its economic profits. In this way, the 5SM welcomed the mainstream indignation and the anti-political

sentiment. On the other side, Grillo accused the news media to collude with the political elite. Similarly, the news media were accused of hiding the viewers and the citizens the truth and to treat them unresponsively. Consequently, news media were perceived as supporters of the elite's economic and political interests (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). Thus, he divided the society in two antagonistic groups, basing the distinction on moral issue, as Mudde (2004)'s definition suggests. Besides, the Movement uses other communication tools, different from the mainstream media, to convey its messages to its electors: Facebook, Twitter and the Grillo's web (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2015).

As regards ideology, the 5SM has never aligned itself on the political axis. 5SM's exponents and followers claim to be neither left-wing or right-wing, but only bearer of ideas (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013. Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2015). Furthermore, a patchy investigation on the 5SM policy proposals and formulation confirms this trend. On some issues, it favours commonly right-oriented arrangements. The party originally intended to propose a referendum on Italy's membership of the Euro currency, although this was never accomplished. Similarly, 5SM MPs did not approve the bill on gay civil unions and opposed amendments in favour of a more positive integration on immigration issues. By contrast, a reduction in the corporate taxes and guaranteeing a monthly income for the less-affluent people commit their initiatives towards a more left-oriented strategy (Edwards, 2018).

Yet, in Diamanti (2014)'s terms, the 5SM is hard to define, since it can be defined as a party, a movement but also a vote used by citizens in a strategic way, may be for protesting, may be for achieving its political initiatives. Under those circumstances, a "choice of identity" was realised only by a pitiful number of voters, while the majority of support came out as a consequence to a last-minute decision (Diamanti, 2014. Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013). Surely, the 5SM has always rejected any political alliances with the mainstream parties (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2015). Henceforth, the coalition government with the Lega marks a turning point in its political strategy. Furthermore, the absence of Grillo in the parliamentary leadership confers ambiguity on the 5SM's political identity.

3.1.3 *The Rousseau platform and the role of technocracy*

This sub-section illustrates the evidences that shed light on the techno-populist features of the 5SM. Indeed, technology and its exercise has encompassed and developed the 5SM's organizational framework, while the competence-based approach acquired by the 5SM bespeaks the proposal of Giuseppe Conte as Prime Minister.

The use of technological tools to promote a bottom-up participation is a distinctive trait in the organizational structure of the 5SM. Through the Web (Beppe Grillo's web and meet-ups), the Movement was created, and participants engage in active citizenship by reporting inquiries or reportage about real problems.

The meet-up platforms have allowed committed and involved followers to independently organise themselves at local-level. Moreover, local-activist groups are partially coordinated by the web, and its founders, conferring a certain degree of autonomy to its vertical and horizontal organizational levels. Importantly, the web has also allowed the implementation of an online direct democracy, thus corroborating the aforementioned Sorice and De Blasio (2018)'s claims. Prior to the elections, 5SM's parliamentary candidates are selected through the web by the members in the online primaries (Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2015).

Surely enough, one of the most innovative features of 5SM's identity lies in providing a tool for direct democracy to its members by means of an online platform. On the one hand, this is a product of a complete denial of the political mediation performed by political representative (Mosca, 2018. Deseriis, 2017). In 5SM's view, representatives should speak on behalf of citizens and achieve their wishes. Similarly, it should be posed under citizens' monitory (Mosca, 2018). Consequently, a distinguishing trait of 5SM's representative is the 2-mandates limit, a method to avoid corruption among politicians (Mosca, 2018. Deseriis, 2017). What emerges is the utter rejection of the mediation agency usually performed by traditional parties and the intense advocacy for a strict bond between the political representative and the will of constituents (Mosca, 2018. Deseriis, 2017). At the same time, the Parliament remains central and need to be protected from external interference - not only by lobbyists, but also from the Government and the President of the Republic (Mosca, 2018. Deseriis, 2017). Here, the web assumes the leading role of offering a channel for political participation and decision-making to citizens (Deseriis, 2017).

On the other hand, the concept of Web, or simply of Internet, is central in the 5SM's sponsorship for direct democracy, as Internet is conceived as being free from every kind of process or bond (Mosca, 2018). The so-called "cyber utopian narrative" perceives Internet as a tool for change and progress (Ibid.). Moreover, through Internet monitoring representatives and, coupled with it, carrying out the disintermediation process is more accessible. In other words, Internet is considered as an important means able to establish a direct communication between constituents and politicians by circumventing the mediating actors (gatekeepers) (Ibid.). Moreover, it would be able to provide for decision-making tools which rest on a clear and undistorted exchange of information (Ibid.).

The opportunity to equip the "Movement" with an online platform direct democracy came in 2016, when the Rousseau platform was launched. Before that date, other platforms had been used to allow 5SM members to vote, such as Sistema Operative or the Grillo's web (Deseriis, 2017). The platform is sundered in several areas: Lex Members, Lex Europe, Lex Parliament, Lex Region, Shield of the Net, Fund-Raising, E-learning, Sharing and Call to Action. Then, a "Vote" functionality is put at disposal of members when they are called to decide upon the candidate's selection, the party program or other political matters. (Ibid.)

When members are called to "vote", they can express their vote on a single-choice or multiple-choice basis. Moreover, they can directly express their opinion through comment sharing. However, there is not the possibility to choose among the findings reached by members' discussion (Deseriis, 2017). Therefore, the platform hinders a collective discussion, since it permits members to vote on options already defined by the ruling group, which detains authority over the party agenda. In other words, although direct democracy is implemented, a sort of deliberative democracy is obstructed (Ibid.). Therefore, the vote emerges as the expression of a general will. At the same time, there is the possibility for the members to freely interact with their representatives without intermediaries (Ibid.).

