

“The Cognitive Path to Power
in the Modern Social Media Age:
A Case-Study on Matteo Salvini’s
Communication”

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A mia madre,
che ha sempre avuto la presunzione di conoscermi ma mai quella di scegliere per me.

A mio padre,
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che avrebbe dovuto essere qui.

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INTRODUCTION

With the rising of awareness about the role of social media in shaping public opinion, commercial institutes have started to pay attention to these new channels of distributions in order to profit from them. However, to attain this goal, it would be unreasonable to hold on to the traditional formula of a one-way process in which marketers simply produce, sell and collect revenues. On the other hand, companies were asked to build specific marketing strategies consistent with the new environment and more importantly, with the specific platform being used. As it is commonly known, when great benefits are at stakes, changes are not slow in coming. Since these platforms are made of customers that are first of all users with more choices, more tools, more information, and more peer-to-peer power than ever, marketing experienced a shift toward a two-way process in which “successful companies in social media follow the rule of listening first, selling second”¹. Companies no longer promote mainstream messages, but they pay attention to different market niches which might be leagues away from each other but close in interest⁴: they give up impersonal communication in favor of a more customized one. Furthermore, those whom these niches are made of are active Internet-contributors who put online part of them general creative prowess. Thus, users are now both producers and consumers of contents as the hybrid term “prosumers” accurately underlines². Within this context, users-to-users relationships become crucial in influencing customers: I listen to someone’s feedback on a product or service and if he/she had been persuasive enough, I will be likely to search for further information and eventually buy it. Indeed, Instagram statistics shows that 75% of users take action after looking at a post³ and 80% of Instagram users voluntarily connect with a brand on the platform⁴. It’s not by chance that Tom Duncan and Sandra E. Moriarty have coined the term “Relationship Marketing” to refer to this new concept of market⁵. This is the ground of the so-called User-Generated Content Model (UGC Model) in marketing which have its roots in the Word of Mouth (WOM) concept, i.e. to rely on others’ recommendation in promoting my product by turning my consumers in my own brands marketing agents. The underlying idea is that we will be more likely to trust these Ordinary Brand Ambassador and to believe they are worth that trust more than an Official Brand Manager will ever be. According to East, Hammond and Wright is exactly the lack of commercial bias in WOM to make it a very effective source of information about prospective consumer choices⁶. In other words, the influencer is somebody we can relate to: she does not want to deceive us because she could be us if we would have made different decisions.

If it is true that politicians running for office are doing nothing that “selling” a service for their community then politics might be closer than we thought to these advertising logics. B. R. Gordon compared the paradigms

¹ Vukanovic, Zvezdan. "New Media Business Models in Social and Web Media." *Journal of Media Business Studies* 8, no. 3 (2011): 51-67. doi:10.1080/16522354.2011.11073526

² Tapscott, Don, Williams Anthony D. Don. Tapscott, and Anthony D. Williams. *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*. London: Atlantic Books, 2011

³ <https://bit.ly/2erQMeh>

⁴ <https://bit.ly/2GqUWBr>

⁵ Duncan, Tom, and Sandra E. Moriarty. "A Communication-Based Marketing Model for Managing Relationships." *Journal of Marketing* 62, no. 2 (1998): 1. doi:10.2307/1252157

⁶ East, Robert, Kathy Hammond, and Malcolm Wright. "The Relative Incidence of Positive and Negative Word of Mouth: A Multi-category Study." *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 24, no. 2 (2007): 175-84. doi: 10.1016/j.ijresmar.2006.12.004

used in goods and services marketing to those applied within the institutional framework and found indeed several similarities⁷. In detail, individuals have been found to show a political loyalty which is quite similar to a brand preference and thus closely related to emotional appeal and social influence. Conversely, candidate revealed a tendency to adopt specific policy positions according to the same logic behind firms' decision: the attempt to persuade. Indeed, as Giulio Mozzi recently said: the general purpose of the story is not to please but to deceive⁸. Going on this path, Margaret Scammell coined the term "Consumer democracy" to indicate that "politics are sold like commercial products, and that citizens judge, and are invited to judge, politics as commercial products"⁹. By logic, we expect this analogy to refer not only to the individual attitudes but also to the decision's biases and heuristics which human decision-making implies. In fact, despite what Enlightenment lead us to believe, "the man as a rational being is probably one of the greatest fake news of our culture"¹⁰. We are not rational beings, but we use shortcuts and empirical evidence to ease the cognitive load of making a decision. In other words, we interpret events and messages in terms of consistency with our own stereotypes and ideas¹¹. For instance, in saying that an influencer is considered to be trustworthy because "she could be us", I am actually implying that we are driven to favour those pieces of information coming from people with attitudes and interests recognized to be consistent with our own ones. I guess a number of us refuse to look at ourselves as inherently biased but the WOM strategy, among others, demonstrates that it does exist someone who is aware of this unconscious bias, namely sellers.

Within this scenario, it is communication to bear the crucial role of creating a community of users interested in the offered products (in this case, the political leader and his ideas) by exploiting either their desires or beliefs. Here and all along my work, Communication will not simply mean "to say something" but we are going to think of communication in a more comprehensive and general way: we emphasize the communicative dimension of "getting a message to others", either explicitly or implicitly. However, this definition does not imply that, once a message is out, everyone will get it homogeneously. Nevertheless, a certain degree of homologation in understanding and interpretation of messages could be reached through specific communicative efforts.

Communication to be effective in "selling" its content must be consistent with the environment in which its targets live in. By logic, its forms are nowadays very different from the past but, they do preserve some features of its general structure. In detail, the traditional model of communication¹² implies a *source* that encodes the message; a *channel*, i.e. a transmission medium or distribution channel and *noise* that interferes with the communication processing, i.e. a competitor. Furthermore, the model also provides for a *receiver* who decodes

⁷ Gordon, Brett & Lovett, Mitchell & Shachar, Ron & Arceneaux, Kevin & Moorthy, Sridhar & Peress, Michael & R. Rao, Akshay & K. Sen, Subrata & Soberman, David & Urminsky, Oleg. (2011). Marketing and Politics: Models, Behavior, and Policy Implications - Session at the 8th Triennial Choice Symposium. Marketing Letters. 23. 391-403-

⁸ Mozzi, Giulio. Oracolo Manuale per Scrittrici E Scrittori. 2019 ed. Venezia, IT: Sonzogno.

⁹ Scammell, Margaret. Consumer Democracy: The Marketing of Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

¹⁰ Quattrococchi, Walter, and Antonella Vicini. Liberi Di Crederci: Informazione, Internet E Post-verità. Torino: Codice Edizioni, 2018. p. 41

¹¹ Quattrococchi, Walter, and Antonella Vicini. "La scimmia" in Liberi Di Crederci: Informazione, Internet E Post-verità. Torino: Codice Edizioni, 2018.

¹² Lassell, Harold H. "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society." The Communication of Ideas, 1948, 37-51.

the message and a *feedback* that sends the receiver's response back to the source¹³. Intuitively, the model appears to be a circle that we can build to our own advantage by modifying some of its elements. This process of re-writing is what I would call a “Communicative strategy”.

The purpose of this work is to investigate the changes due to the Internet Revolution in the Communication model and to provide you with an accurate picture of what it looks like now. Despite references to the economic and business field, we have chosen to focus on politics and political Communication.

First of all, I will deal with variations from a macro-level perspective, analysing the New Environment and its characteristics in order to offer you a careful overview of the general framework in which the analysis have its roots. In looking at the context, we will look to the intersection of traditional media logics (TV, radio, press) with digital media logics (Internet)¹⁴ either in a qualitative and quantitative sense. Data about the Italian Online reality will be the ground to understand what it is happening on Social Media whose features have been found to blend and interact with each other. Furthermore, this chapter aims to provide an analysis of the characterizing communicative phenomena: disintermediation and the emergence of echo chambers.

In Chapter II, the investigation moves on by looking at the concept of Political Communication and the emotional engine which lies behind its logic. Indeed, as we have briefly said above, humans are not rational, and they attach specific emotive reaction to the specific way in which an argument is introduced¹⁵. Within this context, we will investigate the main emotional drivers behind individuals’ behaviour with a particular focus on the role of anger and the related necessity to constantly looking for enemies. Both the aforementioned factors play a pivotal role in political leaders’ communicative strategies, whose main purpose lies with persuasion by exploiting individuals’ cognitive shortcuts. The context of these persuasive political narratives is strictly peculiar and, we will pay particular attention to two phenomena: simplification, either in terms of style or contents, and leadership.

Hereafter, in the last Chapter, we will focus on the specific communicative strategy of the Italian Home Secretary and Vice-chairman of the Council in office: Matteo Salvini. Beginning from the historical background of his party and its Re-Branding, we will try to unveil the pillars behind his communication’s strategy and the empirical mechanism on the ground of his success. Great attention will be paid to crossmediality and the TWT virtuous cycle with relevant insights concerning Television’s appearances and participation to political rallies.

¹³ Duncan, Tom, and Sandra E. Moriarty. "A Communication-Based Marketing Model for Managing Relationships." *Journal of Marketing* 62, no. 2 (1998): 1. doi:10.2307/1252157. p. 2

¹⁴ Bracciale, Roberta, and Christopher Cepernich. "Hybrid 2018 Campaigning: The Social Media Habits of Italian Political Leaders and Parties." *Italian Political Science* 13 (2018): 1-15.

¹⁵ Quattrocioni, Walter, and Antonella Vicini. *Liberi Di Crederci: Informazione, Internet E Post-verità*. Torino: Codice Edizioni, 2018. p. 124

First Chapter

The New Environment

*“There is something new
under the sun today, or rather,
something ancient”*

-Giovanni Pascoli, L'aquilone
(1890).

1.1 HYBRID COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

The etymological Ancestor of the term “hybrid”, namely “*hibrida*” emerged around c.1850 during the Ancient Roman Empire to indicate a mongrel¹⁶ or to underline a mixed racial inheritance¹⁷. In both cases, the word was permeated with a negative connotation that had its roots in the Greek concept of *hubris* as “outrage” or “presumption toward the gods”¹⁸. However, the Roman-related racial meaning has been rapidly replaced by a more figurative one that simply focused on the “mixed nature” of these hybrid entities. The aforementioned connotation appears to be significantly more consistent with the present-day interpretation of hybrid and the related phenomenon of hybridization. Nowadays, indeed the term refers to a thing “of mixed character; composed of different elements” and by logic, it stands as the proper noun for something which is “made by combining two different elements”¹⁹. In other words, it conveys an image of a heterogeneous mix of different sources or features that co-exist within a single unit. Thanks to its broad definition, the concept has been able to adapt to a number of fields of research and many scholars began to implement it in their texts. Mayfair Mei-hui Yang spoke of “economic hybridity”²⁰; Pascal-Yan Sayegh tried to address the debate around what he calls “cultural hybridity”²¹. Sabine Milz provided us with a comparative analysis of the ideas and the implications of the so-called “lingual hybridity”²² while Hoffman introduced his notion of “Hybrid Wars”²³. Apart from its academic dimension, Hybridity also plays a key role in our everyday experience. For instance, we continuously and unconsciously resort to what scholars identify as hybrid words, i.e. “compounds of words of two different origins”²⁴. Among the many, “television” which originates from the merging together of “tele”, i.e. far off and “visio”: literally to see things that are far off, which is what a television lets you do²⁵. The concept of hybrid words is usually associated with that of “loanwords”, i.e. “words and expressions borrowed from another language to respond to a semantic or lexical gap”²⁶; for instance: “caffè”, “goal” (gol) and expressions imported from sports as “tennis” or “inning” from baseball. Thus, these words are functional to the language in which they are incorporated since they develop a bridge between a meaning and its “coding”²⁷ in the ordinary language. Because of their mixed nature and their essential role, these words can stand as a very accurate example of the hybrid phenomenon. This phenomenon of lexical interference might also be due to the necessity to import the name along with the item it refers to, as in the case of the “Gay Pride”

¹⁶ Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “Hybrid”. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/hybrid>

¹⁷ Chadwick, Andrew. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press., 2013.

¹⁸ Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “Hubris”. https://www.etymonline.com/word/hubris?ref=etymonline_crossreference

¹⁹ English Oxford Living Dictionaries, s.v. “Hybrid”. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hybrid>

²⁰ Yang. "Putting Global Capitalism in Its Place: Economic Hybridity, Bataille, and Ritual Expenditure." *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 4 (2000): 477. doi:10.2307/3596667-

²¹ Pascal-Yan Sayegh. *Cultural Hybridity and Modern Binaries: Overcoming the Opposition Between Identity and Otherness?* 2008.

²² Milz, Sabine. *HYBRIDITY IN CULTURE, LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY CARIBBEAN CANADIAN AND TURKISH GERMAN WOMEN'S WRITING EXEMPLIFIED BY THE WRITERS M. N. PHILIP AND E. S. OZDAMAR*. PhD diss., McMaster University. 132-77-

²³ Hoffman, Frank G. *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of hybrid Wars*. Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007

²⁴ Kuczkiwicz-Fraze, Agnieszka. "Hybridity as Reflected in Language. The Case of Hindi and Persian." *Cracow Indological Studies* 4 (2002): 1-3.

²⁵ OxfordWords Blog: <https://blog.oxforddictionaries.com/2012/11/09/hybrid-words/>

²⁶ Kobia, Hillary Ngaine. "THE USE AND ABUSE OF LOANWORDS IN THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE." *Neno Language Service* (blog). Accessed May 11, 2019. <https://www.nenolanguageservices.com/en/blog/use-abuse-loanwords-italian-language-3959.html>.

²⁷ Language is described as a convention or a code that made conversation possible (Quattrociocchi, Walter, and Antonella Vicini. *Liberi Di Crederci: Informazione, Internet E Post-verità*. Torino: Codice Edizioni, 2018. Chapter 1; p. 43). By consequence it makes sense to think of single words as the micro-output of this activity of codification.

(parade). Indeed, the LGBTQ social march has its roots in the United States²⁸ and just at a later stage, it has become a worldwide event carrying its original name along with it. The pizza did nothing different when it had been exported all over the globe: it carried its name with it. The Italian scenario is particularly rich in terms of foreign words - especially English ones - which have become inherently part of the country's spoken language but among the many, a distinction has to be made. In fact, some of the words that we are likely to employ in our daily conversations are imported from a different language in the absence of any real need because of the actual availability of their Italian equivalents. These words are classified as "loanwords of luxury": e.g. weekend (*fine Settimana*); "leader" (*capo*), "summit" (*vertice*); "rumours" (*voci*) and so forth²⁹. The topic raises an important debate on the future implications of this unjustified tendency to substitute Italian expressions with foreign ones: what does it really mean to say "display" in place of "*schermo*"? Language is not a concept fixed over time, but it evolves as a consequence of how we use it in our speaking and in our writing³⁰: we build our language almost as the latter shapes us³¹. Scholars investigate the possibility for the English language not to be just a "common unifying factor" but to stand also as a "killer language"³². Thus, they try to unveil the potential drawbacks of linguistic borrowing and they mainly focus on the risk that it might lead to the loss of identity of the recipient words or eventually language³³. This, intuitively, build on the already mentioned assumption that identity is strictly connected to language, both in terms of national and individual identity. This kind of fear opens up to a second dimension of the present analysis of a hybrid communication system: hybridity does not only stand as an inevitable functional phenomenon (e.g. loanwords) but it also raises questions on whether to call for some restrictions due to widespread concern about its implications.

However, before we proceed to the analysis of the current hybrid communication system, either in terms of its essential role, its utilitarian nature and its potential drawbacks, we must have clear in mind what the former is and where it has its roots. As you may recall, "hybrid" is a mixture of different elements or sources coexisting within a single unit. Therefore, drawing on Andrew Chadwick's definition, we will refer to the hybrid communication system as the grandstand of the intersection between traditional old media logics (TV, radio, press) and new digital media logics (Internet)³⁴. Logics are defined as the set of "technologies, genres, norms,

²⁸ GayPride born as a commemoration of the so-called "Stonewall Riots" on June 28, 1969. On this day, the police arrived at the Stonewall Inn, a bar in NY to arrest more than 200 gay people. Indeed, at that time, "Sodomy" was still listed among the crimes. (Ballou, Elizabeth. "The Origins of Pride Month: What You Should Know About Its History." *Bustle*, June 22, 2016. Accessed May 13, 2019.

<https://www.bustle.com/articles/166925-the-origins-of-pride-month-what-you-should-know-about-its-history>)

²⁹ Varga, Dražen, and Saša Bjelobaba. "English Loanwords in French and Italian Daily Newspapers." *Tudia Romanica Et Anglica Zagrabienis*, 2011, 71-84

³⁰ Talks, TEDxMilano. YouTube. May 04, 2015. Accessed May 21, 2019.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1141&v=W2YJoQeYsE.

³¹ TED. November 2017. Accessed May 24, 2019. https://www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think. Lera Boroditsky claims the existence of a quite strong tie between the language we spoke and the cognitive universe we live into. In other words, according to the aforementioned speaker the number of vocabularies, sounds and structures that characterized a given language will end up to shape perceptions of those who speak that specific language.

³² Ceramella, Nick. "Is English a Killer Language or an International Auxiliary? Its Use and Function in a Globalised World." *International Journal of Language, Translation and Intercultural Communication* 1 (2012): 9. doi:10.12681/ijltic.7.

³³ Andronache, Liliana Florina. "LOANWORDS AND LOAN-TRANSLATIONS- LOSS OF IDENTITY OR ACHIEVEMENT OF PRESTIGE?" *GIDNI* 2:150-55.

³⁴ Chadwick, Andrew. "Introduction" in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

behaviour and organizational forms”³⁵ typical of traditional and digital media, respectively. Within this context, it is of utmost relevance to stress that the use of the dichotomy old-new is not employed by coincidence or merely to provide readers with a cognitive perception of the media at stake. On the other hand, it suggests a shift in the focus toward the underlying concept of transition: thus, the hybrid media system as the product of the passing and adjustment of time and its rules, i.e. perceived needs and technological improvements. Roger Fidler termed this “mediamorphosis”, i.e. “a continuum of transformations and adaptations brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive and political pressures, and social and technological innovations”³⁶. By way of explanation, the notion of hybrid system has its roots on that of change and flux and it provides the essential framework for any transition from an older set of norms to the gradual emergence of new ones³⁷. In details, the transition at stake is the one due to the advent of New Digital Communication technology and of computer-mediated communication.

However, to state that transition is the ground of hybridity might seem unreasonable to those who are accustomed to think of development as a linear path in which the new fully replace the old. Within this context, empirical pieces of evidence could perform a crucial role in order to overcome the aforementioned logic trap and to capture the authentic complexity of the evolution of media. For instance, early television merged together two of its ancestors: cinema, i.e. moving images, and radio because of its one-to-many model of broadcasting³⁸. Cinema, on the other hand, can be seen as the photography set in motion. Remarkably, none of the afore-mentioned media failed in surviving those who follow their wake. By reason of the latter, the contemporary media system must be intended as the product of a transition due to changes in need and technologies that do not necessarily imply the total replacement of traditional media. Contrarily, transition appears to be the ground of a system that highlight the media’s mixed nature and interdependence.

At this point, we must discern between two different dimensions of the hybrid system of communication: Structural hybridity and Integrative hybridity. The former investigates the distinctive elements of a hybrid Media system while the latter focus on a specific feature of the system which has been observed within the Italian environment. In both circumstances, Media are described as “socially structures of communication”³⁹ where structure stands as the comprehensive set of the involved technologies and the associated customs and usage patterns.

1.1.1 STRUCTURAL HIBRIDITY

By structural hybridity, we refer to the tendency of New Media to build on older ones which in turn, adapt and incorporate new features in order to prevent their entire displacement⁴⁰. In other words, New Media does not

³⁵ Ibid, 4.