Regardless, Rousseau's functionalities are mainly focused on law-making. Indeed, the platform favours a "Web-based parliamentarization" based on "crowdsourcing" (Deseriis, 2017, p. 10). Lex Europa, Lex Parliament and Lex Region areas work differently in respect to Lex Member, as in the former case 5SM representatives upload a bill to receive members' feedbacks, while in the second one Rousseau users themselves can submit their proposal (Ibid.). Overall, MPs can freely select which law proposal submitting into Parliament. Similarly, MPs can freely establish which amendments are needed or in what order the bill should be presented. Hence, they have a large extent of discretionary power (Ibid.). Lex Europa, Lex Parliament and Lex Region differ in the jurisdiction in which the proposed bill will apply. Equally, they allow 5SM representatives to upload a bill with a short video and a short text explaining it. Here, members can comment the bill through five options: Addition, Modification, Objection, Suggestion and Defect of Form. The platform's users can also point out the favoured comments by voting them, they could not reply to each other. Only the MP-member interaction is available as the representative can answer to member's comments. Moreover, 5SM representative proposing the bill could also amend the it with the comments he deemed suitable. While, Lex Members is the area entirely devoted to members to craft their own bill of law. This is a long process which is divided in six steps: "drafting, screening, voting, tutoring, discussing, and introducing the actual bill into Parliament" (Ibid.). Consequently, once a member has provided a brief description of a bill whose objective have been clearly established, each drafted bill needs to respect four requisites: "constitutionality, jurisdiction, financial feasibility and consistency" (Ibid.). Here, 5SM screen the submitted proposal to verify if the requisites have been met. Then, a vote takes place, where users select among a list of proposal by casting five preferences two drafted bills among a list of proposals. Followingly, a tutor (chosen among the 5SM MPs) is assigned to each proponent of the chosen proposal in order to translate what has been written in non-juridical terms into a real legislative proposal (bill of law). Finally, it is proposed by a MP to users as any other bill and follows the same path of those entered in Lex Parliament, Lex Europa and Lex Region areas. (Ibid.)

Nevertheless, criticisms about code's integrity and database used to collect voters have raised suspicions on the integrity and transparency guaranteed by the platform, which is partly owned by the 5SM

co-founder's son Davide Casaleggio (son of the co-founder Gianroberto). By the same trends, Grillo and the web overseer Davide Casaleggio, preserve the ownership of the 5SM logo establishing a subordinary relationship with the Movement's members. As a matter of fact, the leadership of the movement has the power to expel militants or elected members who do not respect the leader's directives, or the code of behaviour published on the web. Consequently, a lack of transparency seems to dog the internal democracy within the party. (Deseriis, 2017; Bordignon and Ceccarini, 2013)

In this frame of reference, the figure of Giuseppe Conte emerges as an expert apt to engender right solutions to political problems. Giuseppe Conte is an Italian jurist and academic private law professor. Among his main tasks, he was elected by the Chamber of Deputies (one of the two Italian Parliamentary houses) as a member of the Bureau of Administrative justice. His legal expertise places him as a trustee of the belief which surrounds the 5SM political strategy: determining the correct solution is not a matter of ideology, but competence. (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, 2018). Accordingly, the achievement of feasible answer to specific issues, which roots in a problems-solving business approach, should substitute the political decision-making process, or ideological disputes. Similarly, professional politicians, depicted as corrupted, should be replaced by experts and technocrats. (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, 2018; Caruso, 2017). To put it differently, ideological disputes and politicians should be supplanted by competence and technocrats, respectively. Followingly, the proposal to entrust Giuseppe Conte as Prime Minister proves to be a meditated political decision that derives from a prearranged scheme, not as an unfounded choice. Rather, it is remarkable evidence of the techno-populist feature of the 5SM which complies with the study made by Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2018).

Furthermore, empirical evidence proves the fundamental role the 5SM confers to competence and that the recruitment of technocrats classifies the way in which electoral representatives are chosen. As a matter of fact, candidates for the 5SM online primaries were required to upload their CV on Grillo's website and not to state their political views. In like manner, Giuseppe Conte was required to upload his CV in order to attest his qualifications before proposing him to the President of The Republic. Moreover, the presence of non-partisan technocrats distinguishes the cabinet of the Mayor of Rome, Virginia Raggi, who is subscribed to the 5SM (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti, 2018).

3.2. Lega between populism and nationalism

This section provides an analysis of the second political actor composing the current Italian coalition government in power. Lega is not among the Italian youngest political parties. Rather, it was founded in the early 90s, during a period which in Italian political history is called "First Republic", and it is the oldest political force in the Italian party system. Lega's political history documents an extraordinary transformation

of its ideological views, as it has moved from being a separatist party into a nationalist one. Notably, a populist texture has always characterized its political ideology (Albertazzi, McDonnel., 2008; Martinelli, 2018). Moreover, if the party transformation has not ever been possible without the advent of its new leader, Matteo Salvini, this latter's use of social media has vehemently upheld his persuasive endeavour to establish a solid electoral support. For this reason, the following two sub-paragraphs focus both on the profound transformation undergone by the party after the arrival of its new leader Matteo Salvini, and the affinity the new Lega's leader has with technological communication tools.

3.2.1. *An ideological shift*

The Lega as it is known today is utterly different from that established from its founders, both in terms of voters' attraction and in terms of political aims. By only thinking that it has recently changed its name from Lega Nord (Northern League) to Lega, a clearer picture is drawn. Indeed, in 1991 when Umberto Bossi founded the party, his ambitions were rather different from those shared by the current leader, Matteo Salvini. Under Bossi leadership, the Northern League was a regionalist or separatist party (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). According to Mazzoleni and Mueller (2017), a regionalist party is a party whose organization is only established at regional level and aims to promote the interests of a regional community by advocating for a regional government. In doing so, the Northern League has clearly presented the symptoms of a populist party. As a matter of fact, by referring to the Manichean definition of populism given at the beginning of this work, the regional community was opposed both to the rest of Italian population ("others") and to the political class (elite). It was defined as ethnically, linguistically, religiously, geographically, economically and historically different and belonging to a divergent collective identity in respect to the Italian one (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). Moreover, Northern League distinguished itself with a sort of regional exclusivity as no candidates were presented in southern regions. Notably, the so-called "Norther question", that is the advocacy for a more degree of autonomy for the "Padania" region, crucially leveraged on the economic discrepancy existing between the Italian North and South (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). While, the elite was deemed self-servant and even hostile to the homogenous regional community which Lega spoke for. Moreover, in the early 90s Italian politics was hit by a wave of political scandals under the label of "Tangentopoli" which fuelled a common political discontent and dissatisfaction with mainstream parties (Albertazzi and Mcdonnell, 2008). The Lega succeeded in coming to power in several legislatures (1994-1995, 2001-2006, 2008-2011) especially thanks to the communicative skills and the charisma of its leader Umberto Bossi. Bossi has always employed an aggressive use of the language in both strongly opposing the lobbyism made by financial elites (banks and supermarket chains) and denouncing the corruption which traditional politicians were imbued with. Bossi identified with the term "Rome" his rivals, as considered the hub of political ruling class. Similarly, he favoured the vision of its electorate displayed as a homogenous

community of hard-worker entrepreneurs by condemning national and supranational ruling class and immigration as well (Bobba, 2018, Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008)

Yet, numerous scandals involving fraud allegiance addressed to the Northern League's leadership forced Umberto Bossi to step down from his position of secretary of the party. Ironically, Bossi was accused and then convicted of having taken possession of public funds, which then were used for private reasons (Bobba, 2018). Hence, he ended to be convicted of a crime which he frequently condemned his political rivals to be guilty of. As a result, in 2013 Matteo Salvini became the party secretary after being voted by the 80% of party members. Equally, his position was confirmed in 2017 when he was once again elected party's leader. Salvini has been able to lead the party to its historical best result at the 2018 election (17%). This was a success, especially considering that under its founder, Umberto Bossi, this party reached at last only 10% of electoral share (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). Moreover, the change of party's name in Lega is a distinctive remark of the profound ideological transformation brought about by the new leader (Ibid.).

Since the beginning of his secretariat, Matteo Salvini has realized a transformation of the ideological views fostered by the Lega. This mainly regards the shift from a regionalist towards a nationalist identity. At the same time, the party has conserved other key features from the past, as it still can be considered a populist anti-immigration, EU-criticist and far-right party (Martinelli, 2018).

In contrast to regionalism, nationalism is a wider concept and is irremediably linked with the concept of nation. According to Smith (1991; 1992), a nation is a "named human population sharing a historical territory, common memories and myths of origin, a mass standardized public culture, a common economy and territorial mobility and common legal rights and duties for all members" (Smith, 1991; 1992). Smith (1992) consequently concludes that nationalism is the ideology which fosters and aims to maintain "the autonomy, unity and identity of a nation" (Smith, 1991). With this simple and clear definition in mind, the contrast between regionalism and nationalism is emphasized. Relating with the concept of nation-state, nationalism mobilizes collective actions in order to construct a national identity through which building a sense of belonging and advocating for the conferral of powers in a sovereign state (Martinelli, 2018). Although this definition can appear excessively simplistic it perfectly makes the point. Since his rise on party leadership, Matteo Salvini has translated its regional interest's promotion in a national dimension. By the same trends, in the 2018 he decided to present party candidates in the South. Moreover, he ultimately stood for the elections as Prime Minister of Italy (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). Clearly, these three features drastically dispute the three features of a regionalist party envisaged by Mazzoleni and Mueller (2017), while they strongly adhere to Smith's nationalist bedrocks. Yet, in a recent article, Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone (2018) explain that Lega's representatives do not unanimously agree in stating that the willingness to establish a regional autonomy is no more a party's objective (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018).

Although nationalism represents a new ideological perspective embodied in the party, the Lega still shares with the Bossi's Lega Nord the same features which confine both in a populism paradigm. While the political agenda is clearly different, Lega's politics still grounds on the populist ideological definitions theorized by Mudde (2004). To put it differently, nationalism hosts a populist ideology. This led Martinelli (2018) to define the Matteo Salvini's Lega as an example of a national-populist party. On the one hand, Lega's political agenda is typical of a nationalist right-wing political party. National interests are put first and prevail over supranational claims (Martinelli, 2018). Moreover, this implies a permanent struggle against immigrants and immigration (Ibid.). Remarkably, anti-EU and anti-immigration positions have been inherited from the historical Leaguist tradition. On the other, these topics are used by the party and the leader himself to construct a well-defined political community while referring to immigrants as "others" and to the EU as the supranational "elite". By the same trends, the EU has replaced the meaning of "Rome", which in the Bossi's era referred to the political hub where corrupted and egoist politicians gathered themselves. Consequently, EU institutions and immigrants are scapegoated for the conditions in which Italy is going through (Ibid.). As the first are guilty for the national austerity measures applied which did not proof to be effective in recovering from the financial crisis, the second are considered a threat to security, law and order (Ibid.). Furthermore, the political offer presented by Lega hinges on tax reduction - the so-called flat tax - typical of neo-liberalism, and on "a moral and religious conservatism" (Ibid.). This latter helps its leader to delimit the borders of the community which he aims to represent, albeit it can be deemed contradictory in respect to its anti-immigration stances.