³⁶ Fidler, Roger. "Mediamorphosis: Understanding New Media." *Pine Forge Press.*, 1997. doi:10.4135/9781452233413. p.23

³⁷ Chadwick, Andrew. “An Ontology of Hibridity” in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

³⁸ Williams, Raymond. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. Routledge, 2015.

³⁹ Chadwick, Andrew. *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013. p.24

⁴⁰ Chadwick, Andrew. “All Media Systems Have Been Hybrid” in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

come out of a vacuum, but they originate by older media from many perspectives⁴¹ whilst however, posing a number of challenges to them. Despite the majority of scholars agreed that everything that goes by traditional media will become powerless⁴², these Media have shown significant manifestations of resilience and renewal either by incorporating newer features or by imitating these emerging media. So, interdependence and mutual borrowing appear to be the key drivers within our concept of Structural hybridity whose main purpose lies with the detecting of the dynamics of interaction between newer and older. In our analysis, the focus is not on how they differ but rather about how they blend, overlap and intermesh⁴³ to safeguard their own identity and assure the persistence of their relevance among the audience.

Since we have claimed that modern media come into existence founding themselves on older ones, we will first focus on the legacies that may be noticed among them. Dealing with technologies, it may be thought that similarities between digital media and traditional ones will be rare. But although digitalization and technology are usually recognized as interchangeable terms because of the internet's pivotal role in data connectivity⁴⁴, digital production has been upon the continuous disassembly and reassembling of the existing order⁴⁵. For instance, the main organizational tool of the online offer is what we are used to call "web-page" or "page" which are nothing than the re-collocation of the printed-materials' organizational criteria⁴⁶. On the other hand, it also owes to the cinema the routinely combine of moving images, texts and audio⁴⁷ to the point that video-sharing platforms as You-Tube and Vimeo are seen as heirs of the so-called "Cinema of attractions", i.e. "cinema based on spectacle, shock and sensation that directly address the audience"⁴⁸. Furthermore, the main Internet-related medium, i.e. the computer, has been found to have its roots in the merging together of former visual media and early computing machine⁴⁹. Indeed, the operative *modus operandi* of the Universal Turing machine (UTM) - recognized as the heir of computer - resembles that of a projector⁵⁰. Furthermore, Bolter and Grusin define the World Wide Web (WWW) as a kind of "interactive television that monitors and rearranges our physical world"⁵¹. Insofar as the Web resembles Television, they both monitor reality but where Television still makes a distinction between the physical one and the mediated presentation of it, the Internet goes a step further in erasing mediation barriers. Within this context, it is clear that newness deals not with the technology novelty in itself but with the way in which digital Media "honour, rival and revise older media"⁵². It is reasonable to talk about "rivalry" because although Digital media may not be genuinely original, they

⁴¹ Kinnebrock, Susanne. "Old and New Media: Theorizing Their Relationships in Media Historiography" in *Theorien Des Medienwandels*. Von Halem, 2015.

⁴² Maniou, Theodora A. "Traditional Media in Transition? The Reliability of Political News in the New Media Age." *Mediterranean e-Journal of Communication & Media*, vol. 2, 2013, pp. 1–7.

⁴³ Chadwick, Andrew. "Introduction" in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

⁴⁴ Sherrill, Asa. "Is There a Difference between 'Technology' and 'Internet'?" *Quora*, 18 Sept. 2013, www.quora.com/Is-there-a-difference-between-technology-and-internet.

⁴⁵ Chadwick, Andrew. "All Media Systems Have Been Hybrid" in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Rizzo, Teresa. "YouTube: The New Cinema of Attractions." *Journal of Media Arts Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2008.

⁴⁹ Chadwick, Andrew. "All Media Systems Have Been Hybrid" in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

⁵⁰ Manovich, Lev. "How media became new" in *The Language of New Media*. MIT Press, 2000.

⁵¹ Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press, 2003 p. 196

⁵² Ibid, 15

undoubtedly bring innovations and several enhancements, mostly within the immediacy and interactivity realm. This overall process has been identified by Balbi as imitation⁵³ and it does not only refer to technologies but also to contents or genres as the Internet “repurposes oral tradition and the histories of radio and television”⁵⁴ by featuring entertainment and information and by including storytelling and sensationalism to reach individuals drawn from diverse social groups⁵⁵. Despite what conventional wisdom suggests indeed sensationalism, i.e. the practice to use sensational language to arouse an intense emotional response⁵⁶, is not a typical feature of the contemporary world. Rather, it dates back to the late 19th-century phenomenon of “Yellow Journalism” which has reached its most rampant heights with the lead up to the Spanish-American War or “The Journal ‘s War”⁵⁷.

While older media refashion themselves mainly in order to assure their survival, scholars have identified three main different reasons why newer media imitates older ones: (1) the will to improve on them; (2) the attempt to hide their own deficiencies and (3) the need to avoid discontinuities that might threaten audience’s metabolization of the innovation⁵⁸. Dealing with the first one, we have already mentioned new media emphasis on their superiority due to the improvements they bring. What is new, lies with the recognition of the latter as natural resolutions to former inadequacies rather than barely enhancements⁵⁹. The second cause refers either to technical failings and creative ones: to preserve older media’s features might serve as coverage to hide inappropriate alternative ideas of communication. Thirdly, refashioning something which people already know serves as a factor of reassurance dismissing the risk of a collective refusal of the new medium due to fear of changes in daily routine and unsuitableness⁶⁰.

If newer Media imitates, older ones are said to remediate. By way of explanation, the concept of remediation refers to the necessity for these Media to renew themselves according to the emerging technologies, genres and the contemporary audience’s will⁶¹. Indeed, while digital Media grounds themselves on older values in order to assure the audience approval, traditional Media are required to channel innovation to keep captivating this new mass public. In other words, when we have mentioned older Media’s survival, we were referring to survival before the public which, has to be seen as the necessary adoption of communicative strategies able to fit the dominant format dictated by the general public. Within this context and before moving on in investigating specific strategies of remediation, it is important to note that in referring to this phenomenon as

⁵³ Kinnebrock, Susanne. "Old and New Media:Theorizing Their Relationships in Media Historiography" in *Theorien Des Medienwandels*. Von Halem, 2015.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 235

⁵⁵ Chadwick, Andrew. “All Media Systems Have Been Hybrid” in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

⁵⁶ “History of Sensationalism.”*Sensationalism*, sensationalism.weebly.com/history-of-sensationalism.html.

⁵⁷ “Yellow Journalism” indicates what first seems to reach the widespread outcry and fever pitch of scandal familiar today and the phenomenon ended up with the American-Spanish war, whose main causes are identified in the coverage of both *The New York World* and *The New York Journal*. *Claims* was tainted by unsubstantiated claims and sensationalist propaganda, aimed to play an immense influence in stoking the fires of anti-Spanish sentiment in the U.S.

⁵⁸ Kinnebrock, Susanne. "Old and New Media:Theorizing Their Relationships in Media Historiography" in *Theorien Des Medienwandels*. Von Halem, 2015. p.235

⁵⁹ Ibid, 236

⁶⁰ Ibid, 235

⁶¹ Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press, 2003 p. 224

a necessity we are consciously implying that incumbents have already embraced the inevitability of change⁶². However, adjustments took heterogeneous directions and the diverse alternatives in transformation have been found to show diverse purposes and paths.

To respond to an online space which offers to its users an exaggerated number of choices regarding contents and that favours the creation of a highly personalized network, the traditional broadcasting has significantly improved its offer affording a more customizable way of consumption. Notable examples can be found looking at the increasing range of differentiated contents in the United States wherein 2009 the average number of television channels severely increase with just 2.2 hours per viewer devoted to each channel. This data underlines the consumers' desire for differentiated sources and their loosening loyalty toward a single channel alongside with the simultaneous attempt of Traditional Media to keep pace. According to Adner and Snow, this resistance's strategy deals with expansion of performance and it reflects an underlying will to fight the rise of newer media⁶³: there is a certain degree of change, but the focus is still on traditional channels of distribution. However, demand for a great variety is neither the only nor the most significant obstacle that these media are encountering. Indeed, as we have briefly mentioned above, digitalization had allowed the concept of immediacy and interactivity to reach their most rampant heights to the point that older Media can no longer ignore these radically new features. By logic, they found themselves forced to "accommodate these new technologies by repositioning themselves in the demand environment"⁶⁴ by seeking a niche position as in the case of the Financial Times⁶⁵ or by changing their own framework of use⁶⁶. Empirically, newspapers stopped to rely solely upon printed model of distribution and they began to spread contents over the Internet through the creation of their own website or by publishing video on Youtube⁶⁷. By changing their framework of use, they also encourage a radical shift in the focus: older media perspective can no longer stand alone but it must reconfigure itself. Within the context of a general retreat, we can find progress which is peculiar to the phenomena of immediacy and interactivity. The probably most salient example of accommodation can be found looking at the combination of editorial authority and popular participation⁶⁸ by the introduction of the commenting sections in order to ensure a certain form of audience participation on news websites⁶⁹. Furthermore, many broadcasting leading companies began to join social network like Facebook and Twitter letting users nurturing the mild perception of having a direct connection with the medium. On the other hand, the discourse about immediacy first and foremost requires us to emphasize how the inherent nature of this concept lays in the absence of mediation that, in turn, might be conceived in terms of information, connection

⁶² Adner, Ron, and Daniel C. Snow. "Introduction" in *Old Technology Responses to New Technology Threats: Demand Heterogeneity and Graceful Technology Retreats*. SSRN Electronic Journal, 2009, 1655-675. doi:10.2139/ssrn.1353485.

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid, 1656

⁶⁵ Chadwick, Andrew. "The Contemporary context of hybridity" in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

⁶⁶ Flichy, Patrice. *Une Histoire De La Communication Moderne: Espace Public Et Vie Privée*. Paris: La D.couverte, 1997.

⁶⁷ Chadwick, Andrew. "The Contemporary context of hybridity" in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 49

⁶⁹ Toepfl, Florian, and Eunike Piwoni. "Public Spheres in Interaction: Comment Sections of News Websites as Counterpublic Spaces." *Journal of Communication*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd (10.1111), 23 Apr. 2015, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcom.12156/abstract.

and ideas sharing. Where everything is immediately accessible to anyone, the likelihood that news will spread across interpersonal network rather than controlled conventional medium increase at a fast pace⁷⁰. In order to master to this threat, traditional journalists have turned into semi-professional bloggers that often release their own scoops long before submitting them to the conventional authorities in charge of report⁷¹. Furthermore, a number of major English and American newspapers also encourage and paid independent users to submit exclusive videos and users-generated contents to news sites or they allow them to publish directly on the websites through the usage of their own website-provided blogs⁷². Although the measures above do not eliminate the problem that relevant news might first spread online and television as well as newspaper might be contrived to just re-take them, they stand as crucial step towards co-existence and a mutual convergence aimed to sound heterogeneity⁷³.

Summarizing, structural hybridity deals with New-Media's imitation of their ancestors in order to encourage what we might call "improved continuity" that in turn, forces conventional channels of distribution to hire from digitalization to keep pace with the new public. Despite the number of diverse strategies at stake and the apparently-invisible legacies, this idea of hybrid system of communication indicates an intersection of traditional and newer logics which "*vivre ensemble, séparément*"⁷⁴, "to live together, separately".

1.1.2 INTEGRATIVE HIBRIDITY

Integrative Hybridity refers to a special feature of the aforementioned Hybrid environmental system. In detail, in the following section, we will discuss the peculiar phenomenon according to which diverse contemporary platforms integrate specific features of each other. In other words, our focus will shift from remote logics' mutual interaction to the convergence of allegedly similar logics: transition here has to be conceived as within digitalization rather than upon it. At the light of the newness of the aforementioned phenomenon and because of its ongoing development, we have chosen to discuss it within a specific framework rather than merely in general terms. In the following section, indeed our context of analysis will be the Italian General Election of 2018 which, not by coincidence has been defined as a model of the so-called hybrid campaigning⁷⁵. Italian 2018 Election hybridization concerned the interaction of three main dimensions: real space, television and the online sphere⁷⁶. Dealing with the first one, we must note the increasing tendency toward returning to old-fashioned electoral rallies, i.e. politicians talking in squares in order to encourage interpersonal communication⁷⁷. On the other hand, significant data about 2018 Italia Television news viewership⁷⁸ indicates

⁷⁰ Chadwick, Andrew. "The Contemporary context of Hybridity" in *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2013.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Kinnebrock, Susanne. "Old and New Media: Theorizing Their Relationships in Media Historiography" in *Theorien Des Medienwandels*. Von Halem, 2015. p.242

⁷⁴ Flichy, Patrice. *Une Histoire De La Communication Moderne: Espace Public Et Vie Privè*. Paris: La D.couverte, 1997.

⁷⁵ Bracciale, Roberta, and Cristopher Cepernich. "Hybrid 2018 Campaigning: The Social Media Habits of Italian Political Leaders and Parties." *Italian Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2018): 1-15.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 3

⁷⁷ Cepernich, Cristopher Cepernich. *Le Campagne Elettorali Al Tempo Della Networked Politics*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2017.

⁷⁸ Newman, Nic, Richard Fletcher, Antonis Kalegeropoulos, David A.L. Levy, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen. *Digital News Report 2018*. Report. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. 2018. 58-108.

that the latter still plays a crucial role, to the point that a number of scholars started to consider it like one among these new media⁷⁹. Although this interpretation might be true only to a limited extent, it is reasonable to include few insights about Television's borrowing of features from the others "digitalized platforms". Within this context, it is of utmost relevance to stress the increasing habit of television producers to show users' live reaction by showing pieces of the ongoing debate on twitter about the show itself or the topics which have been recently tackled. The reason why this behaviour has not been mentioned as an element of structural hybridity but rather it has been conceived in terms of specific convergence among "digitalized platforms", lies with its purpose: if structural hybridity deals with remediation, here we are experiencing a will to take advantage of others' features. Indeed, users have been found to use social tools like Twitter in order to interpret and frame what they are watching on television⁸⁰ and by adding such feature, television's programs gain in terms of dynamism, liveness and truthfulness and they succeed in the collective re-framing of this mainstream information flow⁸¹. However, what it is of greatest interest in this section lies with the online-exclusive interaction among platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook that are characterized by significant differences in their orientations and purposes but whose features have been found to increasingly resemble each other's. We have chosen to focus on these two social networks and to exclude other platforms such Instagram and the world-leading messaging app of WhatsApp, because of their common ownership that would make impossible to discern our analysis from the underlying business strategy aimed to offer an all-in-one experience⁸². The latest Italian election seems to be very suitable to our analysis because of the experienced centrality of social networks due to low-budget constrictions and scarcity of time for campaigning⁸³. By consequence, drawing on Bracciale and Cepernich analysis of the Facebook pages and the Twitter accounts of the main Italian political leaders⁸⁴, we will provide pieces of evidence about structural features' blending among different social network as a result of hybridization⁸⁵. As previously mentioned, Facebook and Twitter serve different purposes and by consequence they have diverse structures which have been built to respond to these alternative functions. Following these preliminary assumptions, Facebook is said to be strictly public-oriented and by logic, to be the platform of extra-élite relationships while Twitter is more suitable to support intra-élite's communication and it has been recognized as highly media-oriented⁸⁶. Within this context, Media-orientation serves as a strong indicator of the potential feasibilities and the fundamental tools that might characterize Twitter. By consequences, the latter certainly includes the usage of Hashtags, i.e. labels to

⁷⁹ Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press, 2003 p. 224

⁸⁰ Anstead, Nick, and Ben O'Loughlin. "The Emerging Viewertariat and BBC Question Time: Television Debate and Real-Time Commenting Online." *International Journal of Press-politics - INT J PRESS-POLIT* 16 (August 11, 2011): 440-62. doi:10.1177/1940161211415519.

⁸¹ Bracciale, Roberta, and Cristopher Cepernich. "Hybrid 2018 Campaigning: The Social Media Habits of Italian Political Leaders and Parties." *Italian Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2018): p.2

⁸² Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp are indeed all properties of the American entrepreneur Mark Zuckerberg.

⁸³ Bracciale, Roberta, and Cristopher Cepernich. Hybrid Campaigning in "Hybrid 2018 Campaigning: The Social Media Habits of Italian Political Leaders and Parties." *Italian Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2018)

⁸⁴ Namely: Silvio Berlusconi and Forza Italia; Emma Bonino and +Europa (+Europe); Luigi Di Maio and Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Stars Movement); Pietro Grasso and Liberi e Uguali (Free and Equal); Giorgia Meloni and Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy); Matteo Renzi and Partito Democratico (Democratic Party); Matteo Salvini and Salvini Premier (League - Salvini Premier). Timelines of these leaders and their related parties were downloading through Twitter Rest API and Facebook Graph API, from 2 January 2018 to 3 March 2018.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Bracciale, Roberta, and Cristopher Cepernich. "Hybrid 2018 Campaigning: The Social Media Habits of Italian Political Leaders and Parties." *Italian Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2018)

facilitate information seeking within the platform⁸⁷ and to allow activities of monitoring over a keyword-related communication flow⁸⁸. On the other hand, intuitively such a tool appears to be unnecessary and potentially unprofitable within a platform whose main consumption habit deals with scrolling the Home section rather than emphasizing a single debate or topic, e.g. Facebook. However, data support an active and intense use of hashtags on Facebook which are found to be present in almost half of Salvini's posts⁸⁹; moreover, the significant employment of hashtag on Facebook is not exclusively circumscribed to right-wing representatives but left-wing leaders are not immune⁹⁰. The large presence of this tool on Facebook is a clear trace of horizontal hybridization among allegedly similar platform online within the field of political communication. Furthermore, Facebook is widely recognized as the more adequate virtual space where users can express themselves in absence of any serious limits. Certainly, the aforementioned logic stands in opposition to Twitter unique format which severely limit discourse allowing for a simple, fast and poor kind of communication. However, again, empirical pieces of evidence show a reality that favours an alternative scenario. For instance, Italy in 2018 had experienced an interesting growth in the tendency to evade the limit of 240 characters set by Twitter, by adding a link⁹¹ or by publishing on Twitter a screenshot of an already published post on Facebook in order to enlarge the community of reached users⁹². This uninspiring race toward this kind of overtaking is undermining twitter's peculiarities and values while approaching an always more Facebook-like standard. By way of explanation, major social platforms around the WWW are mutually incorporating features which are traditionally peculiar to others social networks. Thus, within this context, convergence is not over time but across users' accounts. However, such form of hybridity raises several doubts about potential drawbacks especially in terms of public dissatisfaction regarding the possibility of an online homogenization.

1.2 NEW CONSUMPTION STYLE: A QUANTITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In the previous section we have seen as conventional and digital media are changing by either loosening their attachment to some of their traditional peculiar features and by incorporating newer ones where "new" refers either to chronological successors⁹³ and contemporary alternatives⁹⁴. However, in both circumstances the audience or the users' community has been recognized as a pivotal factor: media's remodelling is a product

⁸⁷ Bruns, Axel, and Jean Burgess. "Researching News Discussion On Twitter." *Journalism Studies* 13, no. 5-6 (2012): 801-14. doi:10.1080/1461670x.2012.664428.

⁸⁸ Segerberg, Alexandra, and W. Lance Bennett. "Social Media and the Organization of Collective Action: Using Twitter to Explore the Ecologies of Two Climate Change Protests." *The Communication Review* 14, no. 3 (2011): 197-215. doi:10.1080/10714421.2011.597250.

⁸⁹ Bracciale, Roberta, and Christopher Cepernich. "Hybrid 2018 Campaigning: The Social Media Habits of Italian Political Leaders and Parties." *Italian Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2018) p. 13

⁹⁰ Ibid. Also, the 45% of the post produced by +Europa, a liberal centrist party in Italy also member of the centre-left coalition.