Despite the party's electorate is heavily attached to northern regions, the massive adoption of social media tools to propagandise political message has allowed both the party and Salvini himself to be extremely active on social network tools and to gather support not only in the north (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). Surprisingly, Lega reached a satisfying result in the South, as well. This is an impressive result for an ex-regionalist northern party. Although the relationship with party communication and social media will be treated in the next paragraph, certainly the party owes its success to the undisputable communicative skills of its leader, Matteo Salvini, which are manifested in his "success" on social media (Bobba, 2018). He successfully managed to juxtapose a homogenous group which has Italy close to its heart against those who, in leader's claims, do not take part of this group. Frequently, Salvini himself launches aggressive accusations against specific journalists, writers and TV presenters. Similarly, Salvini' flamboyant personality permits him to be often present in TV programs, which, in turn, exploit him to raise their audience's share (Albertazzi, McDonnell, 2008). If populism needs a charismatic and media savvy leader to flourish (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008), Salvini is decisively what Lega needed (Bobba, 2018).

3.2.2 *The extensive party leader's use of social media*

Matteo Salvini can be considered a social media's use master. Salvini dominates party's communication and is assisted by professionals of SM specialists as well (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). Moreover, the use of social media has created the existence of a permanent campaign, which the Lega's leader has been able to exploit for his political aims. Through social media, Salvini and Italian leaders in general, model and direct the public opinion agenda (Ibid.). However, being the most active political leader on digital media, Salvini does have a noticeable social media coverage and, consequently, his messages and posts have a considerable weight in this matter (Bobba, 2018; Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). In particular, his claims against immigration or concerning national security are frequently point of departure for TV debates or TV news' topics (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). Notably, thanks to social media, Salvini has been able to quickly carry out the "deep ideological shift" (Bobba, 2018) referred to in the previous paragraph, and to reach a broader electorate, especially in South Italy (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018).

According to the findings elaborated by Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone (2018), who undertook an analysis on content-related messages spread by both Salvini and the party on Facebook, assertions about immigration and security prevails. Similarly, they have acquired a "national" dimension (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018). Likewise, posts containing references to traditional northern values have been replaced by those related with national values and interests. While, although the party itself has devoted particular attention towards Centre/South Italy's issues in respect to those concerning the "north", Salvini appears to have a distinct bearing on those issues gripping centre/south's citizens the most (Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone, 2018), that confirms the leader's intentions to enhance his electoral support in non-northern regions.

In an even more interesting research, Giuliano Bobba (2018) examined a sample of Matteo Salvini's Facebook posts in a more rigorous way. Bobba (2018) decided to analysis the posts-related content according to the method designed by Jagers and Walgrave (2007)[4]. Moreover, Bobba (2018) went further by assigning to each post a degree in terms of "emotionalization" (Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, 2016), which refers to the extent to which a specific populist message can persuade the receiver. Consequently, Bobba (2018) "assessed the posts' emotional frame" by operationalising a "fear frame" and an "anger frame". This allowed him to assess if a specific post presented explicit elements which instil in the reader sentiments of fear, such as anxiety or worry, or sentiments of anger, such as dissatisfaction or frustration. Bobba (2018) found that the majority of Salvini's post were to be considered populists, as they contain references to at least one of those elements elucidated by Jagers and Walgrave (2007). In particular, the Lega's leader most frequently addressed

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[4] An explanation of the method used is offered in section 3.1

his claims to "the elite". Similarly, although "emotionalised-style messages did not account to the majority of those spread, he most often emotionally attributed blame (Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese, 2016) to the "elite" by resorting to feelings of anger (Bobba, 2018). Moreover, Salvini's emotionalise-style messages appealed the most among his followers. Importantly, this study also showed that, although the majority of messages shared by Lega's leader were anti-elitist, his followers mostly appreciated the "contentious populist" or "excluding populist" ones. To put it differently, the "likeability" of Salvini's posts was positively correlated to the presence of allusion or reference to "the others", who in Salvini's case are namely immigrants and other minorities. Finally, the study made by Bobba (2018) again confirmed that Salvini is a champion in the use of social media as his messages were particularly alluring to social media users. Hence, this study attested the bijective relationship existing between Salvini and social media: while social media surely play a chief role in disseminating his messages, Salvini exploits them to emotionalise and persuade his followers in a populist way. Considering the results of the last national election and the results in terms of "like" received on Facebook, Salvini has been adopting an effective strategy.

Conclusions

This dissertation has performed ad analysis on the ideology of populism by elucidating its main features. Moreover, populism has also been examined as a communication style, whose main tenants and recurrent elements have been clarified. In this way, the relationship between populism and media has emerged. Similarly, social media appears extremely suitable to allow populism and populists to spread their views, especially by means of a two-step communication flow (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). Contextually, analyses in this field proof that populist message turn out to be particularly alluring to social media users. Finally, the existence of a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2013) proves to be decisive for populists to enjoy greater media coverage.

Furthermore, this work has delved into the current Italian political situation starting from the government formation following the 2018 electoral results. Likewise, the 2018 general elections have showed a pronounced political disaffection with the traditional parties, paving the way to the success of populist parties. Accordingly, the use of media and social media during and prior the electoral campaign has emphasized the presence of an endemic populism. To put it differently, both populist leader and non-populist one has resorted to a sort of populist communicative style to convey their messages.

Equally, this analysis has deeply investigated the political offer and the ideological character presented by the two parties in power as well. Notably, while Lega can be considered a regionalist populist party transformed into a nationalist populist party, the 5SM can be deemed a techno-populist party. As a matter of fact, with the rising of its new leader Matteo Salvini, Lega has undergone a profound ideological shift. Similarly, Lega has become the most voted party on the right-spectrum. This was also due to the valuable strategy adopted by Salvini, who by means of social media has propagandised his populist view and reached a broader support. On this matter, his emotionalised anti-immigrants, anti-EU and people-centrist populist messages have ended up being extremely persuasive.

By the same trends, the relationship between technological tools and the 5SM appears unique. As a result, 5SM has been defined as a techno-populist party, whose meaning has been clarified. Not only 5SM presents clear populist ideological elements in its political communication, 5SM has also employed technological tools both to organize the "Movement" and to coordinate its members. Moreover, the 5SM's distinctive trait lies in the use of an online platform to designate its candidates, to craft law proposal and determine its political agenda.

To conclude, the findings reached shed light on the rise of populism on Italian political picture. Likewise, social media turn out to be vehemently affine to the use of populist communication. Therefore, the diffusion of populism appears correlated to the use of social media to persuade electors and citizens. Finally, the use of technological tools has proofed to be an effective way to implement a direct democracy.

Further studies can be made on this matter. Similarly, they should include a deeper analysis on the affinity between social media and populist communication. Correspondingly, a wider work analysis on the implementation of direct democracy via Internet and web could be performed. While, as regards the future of the Italian political situation, the last European elections' results have testified an increasing support for the Salvini and its right-nationalist populist party. Therefore, the phenomenon of Lega could hint further reflections.

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Riassunto in lingua italiana

L'onda populista sta propagandosi inarrestatamente nell'intero panorama politico internazionale. Gli ultimi risultati elettorali testimoniano l'affermarsi di tale corrente anche in Italia, dove si è instaurato un governo con forti tinte populiste, guidato dal Movimento 5 Stelle e dalla Lega. Questo è il punto di partenza di un'analisi che si propone di anatomizzare il fenomeno del populismo ed il suo dilagare all'interno della politica italiana. Codesta analisi è volta ad esaminare il populismo sia da un punto di vista ideologico, ossia come un'insieme di concetti e idee, sia da uno comunicativo. Pertanto, il conseguente obiettivo è quello di illustrare in che modo avviene la veicolazione di tali idee e il ruolo svolto in tal senso dai mezzi di comunicazione. Di conseguenza, il fine ultimo di questa tesi è di esaminare la relazione che sussiste tra il populismo e l'utlizzo di strumenti di comunicazione, con un particolare riferimento ai mezzi di comunicazione digitali. Nel dettaglio, Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) e Lega sono oggetto di una ricerca che espone non solo la loro offerta politica e ideologica, ma anche il rapporto che essi hanno con gli strumenti tecnologico-digitali. Infatti, se da un lato la Lega, e in particolare il suo Leader Matteo salvini, abbia beneficiato dei social media per diffondere idee e perusadere elettori, dall'altro è noto l'utilizzo di una piattaforma digitale da parte del M5S per introdurre una forma di democrazia diretta.

Nel primo capitolo dell'elaborato, il populismo è definito come "un'ideologia che considera la società distintamente separata in due gruppi omogenei e l'un l'altro contrapposti: al "popolo puro" si oppone l'elite corrotta. Inoltre, essa afferma che la politica debba essere concepita come l'attuazione del volere generale del "popolo puro". Questa definizione comporta l'esistenza di una distinzione morale tra i due gruppi. Infatti, l'elite è reputata corrotta, egoista, arrivista, i cui membri aspirano a raggiungere interessi personali a discapito di quelli avanzati dai propri elettori o dal popolo stesso. D'altronde, alla base di ogni sistema democratico vi è la detenzione della sovranità da parte del popolo, a cui, dunque, spetta l'onere di assicurarsi che la propria volontà sia assecondata e che corruzione ed individualismo vengano debellati. Unitamente a quanto detto, l'elite non è pensata essere composta da soli politici, in quanto anche giornalisti, membri dell'alta finanza o magistrati possono farne parte. In aggiunta, la precondizione secondo cui il popolo si definisce distinto e omogeneo crea un'identità in cui le persone si rispecchiano e condividono gli stessi interessi o obiettivi. Coloro i quali non si rispecchiano in tale identità vengono considerati alla stessa stregua dell'elite, definiti con "gli altri" come epitoto, diversi e quindi anch'essi rivali del "popolo". Possono far parte di questa categoria gli immigrati, gli omosessuali, o alcune minoranze etniche. In secondo luogo, data la scarsa profondità dei concetti teorici su cui il populismo è basato, esso è una forma ideologica che può essere amalgamata con dottrine politiche di maggiore spessore, come il socialismo o il liberalismo. Il populismo, perciò, può essere "ospitato" da altre ideologie, il che lo rende estremamente camaleontico. E', altresì, necessaria l'esistenza di una figura carismatica alla guida di un movimento populist affinche quest'ultimo fiorisca. Egli deve avere le sembianze di un leader che sappia conoscere le incertezze e le difficoltà sollevate dal popolo proponendo facili soluzioni

a problemi complessi, esprimendo vicinanza alle persone per apparire come uno di loro. Con un linguaggio semplice, egli deve saper veicolare messaggi in modo diretto e chiaro attorno cui sviluppare un'idea di comunità. anche attraverso l'utilizzo dei media. Infine, il populismo nasce come risposta ad una situazione di crisi, di decadimento morale, contraddistinta da una forte disillusione nella credibilità dei partiti tradizionali, incapaci di offrire attuabili soluzioni a problemi ricorrenti. Queste crisi possono intendersi come conseguenze della globalizzazione o di migrazioni incontrollate, ma tutte portano ad un'assenza totale di partecipazione politica. In questo modo, il populismo affiora invitando le persone a reagire. Attraverso le parole del leader, figura chiave in questo frangente, le persone si mobilizzano per reclamare una migliore gestione dei pubblici poteri, talvolta ridotta ad una richiesta di democrazia diretta. Il populismo è , quindi, da intendersi come una "mutazione della democrazia rappresentativa", laddove ad un sentimento anti-partitico è connessa una forte partecipazione dal basso, in un ordinamento politico in cui il potere è ad ogni modo detenuto dal popolo.