⁹¹ Ibid. Data show that almost 93% of tweets present a link and more than 50% of the tweets by Movimento 5 Stelle; Fratelli d'Italia (Meloni's party) and Salvini's league contains at least a hyper-link.

⁹² Diamanti, Giovanni, and Lorenzo Pregliasco. Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019. p.52

⁹³ This is the case of older media process of imitation of digital peculiarities. It's important to recall that imitation does not imply total replacement of traditional values prepositions. Indeed, even in the context of a shift in the focus towards newer technologies (e.g. repositioning in the demand market) we underline an idea of coexistence.

⁹⁴ By contemporary alternative, we are referring to those features which are peculiar to a given digitalized medium and which are then integrated into another one. It's a horizontal transition among similar channel of distribution.

of either the pursuit of public approval, its maintenance and the attempt to enlarge it⁹⁵. But how does the general public behave with respect to these media of communication? In order to provide readers with an accurate prediction, in the next section we will look at the issue from a quantitative perspective that mainly relies on data from the 52th Country's Report on Social Circumstances, drafted by the Censis agency⁹⁶.

Generally, the following quantitative analysis shows a positive trend in the usage of both digital media and traditional distribution patterns which appears to be consistent with our concept of hybridization-driven co-existence of Media. In details, in a society in which the 78,4% of the population operates on the Internet - a very significant percentage when compared to the 45,3% in 2007 - social network's users increase from 67.3% to 72.5% with Facebook (56%) and YouTube (51.8%) as the most engaging platforms. On the other hand, Twitter's percentage of users remarkably drop to 12,3%, a factor that might not be completely independent of our hypothesis of public dissatisfaction due to perceived standardization of the platform. A decrease in performance is also felt with respect to Twitter informative function: indeed, regardless of the platform's suitability to information seeking, the number of users with informatory purposes drop of 3%, and this negative trend gets worse dealing with under 30. However, decline in informative performance is not exclusively related to Twitter but it concerned almost any other relevant social media including Facebook that had lost 9,1% of its audience. But, despite the aforementioned negative change, Facebook still conserves its leading position in the news environment together with television news that, on the other hand, had experienced a significant advancement of their positioning. Thus, within the Italian environment, both the presumably higher symbol of newer channel of distribution, i.e. Facebook and Television, i.e. a distinguished exponent of older media's legacy, play a pivotal role in information gathering. Moreover, due to an increasing number of spectators for the so-called internet TV (+ 30.1%) and the mobile TV (+ 25.9 %), television succeeded in stabilizing its position and in balancing the slightly drop in its traditional forms of distribution (-2,3%). Likewise, Radio preserves its own relevance by expanding its framework of use and by offering to its audience a number of differentiated listening alternatives including broadcasting via the Internet or by mobile app. Especially the latter had enable radiophonic frequencies to collect a significant new share of listeners (20,7%) and, the growth of almost 2 point⁹⁷ compared to 2017 reasonably inspires confidence about further progression. The only negative value among traditional channels of distributions deals with printed newspapers whose share of users in the communicative environment, fall from 67% in 2007 to around 37,4% in 2018. In addition, newspapers websites failed in compensating this relevant loss leaving printed broadcasting companies at the mercy of a stagnant crisis. To conclude, the Italian communicative environment is characterized by an audience that increasingly take advantage of the technologies⁹⁸ at its disposal but that significantly relies on traditional media especially in the informative context. What it is of utmost importance to recall is that, although these data might picture older media in an overall advanced position with regards to newer ones, the communicative

⁹⁵ This is primarily the case of integrative hybridity.

⁹⁶ CENSIS. "Comunicazione e media" in 52. < Milano: Franco Angeli, 2018. http://www.censis.it/?shadow_comunicato_stampa=121190.

⁹⁷ The actual value is of 1,6% compared to 2017. Furthermore, in referring to "points", we are talking about percentage rates.

⁹⁸ Despite the general inclination towards technologies, Italian usage of the digital sphere is strongly differentiated among generations with younger individuals exploiting all the opportunities as anyone else.

system incessantly produces differentiation but seldom replacement⁹⁹. Rather than see these changes as a process of displacement or progressive atrophy of one out of the media typologies, they should be seen as proof of an evolving reconfiguration that merge together a steady conventional media presence and a persistent digital media ecology¹⁰⁰. However, for the sake of truth we must underline that co-existence does not imply absence of competitiveness for the public attention which is on the other hand, significantly high even within a system characterized by mutual interdependence.

1.3 DISINTERMEDIATION

Up to this point, we have seen how the current Italian Communication system is built and how its different actors interact, develop, compete and recast their roles in response to a model of audience. In exploring the Italian universe at the time of Web 2.0., we have encountered the emerging concepts of interactivity and immediacy which have been said to be of major importance. The former is defined as the relation between self and others¹⁰¹ and even lacking input regarding co-decision making¹⁰², it stands as a breaking point in the previous idea of a passive public. On the other hand, we have conceived immediacy as the lack of mediation within an environment of inexpensive communication technologies through which everything appears to be immediately available to every user. On the other hand, immediacy also implicitly refers to users' opportunity to provide "relatively open and unedited input to mass media"¹⁰³ which once online, will be instantaneously accessible to the whole community. This newly dynamic implies the eschew of any kinds of fact-checking mechanisms or formal review and it allows the circulation of a number of sustained claims that are likely to be absorbed exactly as any others kind of verified information. Indeed, statistical analysis show that unsubstantial claim as well as regular news, stream and spread in similar ways despite their different nature¹⁰⁴. Once politicians or other institutional authorities join social networking platforms, they technically became users and likewise any other, they gain this genuinely new opportunity to spread and manage their own personal contents, bypassing the traditional mass-media mediation¹⁰⁵. The above-mentioned insights are consistently related to "Disintermediation" formal definition as the process allowing the disappearance of the traditional mediator within a number of different fields. In this research, we will mainly deal with disintermediation in the political communication environment. Within this context, this phenomenon is properly described as the process according to which users - either potential voters and institutional

⁹⁹ Bracciale, Roberta, and Cristopher Cepernich. Hybrid Campaigning in "Hybrid 2018 Campaigning: The Social Media Habits of Italian Political Leaders and Parties." *Italian Political Science* 13, no. 1 (May 2018)

¹⁰⁰ Gurevitch, Michael, Stephen Coleman, and Jay G. Blumler. "New Media: Displacement or Reconfiguration?" in Political Communication —Old and New Media Relationships. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625, no. 1 (2009): 164-81. doi:10.1177/0002716209339345.

¹⁰¹ Sorice, Michele. "Involvement and Performativity" in *Mobile Audiences*. Rome: Centre for Media and Communication Studies "Massimo Baldini", 2009.

¹⁰² De Balsio, Emiliana, and Michele Sorice. "Access, Interaction, Participation" in Italian Politics in the Web 2.0: Participation Mistrust and Disintermediation Processes. Rome: Centre for Media and Communication Studies "Massimo Baldini", 2010. ISBN 978-88-6536-003-3

¹⁰³ Schlesinger, Philip, and Michele Sorice. *The Transformation of Society and Public Service Broadcasting*. Rome: Centre for Media and Communication Studies "Massimo Baldini", 2011. ISBN 978-88-6536-011-8. p.17

¹⁰⁴ Mocanu, Delia, Luca Rossi, Qian Zhang, Marton Karsai, and Walter Quattrociochi. "Collective Attention in the Age of (mis)information." *Computers in Human Behavior* 51 (2015): 1198-204. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2015.01.024.

¹⁰⁵ Parisi, Lorenza, and Rossella Rega. "Disintermediation in Political Communication: Chance or Missed Opportunity?" In *Leadership and New Trends in Political Communication*, 123-48. Rome: Centre for Media and Communication Studies "Massimo Baldini" LUISS University, 2011.

representatives, e.g. politicians - are allowed to become “publisher of themselves”¹⁰⁶ and to provide immediate responses to relevant issues and debates. Being a direct consequence of the digital structure itself, the above-mentioned process has been recognized as one of the pivotal peculiarities of the WWW and it has brought several changes in the communicative strategies that different actors are likely to adopt. Indeed, disintermediation offered to politicians and representatives a huge opportunity to convey their specific policy idea and to cease excessive media’s requirements of continuative availability¹⁰⁷. In the words of an Irish commentator:

“Don’t underestimate the attraction to politicians of ‘disintermediation’, the ability to communicate directly with audiences without having to rely on broadcasters and newspapers. You can choose the time and terms of engagement of your policy statement, without any awkward questions or rebuttals. You can move fast, and you can attempt to create a bit of suspense and drama.”¹⁰⁸

To see it empirically, we might look, for instance to Barack Obama’s exploitation of such features in the 2008 Presidential Election: by self-depicting himself through social media, he succeeded in impersonating the “right candidate” and he had the possibility to personally fight attacks by his opponents¹⁰⁹ without having his message edited by conventional, partisan-oriented newspapers. Moreover, few years later, Donald J. Trump began to make large use of social media to masterfully counter-criticize the mainstream coverage of his policies¹¹⁰, in order to delegitimize these potential negative scrutinises. What it is thrilling lay with data showing his success with more than 70% of Donald Trump's supporters distrusting mainstream outlets¹¹¹ in 2018. In other words, one single personality’s effective communication is likely to overcome that of a number of traditionally recognized distributors of pieces of information. On the other hand, disintermediation has also penalized those leaders or parties that failed in developing an accurate digital strategy able to take advantage of potential not-mediated space. This is the case of *Partito Democratico* (PD) at the 2018 Italian General Election during which, the left-wing party missed the opportunity to engage in a profitable dialogue with its targets voters¹¹² because of its tie with the old media system. Both when dealing with disintermediation-related successes or failures, we should recognize “discourse” to play a crucial role. This appears reasonable in

¹⁰⁶ Rauti, Manfredi Alemanno. “*La Comunicazione Politica Digitale Ed Il Cambiamento Attraverso I Social Media*”. Edited by Michele Sorice. Bachelor’s degrees thesis, LUISS Guido Carli, 2016/2017. Rome: LUISSThesis. 1-45.

¹⁰⁷ Isotalus, Pekka and Merja Almonkari. “Current trends in political Communication and Criteris for Political Leaders. Perspectives of the Finnish press and Party Leaders” in *Leadership and New Trends in Political Communication*, 123-48. Rome: Centre for Media and Communication Studies “Massimo Baldini” LUISS University, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Linehan H. (2016) The politics of Twitter: Drama as Kenny unleashes #ge16. The Irish Times. Dublin.

¹⁰⁹ Coleman, Stephen, and Peter M. Shane. *Connecting Democracy: Online Consultation and the Flow of Political Communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012. p. 9

¹¹⁰ Fisher, Caroline. "Essay: Bypassing the News Media." In *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017 (Ireland)*. Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, 2017. http://fujomedia.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/BAI_FuJo_digital_news_2017_WEB.pdf#page=100.

¹¹¹ Miller, Joe. "President Trump's Challenge to Media Credibility." BBC News. January 26, 2018. Accessed June 02, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-42834204>.

¹¹² Faggiano, Maria Paola, Ernesto Dario Calò, Raffaella Gallo, and Melissa Mongiardo. "Facebook, Digital Campaign and Italian General Election 2018. A Focus on the Disintermediation Process Activated by the Web." *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Advanced Research Methods and Analytics (CARMA 2018)*, 2018. doi:10.4995/carma2018.2018.8305.

accordance to the fact that we have identified disintermediation as a diffused process rather than a well-defined stage so that, to be seen or empirically investigated, it must operate through a medium: the discourse. The typology of discourse that disintermediation encourages however, is strictly peculiar since it must be able to address a number of unmediated relationships with others and, most importantly, it must be perceived as a one-to-one kind of communications. Within this context, the speaker is pivotal in gathering a certain degree of intimacy and closeness with the interlocutor¹¹³ in order to strengthen the feeling of “being the same” which in turn, will produce consensus and support. In other words, the kind of discourse that disintermediation promotes is a highly individualist and personality-focused and it suggests an increase in the political weight of the individual actor over time¹¹⁴ to the point that expectations and requirements are imposed on the leaders¹¹⁵ rather than on the Party. Concepts such homologation as catalyser of support and great emphasis on personalization stand as crucial features of today political communicative strategies and they will be analysed in greater details later in this dissertation. However, up to this point, what was of utmost importance was to understand the underlying role of disintermediation as ground of the majority of features in Communication Research.

But how Italians relate to increasing disintermediation? Almost half of the population (47,1%) is positive about this increasing number of institutional presences on social network and the related decline in external traditional mediation. The main causes behind such a positive trend lay with politicians’ shift toward a direct relationship with voters that, in turn, can easily raise doubts or questions to their representatives. On the other hand, only the 23,7% believe that exclusively traditional news can perform an accurate informative function¹¹⁶.

1.4 THE PHENOMENON OF ECHO-CHAMBERS

In the previous section we have seen the production of user-generated contents as an engine of the widely diffused phenomenon of disintermediation that ultimately changed the way in which users become informed and form their opinion. The spreading of these new patterns of information-gathering on the WWW also favour the arise of what Walter Quattrociocchi, head of the Laboratory of Data Science and Complexity at Ca ’Foscari University, called an “epidemic of narcissisms”¹¹⁷. By narcissisms epidemic, he refers to the increasing tendency for users to engage in self-promotion and in the sharing of contents, aimed to collect positive feedbacks both in terms of others’ approval and attention¹¹⁸. A number of studies have recognized this phenomenon to be significantly widespread among different social groups, geographical areas and cultures¹¹⁹ and, although narcissism is not to be considered a causal consequence of social media, it has been observed a

¹¹³ Bentivegna, Sara. *La Politica in 140 Caratteri: Twitter E Spazio Pubblico*. Milano, Italy: FrancoAngeli, 2014.

¹¹⁴ Isotalus, Pekka and Merja Almonkari. “Current trends in political Communication and Criteris for Political Leaders. Perspectives of the Finnish press and Party Leaders” in *Leadership and New Trends in Political Communication*, 123-48. Rome: Centre for Media and Communication Studies “Massimo Baldini” LUISS University, 2011. p. 112

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 111

¹¹⁶ CENSIS. “Comunicazione e media” in *52. Rapporto Sulla Situazione Sociale Del Paese 2018*. Milano: Franco Angeli, 2018. http://www.censis.it/7?shadow_comunicato_stampa=121190.

¹¹⁷ Quattrociocchi, Walter, and Antonella Vicini. *Liberi Di Crederci: Informazione, Internet E Post-verità*. Torino: Codice Edizioni, 2018. p.56

¹¹⁸ Quattrociocchi, Walter, and Antonella Vicini. “Comunicare è difficile” in *Liberi Di Crederci: Informazione, Internet E Post-verità*. Torino: Codice Edizioni, 2018.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*,57

significant rise of it following social media's outburst¹²⁰. Furthermore, an increasing centralization around the self appears to be in line with the previously mentioned personalization and with the individualist focus of discourse within the digital environment. Within a crowded environment as the online space, to say that users are experiencing an increasing tendency to self-promotion implies that every post or news items might be considered as a potential occasion to increase the share of those who appreciate us, i.e. those who like or comment our contents, to further reward our own ego. By consequence, this constant search for others' gratification further intensifies the availability of contents in the online social media but it also facilitates reduction in general empathy. Indeed, as long as narcissism involves an almost exclusive and exaggerate admiration of the self, it also implies a common indifference and contempt towards others¹²¹ and their beliefs. It may seem unreasonable to be intimately addicted to others' judgements whilst disregarding any interests toward them but actually, such an interpretation unveils an important feature of the phenomenon at stake. Narcissisms drive us to positively evaluate only those sentiments that adhere to self-confirmation while emphasizing the lack of values of opposite ones. Intuitively, this increases the likelihood that individuals on the Web will mainly interact with those users who share the same system of meaning - or at least very similar - and these interactions will take place within homogenous clusters. These clusters are called Echo Chambers, and for the sake of consistence, they have also been described as "narcissistic mirrors"¹²².

Drawing on Dubois and Blank, we can identify echo chambers as the virtual spaces where people with similar views and interests primarily interact¹²³. Intuitively, different interests will generate different echo chambers, characterized by a specific consistent narrative. However, here, and all over the rest of the book, we will focus our attention to those space populated by like-minded people in terms of political narratives.

Up to this point, we have followed a logic path, related to the greater amount of diversified contents available on the WWW in order to explain the emergence of this communities. However, another possible reason has to be mentioned: filter bubbles. By this term, scholars refer to those algorithms that inadvertently favour these patterns of aggregation "by automatically recommending contents an individual is likely to agree with"¹²⁴. Although within specific environment and under some circumstances, one of the two aforementioned reasons might prevail, they are not to be seen as mutually exclusive but contrarily, echo chambers originate by the combination of these two factors: wide availability of contents and filter bubbles.

The emergence of echo chambers is not relevant per se but because of three main implications: (1) homogeneous content diffusion (2) polarization and (3) lexical convergence. First, we refer to the specific diffusion of contents within echo chambers according to which people inside this setting will only encounter arguments and pieces of information they already agree with¹²⁵. This is primarily due to the recognition of

¹²⁰ Twenge, Jean M., and W. Keith. Campbell. *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement*. New York: Atria Paperback, 2009.

¹²¹ <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/narcisismo/>

¹²² Meazzini, Giulio. "La Mia "bolla" Personale (E Di Gruppo)." *Città Nuova*, July 2017, 64-67.

¹²³ Dubois, Elizabeth, and Grant Blank. "The Echo Chamber Is Overstated: The Moderating Effect of Political Interest and Diverse Media." *Information, Communication & Society* 21, no. 5 (2018): 729-45. doi:10.1080/1369118x.2018.1428656.

¹²⁴ Flaxman, Seth, Sharad Goel, and Justin M. Rao. "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. S1 (2016): 298-320. doi:10.1093/poq/nfw006. p. 299

¹²⁵ Dubois, Elizabeth, and Grant Blank. Introduction in "The Echo Chamber Is Overstated: The Moderating Effect of Political Interest and Diverse Media." *Information, Communication & Society* 21, no. 5 (2018): 729-45. doi:10.1080/1369118x.2018.1428656.

homogeneity as the main driver for the sharing of contents¹²⁶. To see it empirically: once a given content is shared, it will appear on the timelines of the first sharer's friends and among them, only those with a close opinion to that of the original content, will be willing to re-share it. Within this context, the minimum requirement is for the message to be consistent with the personality at stake and his/her imaginary. As long as this is the case, the item will be largely transmitted within the echo chamber and its degree of virality will resemble the dimension of the chamber the content belongs to. The main reason behind such dynamic lay with the so-called confirmation bias, according to which people select and process information in order to reinforce their own beliefs and preconditions¹²⁷. Although this does not imply an avoidance of contrasting views, it suggests different standards in evaluating them that will ultimately make opposite claims harder to accept¹²⁸. Empirical evidence can be found looking at Flaxman's experiment in which participants choose to read publications in line with their own ideology rather than a variety of items' outlet¹²⁹. By consequence, echo chambers appear to be a place of segregation rather than aggregation and discussion and elaboration of narratives in such a closed cluster will allow polarization to emerge and likely, to persist. Indeed, when people are hearing echoes of their own voices, they may become even more confident in being right about a given narrative and this might result in more extreme positions. Within this context, polarization refers to "group polarization", i.e. the group's move towards a more extreme point in the direction indicated by the members' preliberation tendencies where extreme means "a more drastic position with regard to the typical average one of individuals in the group"¹³⁰. However, what it is of utmost importance to note is that the initial transition does not occur on the individual level but on the collective one: as the group became more enthusiastically committed to a specific narrative, then the single moves accordingly. When engaging in discussions or debates with others, these polarized clusters are not able to commit in reasoning doubts or in capturing the different nuances of a given event or issue; thus, the controversy is very likely to assume aggressive tones and become a challenge to whom shout louder¹³¹. It might be particularly interesting to note that the "fiercest battles take place between people who have a lot in common" due to the fact that they do not differ regarding the "what", but they do have dissimilar views on the "how". In fact, in a highly polarized environment, a convergence of

¹²⁶ Vicario, Michela Del, Alessandro Bessi, Fabiana Zollo, Fabio Petroni, Antonio Scala, Guido Caldarelli, H. Eugene Stanley, and Walter Quattrociocchi. "The Spreading of Misinformation Online." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 3 (2016): 554-59. doi:10.1073/pnas.1517441113.

¹²⁷ Vicario, Michela Del, Antonio Scala, Guido Caldarelli, H. Eugene Stanley, and Walter Quattrociocchi. "Modeling Confirmation Bias and Polarization." *Scientific Reports* 7, no. 1 (2017). doi:10.1038/srep40391.

¹²⁸ Epley, Nicholas, and Thomas Gilovich. How Motives Influence Beliefs in "The Mechanics of Motivated Reasoning." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2016): 133-40. doi:10.1257/jep.30.3.133. Interestingly people have been found to ask themselves different questions when evaluating propositions, they favour versus those they oppose: dealing with the former, they ask themselves "Can I believe this?" allowing for a standard more easily meetable since evidence can be usually found even for the most dubious propositions. On the other hand, when before opposite propositions, they ask themselves "Must I believe this" providing themselves with a standard harder to meet since contradictory arguments can be found for almost everything.

¹²⁹ Flaxman, Seth, Sharad Goel, and Justin M. Rao. "Filter Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online News Consumption." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. S1 (2016): 298-320. doi:10.1093/poq/nfw006.

¹³⁰ Sunstein, Cass R. "The Law of Group Polarization." *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2002): 175-95. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9760.00148>.

¹³¹ It is important to consider that within an environment characterized by an otherworldly amount of differentiated contents and where an echo-chambers is likely to arise around any specific interest, discussion or debate is very likely to occur among two or more polarized clusters. In other words, debate is often a fight between separate polarized groups in absence of neutral clusters.

belief does nothing than emphasizing the threats of remaining differences leading people, who are otherwise alike to experience serious hostility¹³².

The third peculiar feature of echo chambers deals with the language of users within these polarized homogeneous clusters. Within this context, Quattrociocchi and his colleagues have analysed the lexical choices of users engaged within the echo-chambers of Science News and Conspiracy News, two distinct and opposite narratives. Findings show that, despite segregation of communities, users from both the chambers are likely to make similar lexical choices with similar frequencies. Moreover, this pattern of lexical convergence has been observed also across echo-chambers: not only users seem to adopt similar expression in communicating with their peers, but they also tend to use these terms during encounters with members of the other chambers¹³³. To conclude, echo chambers seem to promote a significant divergence in terms of positions before a given narratives but a relevant lexical convergence in the ways these positions are expressed both within and across these mentioned echo-chambers.

¹³² Golman, Russell, George Loewenstein, Karl Ove Moene, and Luca Zarri. The Surprising Potency of Small Differences in "The Preference for Belief Consonance." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2016): 165-88. doi=10.1257/jep.30.3.165

¹³³ Brugnoli, Emanuele, Matteo Cinelli, Fabiana Zollo, Walter Quattrociocchi, and Antonio Scala. "Lexical Convergence inside and across Echo Chambers." March 28, 2018, 1-14. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1903.11452.pdf>.

Second Chapter

**Political Communication:
Not Rational as it seems.**

*“Text is a lazy mechanism
full of empty spaces and white gaps,
thus, needing the cooperation and collaboration
of the reader to be actualized and fully realized.”*

-Umberto Eco, Lector in Fabula
(1979).

2.1 THE EMOTIONAL DRIVERS

Despite the peculiarities that might significantly characterised a specific Media system, the underlying nature of communication has been found to persist over time. It dates back to the Greek Rhetoric, i.e. the so-called “Art to persuade” or, according to Aristotle “the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion”¹³⁴. What is of utmost importance is that persuasion does not stand as the mere attempt to convince someone of something, but it implies a distinctive emotional appeal that relies on affective rather than rational mechanisms, employed in order to influence the behavioural choices of the target audience¹³⁵. Ancient Philosophers seem to have understood what we are still struggling with: despite what Enlightenment lead us to believe, “the man as a rational being is one of the greatest fake news of our culture”¹³⁶. To be fully rational will implies extensive cognitive capabilities while our cognitive storage appeared to be quite narrow since we continuously resort to shortcuts in order to ease decision-making and to interpret the reality’s complexities and its narratives¹³⁷. However, it is paramount to note that in claiming emotions to be relevant decision drivers, we are not precluding rationality from having a significant role. Within this context, Antonio Damasio recognized decision-making to be the simultaneous result of the integration between cognition and emotion, to the extent that no thought is free from emotional influence¹³⁸. Furthermore, he legitimates his hypothesis drawing on the assumption that every choice inherently presupposes individual responsibilities and, consequently, emotional evaluations. As a result of Damasio’s experimental work, decision-making cannot disregard the vital role of the affective sphere in evaluating alternatives concerning personal gains or losses and, ultimately directing attention on specific themes. By way of explanation, the best option is not merely the more profitable one in abstract terms but, the one that pleases the subject too¹³⁹. According to Herbert A. Simon, human tendencies to deviate from rational model of choice can be described by the doctrine of “bounded rationality” which certainly implies a degree of rationality in decision-making but also considers behavioural automatization as a crucial feature¹⁴⁰. Thus, humans are not immune to cognitive constraints that may drive them to act according to unconscious deliberative choices due to a limited available amount of information and time. Among these cognitive and situational constraints able to lead individuals to perform in discrepancy with optimization and utilitarian arguments, it is impossible to exempt the role of emotions from further investigations. Drawing on Aristotle’s findings of anger’s role in affecting individual behaviour or

¹³⁴ To say that Rhetoric implies to be able to find the most profitable persuasive means for any occasion does not imply that who master Rhetoric will be able to persuade anyone.

¹³⁵ Godino, Antonio. "L'arte Della Persuasione: Seduzioni Del Pensiero." *PSYCHOFENIA* 12, no. 20 (February 26, 2015): 97-128. <https://ojs.pensamultimedia.it/index.php/psychofenia/article/view/1474>.

¹³⁶ Quattrococchi, Walter, and Antonella Vicini. *Liberi Di Crederci: Informazione, Internet E Post-verità*. Torino: Codice Edizioni, 2018. p. 41

¹³⁷ Selten, Reinhard. "What Is Bounded Rationality?" In *Bounded Rationality: The Adaptive Toolbox*, by Gerd Gigerenzer and Reinhard Selten, 13-35. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.

¹³⁸ Costanzucci, Paolino. *Cognizioni Ed Emozioni: Prospettive Neuroeducative*. Master's thesis, Università Degli Studi Di Foggia, 2013-2014. 105-14.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Selten, Reinhard. "What Is Bounded Rationality?" In *Bounded Rationality: The Adaptive Toolbox*, by Gerd Gigerenzer and Reinhard Selten, 13-35. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002. Simon’s analyst deals with the human rationality as implied by the concept of *homo economicus* and it was mainly circumscribed to the behaviour of real people within the economic sphere. However, the underlying concepts are pervasive of a number of fields of research. Thus, her main findings can fit well a number of circumstances and different sphere of the public life.

Darwin's idea of a separation between cognition and emotion marked by an "affective primacy"¹⁴¹ and, the emotional appeal of the leader described by Weber, we can see how the affective dimension has always been an object of analysis. However, although references of this kind have been found to have a relatively long history, the science of emotion has emerged only recently as an independent and pivotal field of analysis in decision-making. Within this context, emotions are defined as the set of concurrent cognitive reactions to events, facts or issues which the individual regards as relevant¹⁴², namely that touch upon the subject's concerns¹⁴³. Nowadays, emotions are seen as dominant decisions' drivers mainly because of their role in activating specific action tendencies that prompt individuals to act in accordance to the emotion-suggested behaviour: for instance, anger triggers aggression and fear promotes fight¹⁴⁴. By way of explanation, the arose of a specific emotion will increase the chances of seeing the connected behaviour in place. At the light of the former, in political science, emotions began to be seen as a desirable and valuable element and, political stimuli have been increasingly addressed to elicit specific emotions. Indeed, by acting in specific ways or by communicating particular facts or beliefs, politicians are likely to activate the desired emotive response that will ultimately promote the attitude more favourable to their political narrative. That said, the plight lays with the definition of these specific communicative or behavioural paths that politicians should adopt.

What it is of utmost importance to note is that the aforementioned relationship between emotive response and attitude is not a direct one, but emotions motivate behavioural decisions through appraisal, i.e. a direct immediate evaluation of the circumstances at stake with respect to individual's own well-being¹⁴⁵. Context's estimation is the ground of the so-called "Appraisal theory" which expects the appraisal to assess the relevant environmental changes that will then result in the elicitation of different emotions¹⁴⁶. In other words, "emotional experience is the experience of the situation as interpreted by the individual"¹⁴⁷. This evaluation or interpretation usually develops upon six different dimensions:

- Certainty: how much future events seem to be predictable or comprehensible?
- Pleasantness: Is it pleasurable?
- Attentional activity: To which degree this draw my attention?
- Control: Are events due to individual agency or situational agency?
- Anticipated effort: How much physical or mental exertion will be needed?

¹⁴¹ Lerner, Jennifer S., Ye Li, Piercarlo Valdesolo, and Karim S. Kassam. "Emotion and Decision Making." *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (2015): 799-823. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043. Supplemental Material

¹⁴² Lerner, Jennifer S., Ye Li, Piercarlo Valdesolo, and Karim S. Kassam. "Emotion and Decision Making." *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (2015): 799-823. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043.

¹⁴³ Frijda, Nico Henri. *The Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001. p.6

¹⁴⁴ Lerner, Jennifer S., Ye Li, Piercarlo Valdesolo, and Karim S. Kassam. Emotional Valence Is Only One of Several Dimensions That Shape Emotions' Influence on Decision Making in "Emotion and Decision Making." *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (2015): 799-823. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043.

¹⁴⁵ Davidson, Richard J., Klaus R. Scherer, and H. Hill. Goldsmith. Appraisal process in Emotion in "*Handbook of Affective Sciences*". Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 573

- Others' responsibility: Is someone, or something, other than myself responsible?

Different perception upon these dimensions will result in the individual experiencing different emotions, which in turn, will carry specifically related action tendencies¹⁴⁸. Thus, "appraisal theory posits that emotions stem from subjective evaluation of the world"¹⁴⁹. Within this context, appraisal theory serves as an explanation of the effective paths that political communication should pursue towards desired emotive response. Indeed, political communicators acquire awareness about the necessity to promote a shared and specific framework of interpretation of the events in order to generally elicit the specific emotion and the related desired behaviour or attitude.

In practice, the setting of the aforementioned general framework often implies the use of metaphor, conceived as a "rhetorical device" that function as expedients to apply familiar concepts to different realities in order to appeal individuals' emotive sphere and generate emotive reactions¹⁵⁰. Moreover, Cammaerts claimed metaphor's ability to provide schemes and "to convey certain easily digestible images and ideas, while [...] framing the way citizens perceive a certain issue"¹⁵¹. Thus, metaphor is successful in shaping the individuals' perception of reality and adequately pursue the communicators' aim to enlarge their support through emotional appeal. Some examples can be found investigating the so-called "*gentese*", the political language of the Italian Second Republic which was largely built around the figure and the language of Silvio Berlusconi. Berlusconi made large use of metaphors related to either the religious or the football's semantic fields; for instance, the "*miracolo italiano*" - the Italian miracle -; the depicting of Bossi as a "Judah" and the name itself of his party that strictly recall the support for the national football team: "*Forza Italia*"¹⁵². These expressions were employed in order to foster a sentiment of unity and tradition aimed to capture the attention and the potential support of the audience by picturing himself in opposition with the former political elite. However, the contemporary Italian scenario provides us with further very significant examples to accurately understand the role of metaphors in the emotional sphere.

¹⁴⁸ Lerner, Jennifer S., Ye Li, Piercarlo Valdesolo, and Karim S. Kassam. "Emotion and Decision Making." *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (2015): 799-823. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043.

¹⁴⁹ Miller, Patrick R. "The Emotional Citizen: Emotion as a Function of Political Sophistication." *Political Psychology* 32, no. 4 (2011): 575-600. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2011.00824.x. p. 577

¹⁵⁰ Croci, Osvaldo. "Language and Politics in Italy: From Moro to Berlusconi." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 348-70. doi:10.1080/13545710110084271.

¹⁵¹ Cammaerts, Bart. "The Strategic Use of Metaphors by Political and Media Elites: The 2007–11 Belgian Constitutional Crisis." *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 8, no. 2 (2012): 229-49. doi:10.1386/macp.8.2-3.229_1. p.7

¹⁵² Croci, Osvaldo. "Language and Politics in Italy: From Moro to Berlusconi." *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6, no. 3 (2001): 348-70. doi:10.1080/13545710110084271.

A representative case is Salvini's picturing of migration as an "organized invasion":



Figure 1 – Matteo Salvini's post on migration as "organized invasion"
Source: Matteo Salvini's Twitter account

By picturing migration as an invasion, he promotes a specific appraisal of the circumstances that strongly resembles and evoke a military aggression¹⁵³. Intuitively, a war-like framework will be very likely to promote an unpleasant feeling due to the well-established common imaginary of invasion and wartime from which, we exempt ourselves from any responsibilities. The presence of a consistent common imaginary implies that the potential incoming events might seem predictable; in other words, according to the criteria of appraisal mentioned above, individuals will experience high degree of certainty while the absence of any perceived personal responsibilities will stand as high indicator for the Others' responsibility's dimension. On the other hand, the appraisal promoted by Salvini will score low in terms of Pleasantness. Experimental researches have found these tendencies in evaluation to be consistent with a negative-valence feeling, namely, they strictly correlate with the emergence of anger¹⁵⁴. In the next section, we will investigate in detail the cognitive model of behaviour that this emotion promotes and how political leaders have tried to take advantage from it.

2.1.1 THE PECULIAR ROLE OF ANGER

As we have noted above, certainty and responsibilities are inner dimensions in the emergence of Anger. However, an additional feature has to be underlined in order to have a comprehensive understanding of the feeling at stake: the dimension of control. The latter is what discern Anger from Fear, and it refers to individuals' perception of the situation as under control¹⁵⁵. Drawing on the appraisal dimensions mentioned above, a situation is said to be controllable or manageable when the underlying causes are not allegedly due to a situational agency but to an individual one. In brief, circumstances are not due to independent factors which are external to the individual sphere but are under human control. The latter is also clear dealing with

¹⁵³Pregliasco, Lorenzo. "Framing E Strategia Comunicativa Di Matteo Salvini." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 25-43. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

¹⁵⁴Lerner, Jennifer S., Ye Li, Piercarlo Valdesolo, and Karim S. Kassam. "Emotion and Decision Making." *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (2015): 799-823. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043.

¹⁵⁵Searles, Kathleen, and Travis N. Ridout. "The Use and Consequences of Emotions in Politics." *Emotion Researcher*. February 2017. <https://emotionresearcher.com/the-use-and-consequences-of-emotions-in-politics/>

Salvini's post on migration: he accurately avoids implicit description of the phenomenon as the mere "movement of people to a new country in order to find work or better living conditions"¹⁵⁶, i.e. an incidental scenario, but he emphasizes the individual dimension. Indeed, he pictures invasion as a voluntary instance while strengthening the occurrence of financial support to further focus the audience's attention on the potential responsibility of an individual agency.

The emergence of Anger due to these specific appraisal tendencies is pivotal in individuals' decision-making because, although difficult to study, Anger is one of the most powerful political emotions. Indeed, contrarily to the general assumption of the valence-model¹⁵⁷, according to which negative emotions promote vigilance, careful analysis and low motivation in action, empirical evidence suggests a strong tie between Anger and action associated with a poor cognitive effort¹⁵⁸. Thus, Anger significantly increases the likelihood that people will engage in haphazard processing and cognitive shortcuts, which ultimately lead individuals to biased attitudes¹⁵⁹. In detail, it promotes three different behavioural tendencies.

First, anger supports those behavioural decisional approaches which are in favour of punitive and risky policies over potentially more rewarding ones¹⁶⁰. This is primarily due to a sizeable underestimation of risk that impact support for government policies and lead angry individuals to pursue risk-seeking behaviour, even within the political and international scenario. Experimental pieces of evidence of this claim, can be found looking at Huddy, Feldman and Cassese's analysis of political reactions to Iraq War in which, they found Anger to minimize perceived risk inherent to military actions and promoting the interventionist stance in order to face Saddam Hussein's threat¹⁶¹. Moreover, Lerner, in his experiment, had found that anger-primed participants will amplify punitiveness in justice's judgement¹⁶². Nowadays, anger, promoted by posts as the above-mentioned Matteo Salvini's one, might play a crucial role in developing general support for those policies involving aggressive positions or high severity in judgement as the one concerning legitimate self-defence¹⁶³. If it is true that by getting the "right words in the right order, you can nudge the world a little"¹⁶⁴, the Italian Home Secretary has been particularly successful in reinforcing such punitive behaviours by constantly resort to expressions as: "defence is always legitimate" or "who errs, pays".

¹⁵⁶ English Oxford Living Dictionaries, s.v. "Migration". <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/migration>

¹⁵⁷ The Valence model indicates the so-called "two-dimensions valence models" that posits the centrality of two emotive dimensions: positive and negative affects. The two valence dimensions are consistent across situations suggesting a close match between affective experience and individual predispositions. Within this context, positive affect is assumed to promote goal-seeking behaviour, i.e. driving individuals towards experiences. Contrarily, negative emotions are thought as drivers of avoidance behaviours.

¹⁵⁸ Huddy, Leonie, Stanley Feldman, and Erin Cassese. "On the Distinct Political Effect of Anxiety and Anger." In *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior*, 203-30. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

¹⁵⁹ Searles, Kathleen, and Travis N. Ridout. "The Use and Consequences of Emotions in Politics." *Emotion Researcher*. February 2017. <https://emotionresearcher.com/the-use-and-consequences-of-emotions-in-politics/>

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Huddy, Leonie, Stanley Feldman, and Erin Cassese. "On the Distinct Political Effect of Anxiety and Anger." In *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior*, 203-30. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

¹⁶² Lerner, Jennifer S., Julie H. Goldberg, and Philip E. Tetlock. "Sober Second Thought: The Effects of Accountability, Anger, and Authoritarianism on Attributions of Responsibility." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 24, no. 6 (1998): 563-74. Doi 10.1177/0146167298246001.

¹⁶³ On March 2019, the Italian Senate gave final approval to the government's law expanding the right to legitimate self-defense from intruders, fashioned by Interior Minister and League leader Matteo Salvini. The law introduces norms similar to the US 'stand your ground' laws which often allow a person to use lethal force to defend themselves against an intruder on their property.

¹⁶⁴ Mehan, Hugh. "The Discourse of the Illegal Immigration Debate: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation." *Discourse & Society* 8, no. 2 (1997): 249-70. doi:10.1177/0957926597008002006. p. 250

Second, Anger boosts individuals' likelihood to engage in pro-opposition discourses¹⁶⁵. The tendency toward opposite positions is a direct consequence of the nature of this emotion in the political sphere. Anger is the response to a frustrating object which, in politics, usually refer to a given policy or a political leader's statement. Intuitively, those who experience frustration will blame the government or the leader and will look for alternatives on the other side of the political spectrum. In political communication, this lays on the ground of political representatives' will to strengthen the difference between "us" and "them" by employing specific lexical registers able to challenge the communicative standards of contemporary democracies. An example is the widespread use of terms that give up the established notion of the "politically correct" according to which, to say "Black" or "Afro-American" is not the same and where the abolishment of the "Miss" status might be likely to jeopardize the traditional hierarchy of power. Illustrative of the above is Donald J. Trump's refusal to replace the term "anchor baby" with a more institutional and "politically correct" one¹⁶⁶.