La tesi si sofferma sui risultati elettorali posti in essere dopo le votazioni del 2018 e la conseguente instaurazione al governo di Lega e M5S, ponendo in evidenza sia l'incredibile risultato ottenuto dalla Lega, che ha raggiunto il suo più grande successo elettorale dalla sua fondazione, e del M5S, consolidatosi come primo partito nazionale in termini elettorali, sia la drammatica disfatta del Partito Democratico e di Forza Italia, incapaci di offrirsi come una valida alternativa al populismo. Se comparate con quelle precedenti del 2013, le ultime elezioni hanno anche dimostrato una forte volatilità elettorale unita ad una trasformazione del sistema partitico italiano, riformato in un tripolarismo in cui all'apice vi è il M5S, seguito dalla coalizione di destra ed, infine, da quella di sinistra. Inoltre, gli esiti delle urne hanno sancito una profonda correlazione tra la scelta del voto e la territorialità geografica di quest'ultimo. Se nelle regioni del nord, più industrializzate ed economicamente sviluppate, la proposta della lega e della coalizione del centro-destra di una "flat-tax" ha portato i risultati sperati, nelle zone centrali e meridionali, dove la disoccupazione raggiunge livelli più allarmanti, l'intenzione da parte del M5S di introdurre un "reddito di cittadinanza" ha convinto maggiormente gli elettori. Alla luce dei risultati elettorali, si è manifestata una lampante richiesta di cambiamento. Di fatto, dopo le "consultazioni", Lega e M5S hanno raggiunto un accordo per la formazione del nuovo governo. Caratteristica saliente di tale governo risiede nella presenza di una figura nominata come Primo Ministro dal Capo Dello Stato Sergio Mattarella diversa da quella dei due leader politici di Lega e M5S. Invero, Luigi Di Maio, capo politico del M5S, ha deciso di proporre Giuseppe Conte, un professore di diritto universitatio alla sua prima esperienza politica, come capo del governo sia al suo alleato, Matteo Salvini (leader della Lega), che al Presidente Della Repubblica. I leader dei due partiti al potere hanno anche aderito a stipulare un contratto di governo, su cui basare la propria agenda poltica, e a fare parte dell'esecutivo.

La tecnologia e i media hanno disputato un ruolo primario nel diffondere messaggi e perusadere elettori durante la campagna elettorale. Secondo i dati ITANES, la campagna si è sviluppata principalmente attorno a quattro temi: disoccupazione, tasse, immigrazione e corruzione. In altre parole, ha decisamente risentito della

forte ondata migratoria e le difficili condizioni economiche che l'italia e l'UE si trovano ad affrontare. Su questi argomenti, i leader dei principali partiti politici hanno preferito erigere un terreno ostile e conflittuale, poco incline ad un dibattito costruttivo, in cui attestare le proprie capacità e proposte. Data l'assenza di rimborsi elettorali, i leader politici hanno particolarmente utilizzato i media per veicolare i propri messaggi. In particolare, secondo una ricerca condotta da Bobba e Roncarolo, i social media hanno coadiuvato la trasmissione di messaggi di stampo populista e promosso l'utilizzo di dialettiche definitivamente populiste. Ciò che emerge da tale ricerca, è la sorprendente capacità da parte dei messaggi populisti di ricevere appoggio e condivisione, soprattutto se riferiti agli immigrati, in confronto a quelli che non presentano gli stessi elementi narrativi su cui si fonda il populismo.

Nel secondo capitolo, l'elaborato illustra lo stile comunicativo attraverso cui il populismo si manifesta. Ricorrenti sono espliciti riferimenti alla centralità del popolo, all'anti-elitismo e al rifiuto di coloro i quali non condividono gli stessi vaolori del popolo. Per mezzo di un liguaggio informale ed un abbigliamento informale, il populista valorizza le virtù del popolo ed esalta la sua sovranità, trasmettendo emozioni agli ascoltatori. Allo stesso tempo, il populista si serve di vittime sacrificali a cui additare colpe e responsabilità per la situazione di malessere sociale, culturale e politico in cui riversa la società. In questo senso, elite e immigrati servono come capri espiatori per incanalare rancore e odio verso un nemico comune del popolo, chiamato a difesa della propria madrepatria, o dei vaolri che compongono quest'ultima.

Questo stile di comunicazione è impiegato anche nel diffondere pensieri e opinioni attraverso i media. La copertura mediatica permette ai populisti di raggiungere un maggior numero di elettori. In generale, i media possono essere divisi in due grandi categorie: stampa o mezzi di comunicazione di massa e social media o piattaforme di comunicazione digitale. L'interazione con il populismo varia a seconda del tipo di media utilizzato. I primi svolgono un ruolo di mediatori, poichè si offrono di riportare ciò che viene asserito dai populisti. Ossia, i giornalisti possono influenzare i lettori o gli ascoltatori. Al contrario, i social media permettono ai populisti di comunicare direttamene con i propri sostenitori, riducendone la distanza.