Third, Anger significantly supports blame-seeking behaviours. We have already seen that this emotion arises within situations marked by high a high perception of others' responsibilities but, likewise, we should not underestimate the possibility that "anger can activate blame cognitions as much as blame cognitions activate anger"¹⁶⁷. Within this context, Anger has been recognized as a strong motivator in scapegoating, especially against minorities¹⁶⁸. The analysis of the Italian migration phenomenon is considerably suitable to explain the mutual relationship between Anger and responsibilities. In developing Anger, individuals recognize others' responsibilities to lay with the liberal inclusive policies and, in particular with his leader, namely Matteo Renzi. However, while Renzi was slowly abandoning the political scenario, Anger was not going anywhere. Renzi might be gone - the responsible- but the object of anger - migrants- was still there, and it has been toward them that this Anger has been conveyed. In other words, Renzi's perceived responsibilities result in a diffused feeling of Anger which, in turn, lead angry people to blame immigrants. This process of transition was certainly not independent from opponents' communicative efforts in picturing migrants or, more generally, minorities groups in Italy, as something to protect oneself from. Enemies-seeking and some of the strategies employed to depict them as such will be investigated in the following section.

2.1.2 THE CONSTANT SEARCH FOR ENEMIES

Within the previous scenario, we noted a diffused sense of hostility: towards risk-averse policies, the majoritarian rule and others' responsibilities. Hostility, indeed, is strictly correlated to anger and it is usually

¹⁶⁵ Searles, Kathleen, and Travis N. Ridout. "The Use and Consequences of Emotions in Politics." *Emotion Researcher*. February 2017. <https://emotionresearcher.com/the-use-and-consequences-of-emotions-in-politics/>

¹⁶⁶ Anchor baby is an English-American word used to a child born from a non-citizens mother in a country which has birthright citizenship. You can see the moment in which D.J. Trump refused to dismiss such allegedly offensive word, here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPKuYhKanao>

¹⁶⁷ Lerner, Jennifer S., Julie H. Goldberg, and Philip E. Tetlock. "Sober Second Thought: The Effects of Accountability, Anger, and Authoritarianism on Attributions of Responsibility." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 24, no. 6 (1998): 563-74. doi 10.1177/0146167298246001.

¹⁶⁸ Victoria University of Wellington. "Anger, and the Politics of Blame." Victoria University of Wellington. June 27, 2018. Accessed Spring 2019. <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/news/2018/06/anger,-and-the-politics-of-blame>

identified as the “motivating force toward injury” addressed to someone or something¹⁶⁹. The word has its roots in the Latin term “*hostis*”, i.e. enemies¹⁷⁰ and this is consistent with the fact that, intuitively, those whom our hostility is addressed are often the ones who we will be likely to label our enemies. The figure of the enemy has been severely dominant within the political discourse over time, and interesting insights about its founding ground can be found looking at Hitler’s private speech at the National Club of Hamburg, in 1926. In such circumstances, the author of the *Mein Kampf* stated the futility of any theoretical discourse on doctrinaire subjects before the masses and, he claimed that only hate is immune from wavering¹⁷¹. In his words, we can see again, the enormous appeal of negative emotions on a target audience and we can set the ground for the development of the so-called negativity bias, according to which humans are naturally fitted to better receive and respond to negative stimuli. We are all alike, in the good and in the bad but perhaps, especially in the bad. Within this context, Carl Schmitt¹⁷² emphasised the dichotomy friend-enemy as the defining distinction in politics and he argued in favour of an essential role of the “enemy” in shaping political identities¹⁷³; thus, “the hatred others serve to create a homogenous self”¹⁷⁴. What it is of utmost importance is that, in Schmitt’s discourse the enemy is a public one, i.e. a collective entity that confronts a similar fighting collectivity¹⁷⁵. A very illustrative instance of the aforementioned role of enmity can be found analysing the Cold War. Within this context, the Soviet Union was demonized as the overall enemy of Western democracies in order to allow the US to implement many conservative policies while perpetuating and justifying both sides’ effort in the arms race. This terrifying historical period legitimated people seek for enemies and political communication’s attempts to exploit this search by creating specific discourse’s strategies. This purpose of exploitation was primarily carried out through an accurate construction of the enemy made of fragmented information and unauthenticated presumptions aimed to urge the perception of the USSR as a destructive force, willing to take down the new Liberal asset of the World¹⁷⁶. By doing so, the discourse succeeds in appealing people dislike for losses which, in turn, will make them more prone to accept risky policies to evade losing. The contemporary scenario of political discourse operates in ways reminiscent of these historical scripts¹⁷⁷, as we can note looking at the Hungarian Party of Viktor Orbán (Fidesz); the *Rassemblement National* of Marine Le Pen; the UKIP by Nigel Farage or the League of Matteo Salvini in Italy. Indeed, these populist right-wing movements are doing nothing than shifting the traditional search for enemies from the external to the internal

¹⁶⁹ Saul, Leon Joseph. "What Hostility Is." In *The Hostile Mind: The Sources And Consequences Of Rage And Hate*. Pickle Partners Publishing, 2015.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Kershaw, Ian, and Nicola Antonacci. *Hitler E L'enigma Del Consenso*. Roma: GLF Editori Laterza, 2011. p. 66

¹⁷² Carl Schmitt was a conservative German legal, constitutional, and political theorist who actively involve himself with National Socialism. According to Jan-Werner Muller, professor of politics at Princeton University, he is “the [twentieth] century’s most brilliant enemy of liberalism”.

¹⁷³ Norris, Andrew. "Carl Schmitt on Friends, Enemies and the Political." In *The Fate Of Modernity*, 68-88. 2nd ed. Vol. 30. New York: Telos Press Periodicals, 1998.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 70

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Robin, Ron Theodore. "Introduction: Rumors of an Enemy." In *The Making of the Cold War Enemy: Culture and Politics in the Military-Intellectual Complex*, 3-16. Princeton University Press, 2003.

¹⁷⁷ Mehan, Hugh. "The Discourse of the Illegal Immigration Debate: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation." *Discourse & Society* 8, no. 2 (1997): 249-70. doi:10.1177/0957926597008002006.

dimension: the enemy is no longer an outsider of society, but it is within the society itself¹⁷⁸. The enemy is now the one who lives in our neighbourhoods, who contributes economically to the society even if excluded from tax-paying, namely migrants and, more generally, every minority isolated from nationals. They could be us but, the dominant discourse has made this almost impossible to happen. Despite their internal positioning, typical features still hold: demonization as the servant of specific interests, resort to stereotyping, a limited amount of information in argumentation and an underlying distinction between “us” and “them”. The current discourses propose an image of the enemy aimed to fracture unity, where “them” serve as the essential feature to bring “us” closer. Indeed, group identification lays on similarities among members while such dichotomy emphasises differences; thus, eliciting polarization. Within this context, people will pay attention only to pieces of evidence that support their shared beliefs, ignoring or, at least underestimating any counter-argument. In other words, the “established image of the common enemy is caught in a cycle of confirmation bias”¹⁷⁹ that reinforces perception of the enemy as threat and give strength and power to those who promise to address it. However, what it is to utmost importance is that these discourse strategies are not inherently racist; rather, they serve the function that their context dictates¹⁸⁰. In the current particular case, they operate within a context that has been characterized - by the political discourse - as a zero-sum game, in which “they” gain and “we” lose¹⁸¹. The typical argument according to which “they stole our jobs” is illustrative of this kind of mindset but, the aforementioned interpretation of reality can also find a visual representation in the video “*Anziani italiani rovistano nella spazzatura per sopravvivere*”, published by Matteo Salvini on his Facebook page on the 27th of October 2017¹⁸². In this video, vulnerable Italian retirees are caught digging through the garbage in order to find something to eat: they are the losers, either in economic terms and concerning dignity, who have been abandoned by the State. On the other hand, the above-mentioned images are proposed in opposition to that of several migrants asking for better food and money. These migrants are guests at refugee shelters so, they presumably have food and accommodation; in other words, they have gained from State intervention: they are foreigners who abuse of the rights of Italians. It does not matter that pension-related issues might be independent of immigration policies, the post succeeded in stressing differences and in favouring the emergence of a culprit which is more tangible and recognizable than any governmental officers¹⁸³. In the words of Umberto Eco:

“For the enemy to be recognized and feared, he has to be in your home or on your doorstep [...]. You always want someone to hate in order to feel justified in your own misery”¹⁸⁴.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ "Searching for a Cause: The Case Against Defining the Common Enemy." Harvard Political Review. May 2, 2016.

<https://harvardpolitics.com/covers/covers-summer-2016/searching-for-a-cause-the-case-against-defining-the-common-enem/>

Within this context, confirmation bias refers to the tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions, leading to biased decisions. As explained in Chapter 1, this phenomenon is particularly intense within echo-chambers, i.e. homogeneous clusters.

¹⁸⁰ Mehan, Hugh. "The Discourse of the Illegal Immigration Debate: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation." *Discourse & Society* 8, no. 2 (1997): 249-70. doi:10.1177/0957926597008002006.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² The video “Anziani che rovistano nella spazzatura per sopravvivere” is here: “<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10155248574318155>”

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Eco, Umberto. *The Prague Cemetery*. Translated by Richard Dixon. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

The will to depict this group of people as an enemy is also traceable in investigating the lexical choices of populist leaders. For instance, Matteo Salvini has been cautious in persistently define them as “illegal immigrants” - “*clandestini*” - while seldom discerning between the latter and other categories as one of refugees or asylum seekers¹⁸⁵. The choice is largely due to the fact that, his indiscriminate use of the word “illegal” serves to invoke a feeling of alienation towards these groups that ultimately favour their representation as strangers, namely people outside our World and who are trying to negatively affect our standards of living¹⁸⁶. Indeed, by employing the word “illegal”, he also implicitly put them in contrast with the Italian institutional identity, signalling them as threatening entities¹⁸⁷. Efforts in this direction can also be observed looking at the huge attention paid those crimes committed by migrants by the Italian Home Secretary who usually posts articles regarding this news on his social media.

As briefly noted above, this search for enemies is not an exclusive Italian phenomenon but, it has broad geographical, cultural and historical connotations. As Hitler blamed Jews and Reagan demonized Russia, nowadays, Trump points an accusing finger at China while in Europe Le Pen attack the Union (EU) and Salvini goes after immigrants. Although these above-mentioned similarities do not imply any ideological affiliation between these different realities, they suggest the existence of a shared pattern of mobilization and emotions' management, especially in terms of insecurity exploitation. “Tell me who your enemy is and, I will tell you which politicians is best suitable to you”, we can say.

2.2 SIMPLIFICATION

Drawing on enemy-building as due to fragmented information and, on the limited nature of political discourse as an instrumental opposition between friends and enemies, we can infer another peculiarity of political communication: simplification. Within this context, simplification has been found to have two different dimensions: one concerning the language employed by political communicators and one, dealing with the transmitted content or the message itself. However, in both circumstances, we refer to simplification as a codification of reality freed from relativisation and, inherently enhanced by our discretion¹⁸⁸. Within this context, it also implies a certain degree of dogmatism: what it is simple will be perceived as truthful while complexity will presumably involve attempts to deceive. This statement is particularly consistent with the so-called Fluency Heuristic according to which if an alternative is recognized and processed more fluently and faster than another then, the former is accepted as of higher value¹⁸⁹.

First, simplification in terms of language refers to the tendency to present information in a format that facilitates voters' reception of political issues, minimizing their cognitive efforts and their investment of time

¹⁸⁵ Pregliasco, Lorenzo. "Framing E Strategia Comunicativa Di Matteo Salvini." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 25-43. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

¹⁸⁶ Mehan, Hugh. "The Discourse of the Illegal Immigration Debate: A Case Study in the Politics of Representation." *Discourse & Society* 8, no. 2 (1997): 249-70. doi:10.1177/0957926597008002006.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Schmidt, Gunnar. "ON THE AESTHETICS OF POPULISM IN THE DIGITAL AGE." *4th Council of Europe Platform Exchange on Culture and Digitisation*, 2017. <https://rm.coe.int/on-the-aesthetics-of-populism-in-the-digital-age-a-case-for-art-essay-/168075e908>

¹⁸⁹ Gigerenzer, Gerd, and Wolfgang Gaissmaier. "Heuristic Decision Making." *Annual Review of Psychology* 62, no. 1 (2011): 451-82. doi:10.1146/annurev-psych-120709-145346.

in news' decoding¹⁹⁰. Within this context, the lexical register focus on clarity, directness and repetitiveness in order to be persuasive. Clarity relies on an informal style of communication aimed to assure the message to be accessible to voters while, directness refers to the model according to which, political statements will immediately address the most important parts of the topic¹⁹¹. To note, evaluations about issues' relevance are made by the politician; thus, in referring to "the most important parts", we deal with those pieces of information of greater importance for a specific narrative. By way of explanation, representatives are impelled to resort to popular idioms and short sentences - informal register - in order to allow receivers to effortlessly grasp the message concerning exclusively those aspects considered paramount by the speaker. However, to secure effectiveness, the message will be repeated again and again with two major purposes: first, allow voters' memorisation of the information and second, to ensure more voters to be treated by it¹⁹². This simple and immediate model of communication has also been labelled as the process of "going popular" or, "populism of politics"¹⁹³. References to populism and the popular culture are not random but, they are made to emphasise the function of this communication in fostering the relationship between ordinary people and political leaders, suggesting that the latter focus on the interests of the *populus* rather than those of elites¹⁹⁴. In other words, it serves the traditional strategies of populist movements of distancing themselves from incumbents in order to authenticate their allegedly representative nature¹⁹⁵. Illustrative instances of this model of communication can be found looking at the extensive use of slogans in the contemporary political arena. Indeed, slogans as the aforementioned populist strategies, are employed as a concise token of identity, easy to remember and repeat that serves to simplify a complex government agenda¹⁹⁶. Furthermore, they attempt to persuade by assertion rather than through logical arguments appealing to the emotive and allusive sphere. For example, Donald J. Trump with his "Make America Great Again" has done nothing than nourishing people nostalgia about the fallen American Dream, exploiting the common tendency to remember previous events more positively than they evaluated them to be at the time of occurrence (Rosy Retrospection)¹⁹⁷.

While the kind of simplification mentioned above operates within the dimension of providing a message to the target audience, simplification in terms of content handles the audience's comprehension of the message¹⁹⁸. Under these circumstances, it has been defined as the process aimed to an "oversimplification of issues and

¹⁹⁰ Bischof, Daniel, and Roman Senninger. "Simple Politics for the People? Complexity in Campaign Messages and Political Knowledge." *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 2 (2017): 473-95. doi:10.1111/1475-6765.12235.

¹⁹¹ Romarheim, Anders G. *Definitions of Strategic Political Communication*. n. 689. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2005. ISBN:82 7002 115 6

¹⁹² Bischof, Daniel, and Roman Senninger. "Simple Politics for the People? Complexity in Campaign Messages and Political Knowledge." *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 2 (2017): 473-95. doi:10.1111/1475-6765.12235.

¹⁹³ Bracciale, Roberta, and Antonio Martella. "Define the Populist Political Communication Style: The Case of Italian Political Leaders on Twitter." *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 9 (2017): 1310-329. doi:10.1080/1369118x.2017.1328522. p. 1313

¹⁹⁴ Bischof, Daniel, and Roman Senninger. "Simple Politics for the People? Complexity in Campaign Messages and Political Knowledge." *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no. 2 (2017): 473-95. doi:10.1111/1475-6765.12235.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, 476

¹⁹⁶ Newsome, Cail. "The Use of Slogans in Political Rhetoric." *The Corinthian* 4, no. 3 (2002): 21-35. <https://kb.gcsu.edu/thecorinthian/vol4/iss1/3>

¹⁹⁷ Mitchell, Terence R., and Leight Thompson. "A Theory of Temporal Adjustments of the Evaluation of Events: Rosy Prospection & Rosy Retrospection." In *Advances in Managerial Cognition and Organizational Information-processing*, 85-114. Vol. 5. JAI Press, 1994.

¹⁹⁸ Romarheim, Anders G. *Definitions of Strategic Political Communication*. n. 689. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2005. ISBN:82 7002 115 6

solutions”¹⁹⁹ with respect to the overall scenario. This kind of discourse is full of ideology but weak in details and it promotes confidence in absence of an actual knowledge of the facts. In order to fulfil the aforementioned task, politicians have been found to considerably resort to the exploitation of a logical fallacy, namely the Cherry-Picking Fallacy. The English Oxford Living Dictionary defines Cherry-Picking as choosing only “the most beneficial or profitable items, opportunities, etc. from what is available”²⁰⁰, as do attorneys who look for evidence to properly represent their client in Court. Similarly, in political communication, it occurs as the exclusive selection of those pieces of information suitable to support specific politicians’ claims or political stances regarding critical topics. This manipulative mechanism has been found to concern both the interpretation of empirical data and the judgment of opponents’ statements. Dealing with the former, politicians mainly resort to selective exposure in order to enhance a positive message about specific policies or to strengthen the importance to address certain issues by depicting them as critical. A good illustration is Matteo Salvini’s claim about the decreasing number of deaths at sea in 2018²⁰¹. Although the number of migrants who died in the Mediterranean fell compared to 2017, this is only true in absolute terms. Indeed, the mortality rate has risen sharply: from one death every 38 arrivals in 2017 to one every 14, last year²⁰². In other words, the Italian Home Secretary only reported part of the story, namely the one that serves its narrative about the *porti chiusi*²⁰³; thus, simplification lies with a partial representation of reality due to a conscious manipulative purpose. On the other hand, politicians might stress particular segments of opponents’ speeches in order to foster specific messages, emphasizing differences or undermining others’ credibility and reliability. Empirical evidence can be found by analysing how Salvini had re-purposed a video in which Laura Boldrini²⁰⁴ had metaphorically accused him of having poisoned Italians²⁰⁵. Within this context, Salvini does not only promote an image of the Left as struggling in despair, but he also succeeded in highlighting its communicative incapability. Indeed, by opposing Laura Boldrini’s highly accurate discourse to his colloquial register, here, enhanced through images from “The Sleeping Beauty”, he mediates an image of the Left as disproportionately rigid and devoted to the institutional system of communication, i.e. distant from the people and presumably, their interests. To conclude, politicians emphasise some elements and suppress others to encourage recipients to significantly weight only those aspects of reality which are considered consistent with their narratives. This conscious choice of limited information is known as Framing, namely the selection of few aspects of a perceived reality and their connection in a narrative that enhances the availability and the relevance of certain

¹⁹⁹ Bracciale, Roberta, and Antonio Martella. "Define the Populist Political Communication Style: The Case of Italian Political Leaders on Twitter." *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 9 (2017): 1310-329. doi:10.1080/1369118x.2017.1328522. p. 1314

²⁰⁰ English Oxford Living Dictionaries, s.v. “Cherry-pick”. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/cherry-pick>

²⁰¹ On 29th January 2019, Matteo Salvini sent a Letter to the Corriere della Sera in order to explain why he should not be put on trial for the Diciotti affair and to provide readers with some data about the successes of his first mandate. You can read the letter, here:

https://www.corriere.it/politica/19_gennaio_29/salvini-per-diciotti-stato-interesse-pubblico-dd7b8baa-2344-11e9-9543-1916afeb08d9.shtml

²⁰² *Viaggi Disperati*. Report. UNHCR. December 2018.

https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67715#_ga=2.243984898.642170523.1548753735-126843143.1534746251

²⁰³ “*Porti Chiusi*” indicates one of the strengths of the leghist electoral propaganda according to which immigrants’ entries should be drastically reduced by the implementation of further restrictive policies concerning NGOs, already initiated by its predecessor Marco Minniti

²⁰⁴ Laura Boldrini is a left politician; former President of the Chamber of Deputies and previously spokesperson for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

²⁰⁵ <https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1103637620830154752>

ideas²⁰⁶. The main purpose of this lays with the attempt to alter audience's perception favouring one side's interpretation through the so-called Framing Bias, the situation in which the way a politician uses words and elements of an event influences individuals' frames in thought, leading to a change in attitude"²⁰⁷. However, you might be wondering what lead individuals to settle for such a de-contextualized picture or reality. Although many factors have been found to contribute to the success of Framing, as an emotive appeal or perceived weakness of opponents' arguments; to be effective, the audience must perceive it as consistent with its own view. By logic, the leader proposing it will be trusted and legitimate by this homogeneity with his public (group identification)²⁰⁸. The relationship between people and the leader in the contemporary context will be investigated in further detail in the next section.

2.3 LEADERSHIP

In Max Weber's Charismatic Democracy, voters are said to "blindly follow the powerful emotional appeals of the charismatic leader"²⁰⁹ and democracy appears to be reduced to a form of government "by the first demagogue"²¹⁰. Historically, the demagogue is conceived as "someone who achieves power by stirring up the feelings of an audience and leading them to action"²¹¹; in other words, someone who exploits rhetoric in order to impose himself as the master of the people. This definition was usually interpreted negatively because it implied an unscrupulous lust for power and an exaggerate propensity toward personal gain in the absence of ethical principles or a reasonable sense of limit. However, Weber's definition of the demagogue distances itself from this traditional construction by arguing for a "responsible demagogue", namely a charismatic leader who certainly exploit audience unconscious predispositions to obtain power but, who employs the latter to pursue a national vision rather than merely making his living from it²¹². Within this context, the leader does not only draw on people cognitive constraints to efficiently convey national interest, but it actively contributes to it by nourishing his followers' views through its discourses and promises²¹³. Furthermore, the term responsible posits that he would detain power only as long as he keeps his word toward his followers, in accordance with the principle of legitimacy that characterizes modern democracies. Drawing on this definition, we can identify several similarities with the contemporary figure of the leader, specifically the populist one, as described above. Indeed, both the demagogue and the modern model of leadership base on deceit to pursue their goals through an instrumental interpretation of events and an overall simplification of the scenario of

²⁰⁶ Entman, Robert M. "Media Framing Biases and Political Power: Explaining Slant in News of Campaign 2008." *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism* 11, no. 4 (2010): 389-408. doi:10.1177/1464884910367587.

²⁰⁷ Busby, Ethan C., D. J. Flinn, and James N. Druckman. "Studying Framing Effects on Political Preferences: Existing Research and Lingerig Questions." In *Doing News Framing Analysis II: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, 27-50. New York: Routledge, 2018.

²⁰⁸ Group identification lay on similarities among members. The latter may involve belief consonance and confirmation bias within these groups.

²⁰⁹ Márquez, Xavier. "Max Weber's Charismatic Democracy." In *Democratic Moments: Reading Democratic Texts*, 145-52. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. p.146

²¹⁰ Ibid, 146

²¹¹ Gustainis, J. Justin. "Demagoguery and Political Rhetoric: A Review of the Literature." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1990): 155-61. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3885904>. p.155

²¹² Márquez, Xavier. "Max Weber's Charismatic Democracy." In *Democratic Moments: Reading Democratic Texts*, 145-52. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

²¹³ Ibid.

analysis²¹⁴. Besides, a common vernacular style of communication is observed among these two categories as well as the will to unmask a potential culprit behind audience members' struggles²¹⁵. Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that, usually, the demagogue and the populist resemble each other for their historical emergence which seems to be higher in times of transition and when people look for alternatives and "substitutes for the institutions"²¹⁶. Within this context, the new leaders have been found to pledge future stability and security against the alleged uncertainty that might characterise their specific time of occurrence. Under these circumstances, however, it is paramount to remember that whether such statements will not find any confirmation in the forthcoming future, leaders, as responsible demagogues will be likely to lose popular support. This discloses the implicit concept of the "Cycle of the Leader" according to which a leader will be considered as such only as long as he is found to maintain his word. This is particularly due to the great emphasis that is granted to the value of honour, thus the motivational construct which bases itself on the values of loyalty and honesty in the eyes of the other people²¹⁷. The concept mentioned above has its roots in the military code and within this context, its most rampant height can be observed in the Japanese Samurai heritage whom code of ethics, namely the *bushido*, dictates not to die dishonoured by the word or deed of another²¹⁸. In the words of Hideki Tojo, a Japanese Army's commander: "Do not live in shame as a prisoner. Die, and leave no ignominious crime behind you"²¹⁹; suicide was thus preferred to surrender as the most honourable way to fulfil the oath made before the Nation. In the political scenario, it is not unusual to talk about "political suicide"; for instance, this is exactly what the referendum of the 4th of December 2016 has been acknowledged to be for the former Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi²²⁰. On that day, Italian voters were asked to vote for a constitutional reform that envisaged system's simplification, lowering of administrative and bureaucratic costs and, to assure a more direct mechanism for political participation. This was not particularly surprising since the aforementioned objectives have always been milestones of the political view of Matteo Renzi from his debut in 2014. Although he was fully aware of the feasible failure of his proposal, he got involved himself in this fight partly because of some delusions of grandeur but, above all, to honour his promises until the end. However, he found himself unable to fulfil this goal and, therefore, he forced himself to resign. His leadership was over in the exact moment his promises became mere paper tigers.

²¹⁴ Ash, Morgan. *A Contemporary Examination of Demagogic Techniques: Selected Speeches from the 2008 Presidential Campaign*. Master's thesis, Jack J. Valenti School of Communication at University of Houston, 2010. ETD Collection. 1-83. <http://hdl.handle.net/10657/186>

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Neumann, Sigmund. "The Rule of the Demagogue." *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 4 (1938): 487-98. doi:10.2307/2083896. p. 488
Neumann in his work on the Rule of Demagogue defines the latter as a "substitute for the institutions" in a time in which institutions appear to be particularly weak or the ruling class seems to have lost authority.

²¹⁷ Travaglino, Giovanni A., Dominic Abrams, and Georgina Randsley De Moura. "Men of Honor Dont Talk: The Relationship Between Masculine Honor and Social Activism Against Criminal Organizations in Italy." *Political Psychology* 37, no. 2 (2014): 183-99. doi:10.1111/pops.12226.

²¹⁸ Powers, David. "History - World Wars: Japan: No Surrender in World War Two." BBC. February 17, 2011. Accessed Spring 2019. https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/japan_no_surrender_01.shtml

²¹⁹ "Profile on Hideki Tojo | History Channel on Foxtel." History Channel. June 09, 2017. Accessed Spring 2019. <https://www.historychannel.com.au/articles/profile-on-hideki-tojo/>

²²⁰ Matteo Renzi is a Left-wing Italian politician who served as the Prime Minister of Italy from February 2014 until December 2016. After the rejection of his constitutional reform in the December 2016, Renzi formally resigned on 12 December when Foreign Affairs Minister Paolo Gentiloni was appointed new head of the government.

In words preceding Matteo Renzi's resignation, we can observe the nature of the honour-based Cycle described above:

"I wanted to get rid of the exaggerated number of seats in politics: The Senate, the Provinces, the Cnel. I couldn't do it and, so, the seat that jumps is mine."²²¹

In this regard, an interesting question to be tackled is: how is this leadership built? Within this context, we can identify two mechanisms that lay on the ground of this cognitive fabrication: (1) the construction of the image of the leaders as a common man and (2) the direct relationship between the leader and its followers.

Dealing with the former, we refer to the success of the leader in persuading others he is not above them but among them. Peculiar to this context, the above-mentioned use of a colloquial register, as well as the reduction of complexity in issues' analysis are very useful tools as they promote a sense of authenticity which in turn, has been found by Gilbert W. Fairholm to be positively related with trust²²². Trust implies perceived reliability and, it is at the ground of group cohesion that ultimately fosters identification and empowerment. The leader speaks using a language of daily life; he interprets and explains issues as a common individual would do with his closest peers in an informal circumstance. The new leader is no longer a representative chosen because of his greater skills but he is a spokesman of the people, he is the actual *vox populi*²²³. This aspect is consistent with the tendency to organize society around the discrepancy between the people and the elite - friend and enemy - and in voicing the former's discontent about the *status quo*. Within this context, the image of the leader, which is created by professionals and spread by the media, serves to create a "plebiscitary tie" with the people in reaction to the elite's mismanagement of power²²⁴. Therefore, the leader appears to be outside the upper echelons but, to share interests, goals and opponents with the common people, holders of moral value and devoted to the restoration of the underlying democratic principles²²⁵. Experimental pieces of evidence have been found in Bracciale and Martella's study about the Italian political Leaders on Twitter from 2015 to 2016²²⁶. Indeed, through the analysis of politicians' tweets, they found that leaders in order to legitimize themselves before the people, resort to that particular communication style that, not without reason, they have called "Man of the Street Style". Indeed, the former is a communicative strategy founded on colloquial language, simplification and exploitation of diffused concerns in the attempt to strengthen opposition. Furthermore, it not unusual for contemporary leaders to talk about their family or their work in order to strengthen the image of the leader as a common man. For instance, Renzi thanked his wife and his sons in his discourse of resignation²²⁷ while Salvini often makes references to his male child, especially concerning his

²²¹ Palazzo Chigi. YouTube. December 04, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9dNw94QvhM>, 6:51.

²²² Fairholm, Gilbert W. "The Leadership of Trust." In *Leadership and the Culture of Trust* 1, 95-99. Praeger, 1994.

²²³ Kriesi, Hanspeter. "The Populist Challenge." *West European Politics* 37, no. 2 (2014): 361-78. doi:10.1080/01402382.2014.887879.

²²⁴ Viviani, Lorenzo. "A Political Sociology of Populism and Leadership." *SOCIETÀ MUTAMENTOPOLITICA* 8, no. 15 (2017): 270-303. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/SMP-20860> p. 288

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Bracciale, Roberta, and Antonio Martella. "Define the Populist Political Communication Style: The Case of Italian Political Leaders on Twitter." *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 9 (2017): 1310-329. doi:10.1080/1369118x.2017.1328522.

²²⁷ Palazzo Chigi. YouTube. December 04, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k9dNw94QvhM>, 9:48

school's progress. Leaders stress their belonging with the people by virtually inviting them in their personal life: they share photos of themselves playing with kids or animals and posting about what they are currently eating in order to highlight their humanity or in the words of Sigmund Neumann their allegedly "Puritan Simplicity"²²⁸.

Under these circumstances, the second mechanism dealing with the direct relationship between the leader and his followers serves to enhance this "common man" position; thus, the two mechanisms are collaborative and usually inseparable rather than mutually exclusive. By "direct relationship", we indicate the trend for political leaders to bypass both the conventional structure of the Party (personification) and the traditional channels of distribution (disintermediation). First, we refer to the phenomenon of personalization of politics according to which "individual political actors have become increasingly important at the expense of parties"²²⁹ due to voters' focus on leaders and specific issues rather than on abstract programs. Indeed, as for leadership itself, it is not about representativeness anymore. The individuals are no longer looking for a general program that might reflect their beliefs but for a person who sympathises and understands them along with their concerns and needs. At the light of this increasingly cognitive evaluation of the leader rather than of his ideology, scholars have begun to identify voters with fans²³⁰. Illustrative of this celebrity-like association has been the "Vinci Salvini"²³¹ in which followers were asked to participate in terms of greater engagement on Matteo Salvini's posts rather than through proposals and ideas, in order to win a coffee-break with the leader of the League²³². This discloses the direct and personal appeal of the contemporary political leader on his audience, as well as the pivotal role of leadership over the specific political project itself.

Second, the leaders' advantage in contemporary politics has also been strengthened by disintermediation which allowed voters to engage themselves in a direct dialogue with the political agents through commenting activity as well as by joining their Facebook Live videos. On the other hand, from the leader perspective, a direct relationship with his followers offered him the opportunity to ask them questions and collect their opinions and feedbacks in order to build a consistent narrative. Within this context, Salvini has been very smart in exploiting the sentiment-analysis's potential of the Web by often interrogating his followers about possible forthcoming policies or merely about entertainment issues.

²²⁸ Neumann, Sigmund. "The Rule of the Demagogue." *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 4 (1938): 487-98. doi: 10.2307/2083896. p. 493

²²⁹ Garzia, Diego. "The Personalization of Politics in Western Democracies: Causes and Consequences on Leader-follower Relationships." *The Leadership Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (2011): 697-709. doi: 10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.05.010. p. 698

²³⁰ Diamanti, Giovanni. "La nuova Lega, un rebranding che parte da lontano." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 25-43. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

²³¹ The "Vinci Salvini" is now at its second edition. It was launched for the first time in 2018 in occasion of the National Election of the 4th March and it has been reproduced in 2019 for the European Election. The dynamic is pretty simple: a user accumulate points every time he/she likes a Salvini's post or whether is among the first ones to do so. During its first edition, the race only took place on Facebook while in 2019, points could also be accumulated through Twitter and Instagram. Although the coffee-break with the leader was exclusively reserved to weekly winners, the fastest person to "like" Salvini's posts each day would get their picture on his page or a call with Salvini himself.

²³² Ibid.



05:04 - 12 mag 2019

Figure 2 – Matteo Salvini’s post concerning the possible reintroduction of the military service
 Source: Matteo Salvini’s Twitter account 12/05/2019



Figure 3 – Matteo Salvini’s post concerning Mahmood's victory at the Sanremo festival.
 Source: Matteo Salvini’s Twitter account 09/02/2019

The establishment of a genuine conversation on topics which are unrelated to politics serves a dual function: it reinforces the image of the common man and second, it helps to create engagement keeping the community active and potentially enlarging it.

To conclude, offline mobilisation has been found to play a significant role in creating this direct, unmediated relationship with the leader. Within this context, mass meetings have been crucial in fostering unification and self-representation²³³ and in raising confidence and trust in a leader you think you know.

²³³Neumann, Sigmund. "The Rule of the Demagogue." *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 4 (1938): 487-98. doi: 10.2307/2083896

Third Chapter

The Communicative Success of Matteo Salvini.

*“When I had time to read them calmly,
I liked to start from the bottom,
from the pages of the readers' letters.*

*If I had to run a newspaper,
they [readers' letters] would be the opening credits”.*

- Matteo Salvini “Io sono Matteo Salvini: Intervista allo specchio”
(2019).

3.1 THE HISTORICAL PATH: FROM “NORTH” TO “ITALY”

The League of Matteo Salvini, as well as his leadership has its roots in the former “Northern League”, a party founded by its former leader, Umberto Bossi, in 1984 at Varese, a municipality of the Italian region of *Lombardia*. Its original name was the “Autonomous Lombard League” which had been chosen by virtue of its historical value. Indeed, the “Lombard League” historically indicates the medieval alliance among several Northern Italy’s municipalities aimed to oppose the threat of the Barbarossa’s invasion. The alliance was stipulated by the so-called “*Giuramento di Pontida*” which owes its name to its place of occurrence and, that has always been a strictly symbolic element in the League’s political narrative²³⁴. The traditional political agenda of the Party focused on a federalism-based re-organisation of Italy, on the alleged supremacy of the North before the South and a significant resentment against the established institutions in Rome²³⁵. Within this context, we must recall slogans as “*Roma Ladrona*”; “Padania is not Italy” or the offensive identification of those coming from the South as “*terroni*”. Under these circumstances, the Party’s growth has been slow but, in the 2008 National Election under the leadership of Umberto Bossi, it successfully reached the 8,3% of the popular vote and the 27,1% in the Italian Region of Veneto alone²³⁶. However, the aforementioned data provide us with a significant insight: the Party was on the rise, but its nature was still notably circumscribed to the North, to the extent that the support for the League was almost insignificant in the others Italian regions. The point was that nobody would expect something different from a party which had built its strength on the vilification of the national flag and on secessionist purposes²³⁷. However, the situation did change and, in this regard, an interesting question to be tackled is: How? How, in 2019 the League has become the first Party in Italy?²³⁸ And, how the Apulians, who were previously called *terroni* changed their mind rewarding the League with the 25.29% of their votes?²³⁹ Several scholars have recognised the new leadership of Matteo Salvini as the pivotal and almost exclusive factor behind this transformation. The aforementioned potential primacy of the role of the leader might be further strengthened by the present-day leader-oriented nature of the Party, with other exponents that mention Salvini in the 75% of their posts and, his hegemonic presence on TV talk shows and mass meetings²⁴⁰. Under these circumstances, Salvini’s almost exclusive control over the structure of the Party might have facilitated the identification of the latter with the leader himself (one-man-party), ultimately

²³⁴ "Prima Parte 1979 - 1987." [leganord.org](https://www.leganord.org). <https://www.leganord.org/il-movimento/la-nostra-storia/la-storia-della-lega>

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Razzi, Massimo. "Speciale Elezioni 2008 - Elezioni Politiche - Camera - Riepilogo Nazionale." [LaRepubblica.it](https://www.repubblica.it/speciale/2008/elezioni/camera/riepilogo_nazionale.html). https://www.repubblica.it/speciale/2008/elezioni/camera/riepilogo_nazionale.html

²³⁷ The members of the League, at least the pure ones, have never considered themselves as Italians but contrarily, they strongly argued in favour of their imaginary belonging to the territory of the Padania which however, has never been legally legitimated as such. In this context, a number of exponents of the Umberto Bossi’s movement offended the Italian tricolore and the leader himself had been convicted for having compared the Italian National flag to toilet paper. Also, the actual leader of the League was not particularly enthusiastic about the National flag and in 2011, he declared not to own any Italian flag since "the tricolour doesn't represent me, it doesn't feel like my flag". ("L'eurodeputato Leghista Salvini "Il Tricolore Non Mi Rappresenta" *La Repubblica*: Milano Cronaca. October 23, 2011.

https://milano.repubblica.it/cronaca/2011/10/23/news/l_eurodeputato_leghista_salvini_il_tricolore_non_mi_rappresenta-23739891/)

²³⁸ Following the 2019 European elections, Salvini emerged as the most influential leader in Italy and his party with over the 34% of the votes is the first Party in Italy. (Gagliardi, Andrea. "Europee, Lega Oltre Il 40% Al Nord: Ma." *Il Sole 24 ORE*. May 27, 2019.