I social media hanno consentito ai populisti di evitare l'opera di filtraggio effettuata dai giornalisti nei confronti dei loro messaggi. Inoltre, la possibilità di comunicare direttamente con gli elettori assiste il populista nell'apparire più vicino ad essi e a costruire un senso di comunità a cui appartenere. Infatti, i social media permettono la varicazione di confini geografici e la vicinanza di persone che condividono gli stessi interessi, concetto sul quale si basa la cossiddetta viralità del messaggio diffuso, ossia la sua popolarità. In tal senso, il leader può parlare direttamente con i propri seguaci e beneficiare del fatto che anche questi ultimi possono condividere il messaggio e, quindi ampliare la sua diffusione. In più, per mezzo di questi nuovi mezzi di comunicazione, il populista stesso può enfatizzare il proprio messaggio trasmettendo emozioni e mettendo in risalto il proprio lato umano, così da creare un interconnessione con gli utenti. Diverse ricerche hanno posto in risalto l'affinità tra social media e populismo, soprattutto sull'abilità dei social media di diffondere

l'ideologia populista. Quello che si evince maggiormente è che la comunicazione populista sui social media appare frammentata. Il messaggio populista tipicamente contiene al massimo uno o due espliciti riferimenti ivi discussi. Ciò è dovuto a una forte volontà dei populisti di ridurre la complessità ideologica residente nei loro messaggi, e permettere al messaggio stesso sia di non essere distorto dai giornalisti che di essere malleato secondo la propria visione politica del lettore. In aggiunta, uno studio condotto da Mazzoleni e Bracciale ha rilevato la presenza di un populismo "endemico" nello stile comunicativo dei prinicpali leader politici dello Stivale sui social media. In altre parole, sia gli esponenti politici populisti che quelli non-populisti ricorrono a narrative populiste per ottenere un maggior successo virale, e quindi elettorale.

Il terzo capitolo offre un'analisi dei due partiti saliti al governo dopo le elezioni del 2018, mossa dalla forte presenza della componente populista all'interno della loro offerta ideologica; un ulteriore intento è quello di sviscerare il legame che Lega e M5S hanno con le tecnologie digitali. L'analisi si concentra prima sul M5S, una giovane forza politica che si è contraddistinto per la sua narrativa anti-sistema e per il peculiare utilizzo di una piattaforma web attraverso cui attivare una forma di democrazia diretta all'interno del "Movimento". Tali particolarità hanno portato molti scienziati politici a definirlo un partito tecnopopulista. Ivi, l'elaborato espone il significato di tecnopopulismo, un concetto che esprime una relazione tra il populismo, la tecnocrazia e l'uso della tecnologia. Il tecnopopulismo è inteso come il conseguimento del volere del popolo per mezzo di politiche pubbliche corrette ed ideate da persone esperte, capaci e competenti. Perciò, le tecnologie digitali rappresentano uno strumento affinchè competenze e capacità possano fluire e diffondersi all'interno della comunità. Inoltre, le tecnologie permettono un miglioramento della democrazia, che in ottica populista è concepito nell'attivazione di una democrazia diretta, peraltro ad un minor costo.

Il M5S deve le sue origini all' ex-comico Beppe Grillo, il quale, nei primi anni 2000, attraverso un blog personale cominciò a discutere di politica con i suoi seguaci denunciando malaffare e corruzione presenti tra i palazzi di Governo. Tra il 2008 e il 2009, anno in cui il Movimento fu fondato, i primi candidati del M5S furono eletti a livello comunale e regionale. Nel 2013 il M5S si presentò per la prima volta alle elezioni nazionali in cui ricevette il consenso del 25,6 % degli elettori. Il M5S fece leva sul malcontento generale e su un diffuso scetticismo nei confronti dei partiti tradizionali, aggravato dalle conseguenze di una profonda crisi economica. Beppe grillo può essere considerato il leader del M5S. Nonostante la figura di leader politico sia rivestita da Luigi Di Maio, Grillo ricopre il ruolo di garante dei valori del "Movimento". La sua retorica anti-partitica, accompagnata da un uso volgare del linguaggio ed una mimica espressiva, ha reso Grillo un leader carismatico capace di persuadere gli elettori colpevolizzando i media e i rappresentanti politici italiani additando ai primi la responsabilità di non rappresentare degnamente la realtà e difendere i privilegi e gli interessi personali dei secondi. Emblematico è, quindi, l'impiego di una narrativa tipicamente populista che tende a demarcare le differenze tra il popolo e i suoi nemici.

Tuttavia, il M5S non presenta una chiara ideologia politica in quanto le proposte avanzate possono configurarsi sia alla destra che alla sinistra dell'orizzonte politico, e i suoi esponenti si dichiarano essere portatori di idee. Inoltre, esso è stato ricettore di voti di protesta, più che ricevere il supporto di persone realmente devote ai suoi valori. Infine, l'assenza di Grillo nei suoi rappresentanti politici conferma ambiguità al Movimento. Peculiare è sicuramente il fatto che il "Movimento" non aveva mai stretto alleanze con nessun partito prima di stipularla con la Lega.