<https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2019-05-27/lega-oltre-40percento-nord-ma-e-prima-anche-lazio-e-seconda-sud-record-veneto-il-50percento-064934.shtml?uuid=ACg9ZAJ>)

²³⁹ "Europee [Scrutini] Regione PUGLIA (Italia) " Eligendo. <https://elezioni.interno.gov.it/europee/scrutini/20190526/scrutiniEI416000000>

²⁴⁰ Pregliasco, Lorenzo. "Framing E Strategia Comunicativa Di Matteo Salvini." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 25-43. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

favouring a cognitive dissociation between the traditional League's narrative and his leader's current ideology. However, a radical change of this magnitude in the positioning and the identity of a Party cannot be independent of the context and the strategies which have been adopted. In this respect, the League, under the guide of Matteo Salvini and his team ceases to be the patron of the North, and it engages itself in a fundamental process of "nationalization" impelled by expansive purposes, both concerning the electorate and the political goals. Drawing on Borghese and Cavallaro's analysis of changes in League's ideology and policies²⁴¹, we will try to investigate the major instruments behind the success of the process of nationalisation mentioned above. Reasonably, the authors examine the political programs of the League in three different elections and under three different leaderships, namely: the 2008 electoral program under the leading of Umberto Bossi; the 2013 program with Roberto Maroni as Secretary²⁴² and thirdly, the 2018 Matteo Salvini's political manifesto²⁴³. The image below shows how central topics have changed over time by indicating the percentage of sections dealing with certain issues in each of the programs mentioned above:

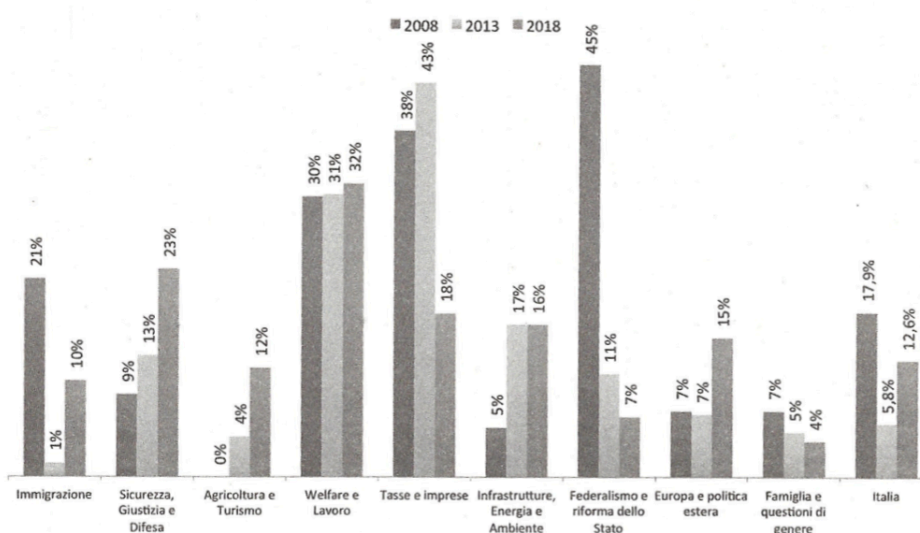


Figure 4 - Source: Borghese, Salvatore, and Matteo Cavallaro. "Da Sindacato Del Nord a Partito Nazionalista: Policy E Programmi Elettorali Della Lega 2008-2018." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 85-107. Castelvecchi, 2019. p.95

In line with the nationalist intent, references to the federalism arguments were significantly reduced in 2018 while mentions regarding "Italy" rise considerably compared to 2013. In the economic field, increasing emphasis is granted to welfare and labour policies while the rate of attention towards enterprises significantly decreases in favour of a greater focus on agriculture and tourism. The new balance in economic concerns reflects the will of the Party to enlarge its targets' audience: The League is no longer the exclusive party of

²⁴¹ Borghese, Salvatore, and Matteo Cavallaro. "Da Sindacato Del Nord a Partito Nazionalista: Policy E Programmi Elettorali Della Lega 2008-2018." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 85-107. Castelvecchi, 2019.

²⁴² It is very important to note that the National Election of the 2013 came immediately after the scandal that in 2012 hit the party and its Leader, namely Umberto Bossi. After many years attacking the powers in Rome and depicting politicians as thieves, the leader of the Northern League was caught in using campaign's refunds for his personal expenses.

²⁴³ In the 2018 National Election, the League of Matteo Salvini was part of the centre-right coalition alongside with Silvio Berlusconi and Giorgia Meloni. Although each of this political force could present its official electoral program, they opt for an unitarian one. However, later both *Fratelli d'Italia* by Giorgia Meloni and the League of Matteo Salvini post on their social network a distinct personal program.

the small and medium entrepreneurs of the North but, it also represents middle classes, employees and pensioners²⁴⁴. Illustrative of the aforementioned new political stance are some of the milestones of Salvini's political campaign including the proposal for the reinstatement of vouchers or the well-known "*Quota 100*"²⁴⁵. Nonetheless, the leader also succeeded in safeguarding his traditional support by fostering financially profitable drafts like the one concerning the flat tax, i.e. system of taxation with a single rate of around 15%. Moreover, in 2018, the Italian Home Secretary also seized the opportunity to further enhance his relationship with the Southern voters by promoting more significant consideration for the tourism industry, the historically pivotal sector in the South of Italy. Salvini has always been aware of the crucial role of the *Meridione* in the process of nationalisation and, already in 2014, he endorsed the creation of the political movement "*Noi con Salvini*". The latter was a broadening of the League in southern Italy whose main goal was overcoming or, at least decreasing through the ideology of the new leader, the lack of confidence toward the League that reasonably characterised the South of Italy²⁴⁶.

Drawing on data from the graph, we can identify two additional features in the peculiar political strategy of Matteo Salvini in comparison to his predecessors: the critical role of the discourse on security and the one concerning immigration. If the increase in the percentage about security issues is visible (+14% compared to 2008), the one about immigration might seem ambiguous. Indeed, in 2018 the rate of exclusively immigration-related sections in the electoral program is lower than in 2008; however, this is not due to a lower relevance of the issue itself but, to a different framing. Indeed, although the characterisation of the threat still focuses on migrants' identification as a security menace and an economic burden, the Salvini's narrative also focuses on the cultural aspect²⁴⁷. In this regard, Western countries' commitment towards cultural identity and its protection necessarily imply references to the European Union (EU) which has often been demonized as the usurper of members states' authority, sovereignty and cultural heritage. Within this context, Salvini's appeal to migration has been found to move alongside with the prosecution of its alleged responsible, namely the elites of Brussels; thus, many references to the former might have been classified as concerning the EU rather than as exclusively related to migration. Unsurprisingly, the debate around Europe and foreign policy had significantly increased meeting 15% of the overall discourse. However, it is of utmost importance to note that data in Figure 4 merely refer to the proportion of sections addressing a specific issue, but they say nothing on their framework of discussion. For instance, the observed high rate for "Italy" in 2008 might be due to its placement in discourses concerning secession rather than patriotic ones. In order to test our hypothesis, we relied on the analysis of programs' recurring words and, we observed that terms as "Italy" or "Italian", which have been found to be peculiar in Salvini's agenda, were almost absent in 2008 which, instead, was strictly

²⁴⁴ Borghese, Salvatore, and Matteo Cavallaro. "Da Sindacato Del Nord a Partito Nazionalista: Policy E Programmi Elettorali Della Lega 2008-2018." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 85-107. Castelvechi, 2019.

²⁴⁵ Quota 100 is now active (experimentally until 2021), and it allows all workers who have reached the age of 62 and who have paid at least 38 years of contributions to retire.

²⁴⁶ Diamanti, Giovanni. "La nuova Lega, un re-branding che parte da lontano." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 9-24. Roma: Castelvechi, 2019.

²⁴⁷ Bulli, Giorgia, and Sorina Christina Soare. "Immigration and the Refugee Crisis in a New Immigration Country: The Case of Italy." *Croatian and Comparative Public Administration* 18, no. 1 (March 16, 2018): 127-56.

marked by terms as “Region” or” North”²⁴⁸. The insights above support our idea according to which, despite potential ambiguity, the nationalist-unitarian discourse is an essential peculiarity of the League of Matteo Salvini.

However, the re-branding of the League under the leadership of Matteo Salvini was not limited to its ideological positioning within the political arena but, it has been an extensive remodelling that could not exempt its name and its visual identity. Dealing with the former, in 2017, Salvini announced the demise of the word “North” from the name of his Party and, the release of a new logo deprived of any direct references to the Padania apart from the traditional stylized image of Alberto Da Giussiano²⁴⁹.

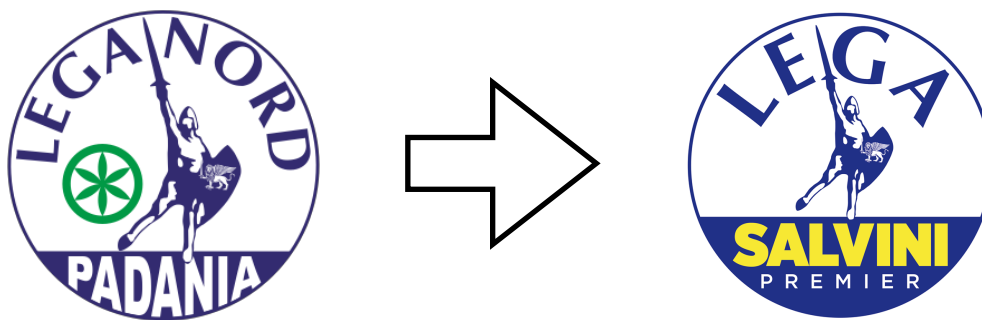


Figure 5 - Visual differences among the traditional logo of the Northern League and 2017 Salvini's one.
Source: leganord.org (<https://www.leganord.org/il-movimento/simboli>)

On the other hand, the shift from the traditional and all-embracing green colour that, for almost two decades had marked the League identity was slower and milder. However, “where there was green, now there is blue”²⁵⁰. Blue was chosen to pay homage to the American experience of Donald J. Trump and to signal the entry of Matteo Salvini in the political landscape of the European Right which made extensive use of the colour mentioned above. To conclude, the path from the historical “Northern League” to the “League” of Salvini Premier has been a major transformation which encompassed the ideological dimension of the Party, its national collocation and its identifying features.

3.2 THE PILLARS OF MATTEO SALVINI'S COMMUNICATION

In order to be effective, the communication of Matteo Salvini has been organized around what Luca Morisi²⁵¹ called “the virtuous cycle TWT”, namely Television, Web and Territory. Indeed, despite their crucial role in

²⁴⁸ Borghese, Salvatore, and Matteo Cavallaro. "Da Sindacato Del Nord a Partito Nazionalista: Policy E Programmi Elettorali Della Lega 2008-2018." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 85-107. Castelvechi, 2019. In their work, the authors also work on an analysis concerning the lexical occurrence in the three electoral programs at stake discerning between those words which are typical, i.e. recurrent in a specific program and those which are exclusive of it.

²⁴⁹ Alberto Da Giussiano was among the constituents of the “*Lega Lombarda*”, the Medieval alliance among many Northern Italy's constituencies aimed to face a threat concerning Federico Barbarossa' invasion. He is remembered for honourably leading the company of the *Gagliardi* into the Legnano battle.

²⁵⁰ Diamanti, Giovanni. “La nuova Lega, un re-branding che parte da lontano.” In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 9-24. Roma: Castelvechi, 2019. p.13

²⁵¹ Luca Morisi, on his twitter account, defines himself as a “digital philosopher” and a “social-megaphone”. Formally, from 2013, he is the head of communication department of the League's (LN) campaign and the media strategist behind the Italian politician Matteo Salvini.

contemporary reality, social networks could never be enough on their own. On the other hand, drawing on the hybrid nature of the current communicative environment, efficient integration between the Leader's presence on traditional and new Media and his physical appearances is critical to assure messages' effectiveness. Within this context, Matteo Salvini has proven himself to be a master in successfully occupying almost the complexity of the online and offline spaces at his disposal. Under these circumstances, we will investigate through empirical pieces of evidence how Matteo Salvini exploited each of the communicative avenues mentioned above. But, before analysing in detail his almost obsessive iper-presenteeism in the political scenario, we need to understand the pillars that lay on the ground of his overall communicative strategy. In this regard, we have tried to build a taxonomy of Salvini's communication by identifying six different features which have been recognized to be peculiar to his Media strategy. That is to say:

(1) Control over the Agenda-Setting

Within this context, we refer to Salvini's ability in dictating the central topics of the public debate. Salvini succeeds in imposing himself over the Media environment mainly due to the peculiarities of his publishing schedule²⁵². Indeed, both the amount and the frequency of the posts published by the Secretary of the League appear to be significantly above the average that of any other Italian leader²⁵³. Intuitively, Salvini will consistently focus his posts on those topics which are critical to his target audience and significantly favourable to his narrative. Under these circumstances and partly due to the Facebook algorithm, he will enjoy greater visibility on social networks. On the other hand, the others political forces, as well as the traditional media, will be forced to rely on his statements either by reporting or opposing them. This is, inter alia, due to people's recourse to the so-called anchoring bias according to which, they will be over-reliant on the first piece of information received²⁵⁴. In an interesting article published on Business Insider in 2015, authors provide an example of the aforementioned cognitive stumbling in the framework of salary negotiation in which whoever makes the first offer establishes the range of reasonable possibilities in people's minds²⁵⁵. Therefore, in the contemporary political communication's scenario, it is Matteo Salvini to set this possible standard to which others have to arrange. Illustrative of this has been the recent affair concerning the Sea Watch, the latest case of ships loitering in the Mediterranean because of the refusal of Italy, and other European countries, to take charge of the landing and reception of migrants on board²⁵⁶. On 15th June 2019, the reaction of the Home Secretary has been immediate and, through a photo on Twitter of the signed decree, he informed his users of

²⁵² Diamanti, Giovanni. "La nuova Lega, un rebranding che parte da lontano." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 9-24. Roma: Castelveccchi, 2019.

²⁵³ Carone, Martina and Matteo Cavallato. "Salvini Social." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 45-85. Roma: Castelveccchi, 2019. According to the qualitative analysis of Martina Carone and Matteo Cavallato, Matteo Salvini publishes 11 posts per day on Facebook and he is the most active Italian Leader on this platform. The second place goes to Luigi Di Maio with an average of 7 posts per day.

²⁵⁴ Lebowitz, Shana. "20 Cognitive Biases That Screw up Your Decisions." Business Insider. August 26, 2015. Accessed June 15, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/cognitive-biases-that-affect-decisions-2015-8?IR=T>.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Sea Watch is a ship belonging to a German NGO which had already been at the centre of the controversy in January 2019. At the time, indeed, the Italian Government prohibited the landing of the 47 migrants on board accusing the vessel of having violated the so-called Law of the Sea. An agreement has been reached only after ten days when the government made a deal with seven EU's countries concerning a mutual reception of migrants and it authorized the landing in the port of Catania.

the ban for the ship to enter and transit the Italian territorial waters. At 10 AM, it is already the top story of the day: both his followers and his haters talk about it and, all the newspapers write about the Sea Watch affair. Once again, the main topic of the debate is a “safe” one for the League, and the opposition is forced to expose itself on disadvantageous topics as the one concerning migration.

(2) Creation of Diversions

The diversion tactic is consistent with the aforementioned will to manage the political agenda. That is to say, it is a well-established means to assure control to occur. Within this context, we refer to diversion as the League’s attempt to create distractions in order to divert audience’s attention from presumably adverse circumstances and lead citizens to focus on issues of minor relevance but of significant emotive appeal²⁵⁷. In practice, when sensitive topics are likely to undermine the consensus of the Party, some of its exponents either adopt controversial stances or introduce different subject matter in order to misdirect Media coverage and opponents’ discourses²⁵⁸. Giovanni Diamanti identified two significant examples of this phenomenon: first, the controversial statements of the Italian Minister Lorenzo Fontana and second, the Salvini’s massive communicative effort in the occasion of Cesare Battisti’s arrest²⁵⁹. In both circumstances, the purpose was to prevent potentially compromising topics to enter the political agenda, jeopardizing the government’s stability. For instance, a few days before Cesare Battisti’s return to Italy, it had been released negative data on the economic growth of the country presumably able to weaken the government’s stance concerning the financial crisis. However, only the 7% of the Italian population mentioned the financial crisis among the most relevant news for that week while Cesare Battisti appeared as the dominant item²⁶⁰.

(3) Usage of a Non-Institutional Tone

In Chapter 2, we have already mentioned the politicians’ recourse to informal idioms to address their messages clearly and directly and, to succeed in picturing themselves as common men. Unsurprisingly, Salvini suits considerably well both the imperatives mentioned above. Indeed, Matteo Salvini’s communicative register is visibly characterized by the constant reliance on common idioms like “*Amici*”; “*Fratelli*”; “*Bacioni*” or “*Rosiconi*”²⁶¹. In this regard, we should note that contrarily to what many scholars might have thought, his style has not changed in response to his new governmental office. The use of short sentences, words and limited but useful concepts, together with an aggressive and decisive tone have remained a peculiarity of his discourse: he did not institutionalize himself. Besides, he made extensive use of capital letters in order to increase his posts’ clarity by making the central topic immediately visible and, favouring the general visibility

²⁵⁷ Diamanti, Giovanni. “La nuova Lega, un re-branding che parte da lontano.” In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 9-24. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

²⁵⁸ Nicodemo, Francesco, and Giusy Russo. “Non Pensate All’elefante: Se Continuate a Dire Che Salvini è Un Razzista Finirete per Rafforzarlo.” Linkiesta. July 31, 2018. <https://www.linkiesta.it/it/article/2018/07/31/non-pensate-allelefante-se-continue-a-dire-che-salvini-e-un-razzista/39007/>

²⁵⁹ Diamanti, Giovanni. “La nuova Lega, un re-branding che parte da lontano.” In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 9-24. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ *Rosicone* is an Italian word to indicate someone green with envy.

of the post on users' timelines²⁶². At this point, the unique nature of the narrative on Matteo Salvini should be nothing new. On the other hand, in the words of Mauro Munafò:

“Salvini is not just a politician: he's that cousin/friend who is upset with immigrants and always takes pictures of what he eats. He watches football on TV and shares status with existential questions or low-ranking statements.”²⁶³

Salvini emphasises the underlying human aspect behind his institutional role, providing his audience with a perfect mix between the private and the political dimension. He forgoes the institutional caution, the State sobriety and all the etiquettes that were said to come with his office, representing himself having breakfast with Nutella, celebrating the school's successes of his son and sharing photos of his holidays. Within this context, nothing is left to chance: products are always Italian, healthy meals alternate with tasty ones because, after all, every common man occasionally indulges himself in a sweet treat. Unsurprisingly, the 67% of his supporters succeeds in identifying with the Minister²⁶⁴.

The accurate combination of public and private is immediately visible scrolling Matteo Salvini's Twitter timeline and, illustrative of the former has been the 4th of July 2019. In that day, the Minister shared a photo of his daughter with an emotive caption describing his first call of the day, in which his little girl told him that he had lost a tooth. Almost simultaneously, he shared another post about his second call of the day concerning the recently occurred operations against drug dealers and human traffickers throughout Italy, with dozens of arrests and millions of euros of assets seized. “An amazing day”, he says.



Figure 6- Posts on Matteo Salvini's Twitter account on 04/05/2019
Source: Matteo Salvini's Twitter account

The private life of the Minister enjoys a direct link with his public experience and the contamination between private arguments and political ones serves to allow him to deal with significant issues through informal

²⁶² Carone, Martina and Matteo Cavallato. “Salvini Social.” In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 45-85. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

²⁶³ Munafò, Mauro. "Mettere like Alla Pagina Facebook Di Matteo Salvini è Un Viaggio Mistico Che Ti Apre Un Mondo E Ti Cambia La Vita per Sempre." *Il Paese Che Non Ama*. July 11, 2014. <http://munafoblogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2014/07/11/mettere-like-alla-pagina-facebook-di-matteo-salvini-e-un-viaggio-mistico-che-ti-apre-un-mondo-e-ti-cambia-la-vita-per-sempre/comment-page-1/>

²⁶⁴ Policastro, Davide “La Lega postelektorale: partito nazionale o partito della nazione?” In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 117-145. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

frames. Like his daughter's post allowed him to implicitly support the work of the security forces; similarly, a post about the bad habit of smoking cigarettes can serve to share nervousness during government formation²⁶⁵. Under these circumstances, the non-institutional standard of communication serves a dual function: it does not only promote the doctrine of the common man in an anti-elite era but, it also allows the leader to manipulate perceptions by apparently blameless contents. This is because Salvini's community must appear as a big family whose emotiveness he should be able to exploit.