Un tratto distintivo del M5S è l'uso della tecnologia. Più precisamente, la rete ha favorito la creazione del Movimento stesso e caldeggia l'interazione tra i suoi membri e i rappresentanti politici, creando cosi una struttura verticale e orizzontale. Il M5S appare così organizzato attraverso la rete. Dal blog di Grillo a Facebook e Twitter, sono varie le piattaforme web attraverso cui i membri del M5S possono confrontarsi e coordinarsi. Sicuramente la piattaforma web Rousseau che permette la realizzazione di una demcorazia diretta è l'elemento più innovativo su cui vale la pena focalizzarsi. Il suo utilizzo nasce dall'idea di disconoscere il ruolo di rappresentante politico da quello di mediatore tra i cittadini e le istituzioni politiche. Infatti, i "Cinque Stelle" ritengono che i rappresentanti politici debbano parlare a nome del popolo e difendere il loro interessi. La piattaforma Rousseau permette ai membri del Movimento di designare i candidati da presentare alle elezioni, il proprio porgramma politico o il suo leader politico. Inoltre, essa permette ai membri di redigere un vero e proprio disegno di legge e di modificare le proposta di legge avanzate dai rappresentanti politici del M5S. Allo stesso tempo, i politici del M5S si riservano il diritto di decidere quale proposta di legge introdurre in sede legislativa. Tuttavia, criticità sui database contenenti i voti degli iscritti e la presenza di Grillo e Daniele Casaleggio (ideatore della Piattaforma e co-fondatore del Movimento) gettano ombre sulla trasparenza del M5S. Essi, di fatto, sono gli unici proprietari del logo del Movimento e preservano il potere di espellere coloro i quali non rispettano le loro direttive o il codice di condotta del Movimento.

il M5S emerge essere un partito tecnopopulista non sono dalla sua relazione con la tecnologia e l'introduzione di una piattaforma web adatta ad attuare una forma di democrazia diretta, bensì anche dalla proposta di designare Giuseppe Conte come Primo Ministro. Ciò evidenzia la forte volonta da parte del Movimento di fare affidamento a competenza e preparazione per apportare soluzioni pratiche a livello politico. Inoltre, l'atto di richiedere a Giuseppe Conte, professore universitario senza alcuna esperienza politica precedente, di pubblicare il proprio CV al fine di dimostrare capacità e competenza corrobora quanto detto.

Dal canto suo, la Lega è uno dei partiti più longevi presenti nel panorama politico italiano che, con il suo nuovo leader Matteo Salvini, ha subito una profonda trasformazione ideologica. Inoltre, proprio l'uso della tecnologia, in particolare dei social media, hanno permesso al suo leader di acrescere il proprio consenso. La Lega fu fondata nei primi anni '90 da Umberto Bossi con il nome di Lega Nord, che presentava tutte le caratteristiche per essere definito sia regionalista che populista. Lega Nord trovava il supporto di tutti coloro i quali condividevano l'idea che la regione della Padania dovesse ottenere l'indipendenza o una maggiore

autonomia, manifestando una forte differenza culturale, linguistica, e soprattutto economica dalle altre regioni italiane. Al contempo, Bossi utilizzò una propaganda tipicamente populista alternando un uso aggressivo del linguaggio ad una narrativa anti-sistema per deridere sia gli avversari politici che per isolare ed enfatizzare i valori culturali e sociali degli abitanti delle regioni del nord Italia, contraddistinte da un maggiore sviluppo economico rispetto a quelle meridionali. Inoltre, si servì del malcontento generale generato dalle inchieste anti-corruzione, che presero il nome di Tangentopoli, per ottenere maggiore consenso elettorale e screditare i partiti tradizionali del tempo. Successivamente, Bossi fu costretto a dimettersi a causa di alcune accuse di frode. Per questi motivi, nel 2013 Matteo Salvini divenne il segretario del partito e fu, ulteriormente, confermato tale, nel 2017.

Matteo Salvini ha operato un profondo cambiamento nell'offerta ideologica proposta dal suo partito, trasformando un partito regionalista in uno nazionalista. Al contrario di quella di Bossi, la retorica di Salvini declama valori comuni a tutti i cittadini italiani per costrurie un senso di identità nazionale. Tuttavia, Salvini condivide con il suo predecessore quegli elementi comunicativi ricorrenti tra i populisti. Infatti, gli avversari politici vengono derisi e i partiti tradizionali reputati responsabili per le impervie condizioni economiche in cui versa il Paese, mentre il popolo è chiamato a difendere i propri confini e valori in risposta alla grave crisi migratoria che sta affliggendo i paesi del Mar Mediterraneo. In altre parole, gli immigrati sono diventati i nuovi capri espiatori per fini propagandistici, prendendo il posto di quelli a cui si riferiva Bossi negli anni della sua segreteria, i cittadini meridionali.

Salvini è un leader carismatico e ha portato il suo partito ad un successo storico, ma ha anche sapientemente beneficiato dell'utilizzo dei social media per diffondere a pieno i propri messaggi. Ciò gli ha permesso di effettuare una rapida trasformazione ideologica. Molti sono i riferimenti all'elite o agli immigrati all'interno dei suoi messaggi, così da poter essere definiti populisti. Inoltre, non solo i suoi messaggi sono riferiti ai cittadini italiani a prescindere dalla loro territorialità, bensì essi presentano anche una forte componente emozionale. Quest'ultima permette a Salvini di imprimere sentimenti, dettagliatamente di frustrazione e irrequietezza, per catturare meglio l'attenzione e divulgare le proprie idee. La sfrenata attività del leader della Lega sui social meida ha sicuramente contributio al successo elettorale raggiunto dal suo partito nelle elezioni del 2018.

In conclusione, questa tesi ha prima definito il populismo da un punto di vista ideologico e uno comunicativo. Ha, poi, mosso un'analisi sul rapporto tra populismo e strumenti tecnologici soffermandosi ulteriormente sulle peculiarità presentate dai due partiti italiani al governo in quest'ottica. Emerge una forte affinità tra l'uso dei social media e la capacità del populismo di trarre consenso tra gli utenti. Infine, l'uso della tecnologia appare decisiva per l'effettiva attivazione di una democrazia diretta.