(4) The essential Role of his Community,

With almost 3,7 mln followers on Facebook, 1,07 mln on Twitter and 1,5 mln on Instagram, Matteo Salvini is undoubtedly among the politicians with the most extensive online community in Italy. At the light of these data, it would be unreasonable to undervalue the potential role of this community in his leadership. Besides, the peculiar fideistic nature of his community further enhances the credibility of the previous statement. Indeed, according to his followers, Matteo Salvini is not only a leader in charge of representing them but, he incarnates these people while being their *Capitano* - "the Captain"- thus, a "saviour"²⁶⁶ to whom rely on. Salvini appears as a strong man able to understand people's needs, and to find the most appropriate route to satisfy them but, concurrently, he is also perceived as an ordinary honest man by the 84% of his supporters²⁶⁷. The degree of empathy among the League's electorate toward their *Capitano* is incredibly strong and, he consistently acts to preserve it by seeking interaction and paying attention to the community itself. The former finds its most prominent example in Salvini's extensive use of call-to-action (CTA) and his direct appeal to his followers to encourage them commenting and re-sharing contents. For instance, he is likely to resort to idioms like "according to you"; "will you be there?"; "what do you think?" or "if you are in, I am too". Although one possible motive of this interactive relationship might lay with the will to propagate the original message's cascade and increase its visibility, it also notably serves the function of a sentiment-analysis, i.e. an analysis of the online metrics to estimate the nuances and emotions aroused. A listening mechanism is crucial to an effective communicative strategy since it advises the communicator on the most relevant topics in the public debate. Moreover, it might address the leader's reaction and political stance informing him about the most desirable ones. In practice, when Matteo Salvini interrogates his followers with the kind of idioms mentioned above, he is both reinforcing audience's perception that their opinion matters as much as the leader's one and, evaluating whether to stress that particular topic in the forthcoming future. On the other hand, by paying attention to the community, we refer to Matteo Salvini's proneness to thank his followers for both personal and partisan achievements and to underline the success of his social networks' pages or the masses' enthusiasm at meetings.

²⁶⁵ Carone, Martina and Matteo Cavallato. "Salvini Social." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 45-85. Roma: Castelveccchi, 2019.

²⁶⁶ Neumann, Sigmund. "The Rule of the Demagogue." *American Sociological Review* 3, no. 4 (1938): 487-98. doi:10.2307/2083896.

²⁶⁷ Policastro, Davide "La Lega postelektorale: partito nazionale o partito della nazione?" In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 117-145. Roma: Castelveccchi, 2019.

However, despite as accurate and precise a communicative strategy may be, the critical engine of this strong empathy has been Salvini's ability in dealing with those things of which nobody used to talk about but, that worried the many. For instance, in 2014, when the generic focus was on labour-market and the so-called Jobs Act²⁶⁸, Matteo Salvini began discussing security and migration. Thus, he leveraged on people's need for protection, exploiting their anxieties about current inequality and allegedly forthcoming one. Under these circumstances, he succeeded in capitalizing vote's volatility in his favour by triggering anger and the demand for a reference person. The underlying scheme is a long-established one: a given discomfort is highlighted and then, an eager leader "solves" it for you. However, the resolution only occurred on the emotional register; thus, he only promotes the perception of having addressed it by alleviating your emotional state of imbalance. Within this context, he has been a master in favouring the emergence of identification, as well as confidence in order to acquire a deep and widespread consensus.

(5) The Rhetoric of the Common Sense

Within this context, we refer to the cognitive shortcut adopted by Matteo Salvini to locate his political stance within a framework of normality and common sense in order to coat it with inevitability²⁶⁹. In line with the imperative of political marketing and the fast politics, he appeals to traditional values rather than individual standings on specific issues²⁷⁰. By way of explanation, the common sense serves to legitimize the Italian Home Secretary's aggressive tone and his controversial statements on the ground that, since they are commonly shared then, they will also be reasonable. Under these circumstances, it is not unusual that Matteo Salvini mentioned the "popular good sense" in opposing the request concerning the permission to proceed against him in court for the *Diciotti* affair²⁷¹.



Figure 7 - "Common sense" in Salvini's post concerning request to proceed against him

Source: Matteo Salvini's Twitter account 24/01/2019

²⁶⁸ Jobs-Act refers to a Labour Reform proposed and passed by the government of Matteo Renzi in May and December 2014. Theoretically, it was aimed to reduce the gap between precarious and stable workers. However, the government was accused of attemptin to abolish the rights that workers have has fought for long time just to please the EU's directives.

²⁶⁹ Pregliasco, Lorenzo. "Framing E Strategia Comunicativa Di Matteo Salvini." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 25-43. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

²⁷⁰ Caciotti, Marco M. "Marketing Politico." Consorzio Universitario Piceno. November 16, 2013. <http://www.cup.ap.it/progetti/progetti-in-archivio/polcom>

²⁷¹ August 2018: The ship *Ubaldo Diciotti* (Italian flag) after having rescued 190 migrants, it had been left loitering in the Mediterranean awaiting for the Italian and Maltese authorities to reach an agreement about the Safety Place for migrants' arrival. Four days after, the ship docked to Catania's harbor, but the commander received an order not to get the migrants off the ship directly from the Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini. The former has been accused of kidnapping by virtue of the alleged will of the Minister to deprive the persons on board the *Diciotti* of their freedom.

The echo of this message was so intense that his supporters even create a petition marked by the hashtag *#SalviniNonMollare* to defend the Minister from the judiciary whose act was seen as contempt for all the Italian people²⁷². In the present case, by claiming that the modern common sense is even above a judicial decision, he did not only legitimize his actions, but he also succeeded in legitimizing his overall support. Indeed, under these assumptions, any opposition will necessarily imply a certain extent of bad faith insofar against common sense. However, to adopt such mindset is very dangerous because it allows an idea of politics as the mere interpretation of widespread popular beliefs rather than a complex evaluation of facts independent from any narcissistic drifts or overconfidence²⁷³.

(6) Polarizing narrative.

As noted in Chapter 2, the search for enemies has been a very pervasive phenomenon in time and space and the Italian scenario and Matteo Salvini's narrative have not been exempted. On the other hand, they have been found to fit very well the *Zeitgeist* according to which contemporary Western societies perceive their community as a homogeneous whole threaten by inland foreigners, namely migrants²⁷⁴. Although migrants and the migration phenomenon have been critical targets in Matteo Salvini's narrative, they have not been the only ones. Contrarily, the polarizing narrative of the Minister has addressed an extensive list of targets, either concrete and symbolic ones. In both circumstances, the primary purpose was to split the public opinion around these allegedly controversial figures in order to trigger niches' negative feelings and generate turmoil on both sides of the political spectrum²⁷⁵. "*Tanti nemici, tanto onore*"²⁷⁶ as Matteo Salvini wrote on his Twitter page on July 29, 2018. The quote dates back to the Fascist period and intuitively, the post has generated a significant controversy but, as a matter of fact, it said a lot about the communication strategy of the Minister. Indeed, to comprehend Salvini's communication means to perceive his constant oppositional dynamic aimed to polarize the debate and identifies antagonists. That is to say, the whole storytelling around the figure of Matteo Salvini exists only as long as he fights something, e.g. migration, or someone, e.g. the elites: "if he had no more enemies, he would no longer be useful"²⁷⁷. Within this context, an illustrative phenomenon has been the promotional campaign known as "*Loro Non Ci Saranno*" - They will not be there - organized for the League's event of the 8 December 2018 in Rome. In the days prior to the manifestation, Salvini diffused several posters portraying his political opponents and many distinguished personalities from the culture, music and entertainment scenario grimacing with the wording "He/She will not be there". Inter alia: Roberto Saviano, Matteo Renzi, Maria Elena Boschi, Paolo Gentiloni, Mario Monti, Elsa Fornero²⁷⁸, Laura Boldrini, Jean

²⁷² <https://salvininonmollare.it> Inscriptions are currently disabled.

²⁷³ Ventura, Sofia. "Da Renzi a Di Maio, Così La Retorica Del Popolo Viene Usata Dalla Politica." *L'Espresso*. October 30, 2018. <http://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/2018/10/30/news/da-renzi-a-di-maio-cosi-la-retorica-del-popolo-viene-usata-dalla-politica-1.328196>

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ Pregliasco, Lorenzo. "Framing E Strategia Comunicativa Di Matteo Salvini." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 25-43. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

²⁷⁶ Literally: "As many enemies, as much honour".

²⁷⁷ Munafò, Mauro. "La Lista Completa Delle Persone Bullizzate Sui Social Da Matteo Salvini." *Il Paese Che Non Ama*. January 30, 2019. <http://munafò.blogautore.espresso.repubblica.it/2019/01/30/lista-persone-bullizzate-matteo-salvini/>

²⁷⁸ Elsa Fornero has been the Italian Minister of Labour and Social Policy in the Monti Government (2011-2013). She is mainly remembered for the so-called *Legge Fornero* that introduced the contributory pension system, i.e. pension is computed based on the payments made by the

Claude Juncker and Emmanuel Macron. Furthermore, dealing with the show business, it appeared Oliviero Toscani, Fabio Fazio, Asia Argento and others.



Figure 8 - “He/She will not be there” Campaign

Despite attesting the compulsive search for opponents that characterize Salvini's narrative, the choice to resort to one's enemies as promoters of a community's event illustrates, first and foremost, the importance of the "external enemy" in strengthening the base around its leader. This confirms the previously mentioned assumption according to which, in a polarized fight between "us" and "them", the latter serves to bring us closer. Furthermore, what it is to utmost importance to note is the peculiar passive-aggressive tone of the Minister; he pronounces terrible things, but he always concludes with idioms like "I say it with a smile" or "with a hug". Similarly, he blames others but, then wishes him "long human and professional life" in a minatory tone²⁷⁹.

3.3 CROSSMEDIALITY: A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Up to this point, we have seen many examples of the efficient communicative strategy of Matteo Salvini in rising his engagement rate or his overall support. Although many of the instances provided deal with the online dimension of his communication, it would be mistaken to reduce his communication effort to his participation on the Web. Contrarily, the additional and distinctive value of Matteo Salvini's strategy relies on crossmediality according to which "each dimension drives the others", Luca Morisi says²⁸⁰. Within this

worker rather than according to the last salaries received. At the same time, the Fornero reform raised the retirement age for men and women and it provided for an increase in social security contributions for a number of employment categories, including craftsmen, traders, agricultural workers and the self-employed.

²⁷⁹ Raimo, Christian. "Come Smontare La Retorica Di Matteo Salvini " Internazionale. July 06, 2018. <https://www.internazionale.it/bloc-notes/christian-raimo/2018/07/03/salvini-pontida>

²⁸⁰ Luca, Nino. "Luca Morisi, Lo Spin Doctor Di Salvini: «Io Filosofo-informatico, Ho Conosciuto Matteo Su Facebook»." Corriere Della Sera. April 22, 2019. <https://www.corriere.it/video-articoli/2018/12/08/luca-morisi-spin-doctor-salvini-io-filosofo-informatico-ho-conosciuto-matteo-facebook/bf6156e6-fb2a-11e8-9a80-9105c7a1d976.shtml>

context, the multimedia approach has to be conceived as the mutual reinforcement of contents spread on a specific platform, and consistency of the pillars as mentioned above among different channels of distribution. This appears to be notably consistent with the modern phenomena concerning hybrid consumption patterns and ubiquitous Internet access²⁸¹. That is to say that users are increasingly doing more than an activity simultaneously and at any place. For instance, while online they might watch TV and vice-versa or they might check social media while attending mass meetings. Under these circumstances, notwithstanding the strategic importance of the Internet, the analysis must involve the role of television and the face-to-face communication that continues to play an essential role in reducing the distance between representative and represented. At the light of the former, we have chosen to investigate the communication appeal of Matteo Salvini throughout these two additional peculiar dimensions.

3.3.1 TELEVISION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE ATTENDANCE TO “*PORTA A PORTA*”

At the light of the aforementioned Matteo Salvini’s iper-presenteeism in the political scenario, it comes with no big surprise that the League and its leader were significantly present all over the news.

According to the data released by the AGCOM²⁸² concerning the period from the 13th to the 19th of May 2019, the leader and his party occupy a large share of the public debate on television, either on national and private news’ broadcasters. Data discern between news time and speaking time where the former refers to the amount of time devoted to facts concerning the specific political subject while the latter indicates the span of time in which the political subject speaks. In both circumstances, the League of Salvini Premier succeeds in asserting itself as one of the most discussed political force occupying the 38,9% of the total news time and the 13,3% of speaking time on SkyTg 24. Consistent findings can also be observed concerning the public RAI broadcaster and, the overall trend of having news time steadily higher than speaking one is generally confirmed among broadcasters. In other words, despite the number of direct interventions of the leader, television pays considerable attention toward facts concerning Matteo Salvini and, this suggests that he succeeded in imposing himself also over the broadcaster environment (Control over Agenda-Setting). Furthermore, the presence of Matteo Salvini on Television is illustrative of the integration between the public and the private sphere, and the purpose to promote the leader as a common man. Indeed, he frequently participates to entertainment programs as “*C’è posta per te*” or “*Domenica Live*” whose audience is traditionally poorly interested in politics, to strengthen the non-institutional tone of his narrative and to make it attractive and feasible also for these subjects. Moreover, the inherently relaxed setting of these kinds of shows allows him to unveil his human and sometimes ironic temperament strengthening the doctrine of the common man. Similarly, attending political talks shows, he never misses the chance to make references to his personal life or his intimate set of beliefs. Illustrative of this had been the episode of *Porta a Porta* on 27 May 2019, immediately after the

²⁸¹ Dutton, William H., Grant Blank, and Darja Groselj. *Cultures of the Internet: The Internet in Britain*. Report. Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford. 2013. 3-61. <http://oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/OxIS-2013.pdf>

²⁸² The AGCOM is the Italian Communications Guarantee Authority that performs regulatory and supervisory functions in the telecommunications, audio-visual, publishing and, more recently, postal sectors.

success of the League at the European Election²⁸³. Besides, this particular debate is also remarkably representative of the all-embracing persistence of the Minister's communication pillars and, for this reason, we have chosen to investigate it to provide readers with an accurate understanding. In this occasion, Matteo Salvini switched between legislative proposals and references to his son's recent school achievements as well as football's scores, telling the story of a diligent politician who is also, and above all, a vigilant father. Here, the primary purpose lays with allowing voters to relate to the Minister since, as long as this will be the case, they will accept his leadership on the ground of the cognitive pre-condition that he will understand them.

Furthermore, what is paramount concerns the many recurring allusions to religion and religious values. Within this context, Salvini shows the Rosario and, he invokes the cross that was once owned by his grandmother, whose name ironically happens to be Maria, to prevent bad fortune to hit him. The aforementioned behaviour attempts to strengthen the focus on traditional values as salient determinants of decision-making. To promote the supremacy of tradition over complex evaluation of the reality favours the rhetoric of common sense, pushing the cognitive fallacy according to which beliefs 'cohesion equals rationality. Renounce to an ideological fury in favour of common sense is also visible having particular regard to Matteo Salvini's calm and mild tone during the debate aimed to convey an idea of plausibility and standardisation of his political position²⁸⁴. However, normalization in Salvini's narrative does not preclude polarization. On the other hand, in the case under consideration, Salvini has been notably careful in differentiating between his "competitors", e.g. the left and Nicola Zingaretti, and his allies, thus, the five stars movement. Although it might be partly due to the government's unbalanced nature at the time, it strictly reinforces the overall prominence of the polarizing game in Matteo Salvini's narrative.

Thus far, we have analysed the television's aspect in crossmediality with regards to communicative pillars' consistency among channels but, as previously noticed, it also refers to the reinforcement of contents. In that regard, social networks serve as a megaphone of Salvini's television's appearances by posting the statements of particular relevance, a short video of the speech or a Facebook live of the whole debate. However, the posts that serve this amplifying function always presume a direct appeal to the followers to encourage them interacting with contents, as set out by the pillar concerning Salvini's community. For instance, in promoting his participation to Porta a Porta, Matteo Salvini interrogated his followers about whether or not they had appreciated it. A question that has become rhetorical reading the successive part of the post, in which the Minister says, "I'm sure you'll like it". Indeed, he is implicitly suggesting the answer, predisposing the audience to experience a positive reaction.

To conclude, through the analysis of a particular case concerning television's appearance, we have observed consistency among Salvini's attitude on TV and his underlying pillars of communication. Furthermore, crossmediality has been confirmed also in terms of reinforcement of contents among platforms.

²⁸³ The video can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/matteo-salvini-a-porta-a-porta-rai-1-27052019/1288324244650812/>

²⁸⁴ Pregliasco, Lorenzo. "Framing E Strategia Comunicativa Di Matteo Salvini." In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 25-43. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

3.3.2 THE MASS MEETINGS

The territorial campaign of Matteo Salvini is a never-ending feature of his strategical communicative appeal, and it is undoubtedly among the most critical determinants of his success. Indeed, according to the survey led by Davide Policastro, the physical presence of the leader has been crucial for 25,5% of his supporter in shaping their opinion about Matteo Salvini. Concurrently, absenteeism was also observed as decisive in opponents' reasons to dislike the leader due to the confidence that a long-lasting rally will be likely to compromise his actual governmental participation²⁸⁵. All things considered, concerns of this kind are not entirely spurious, and data seem to provide them with significant empirical pieces of evidence. Within this context, data collected by *Openpolis* in 2019, underline that, from the beginning of his mandate, Matteo Salvini only took part to the 1,38% of Senate meetings, a percentage which is significantly below the Senate's participative average that stood around the 84,6%²⁸⁶.

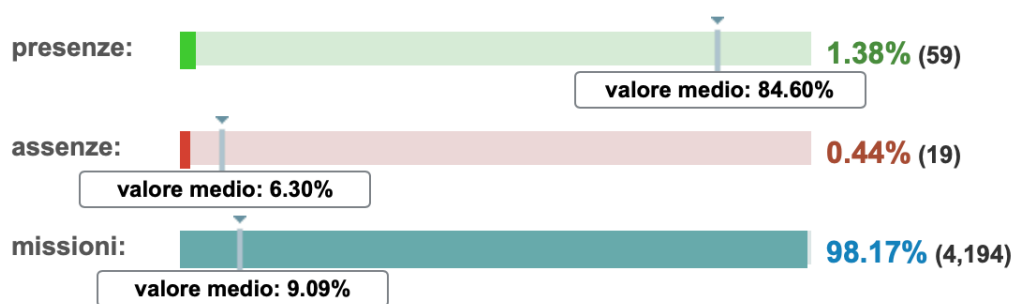


Figure 9 - Dataset concerning Matteo Salvini's presence in 4272 electronic votes at the Senate
Source: <https://parlamento18.openpolis.it/parlamentare/matteo-salvini/63>

Although the 98,17% of absences have been justified by institutional commitments (*missioni*), further investigation has shown these circumstances to be primarily consistent with rallies and other hybrid initiatives only partly related to formal constraints. Indeed, among the missions on behalf of the State, we either found his participation at the Venice Film Festival or at the international arms' fair in Qatar²⁸⁷. Furthermore, on 27 February 2019, while the Senate was voting for *Quota 100*, the Minister was in Cagliari celebrating the victory of the League's candidate at the regional election and, on 7 February 2019, when another vote was taking place, he was attending a rally in Abruzzo²⁸⁸. Legally legitimate absenteeism that suits very well the idea of Luca Morisi of having a "Minister that will not stay in the Palace but on the street", among the people²⁸⁹. Within this context, a question to be tackled concerns the reasons behind this perceived superiority of territorial

²⁸⁵ Policastro, Davide "La Lega postelettorale: partito nazionale o partito della nazione?" In *Fenomeno Salvini: Chi è, Come Comunica, Perché Lo Votano*, 117-145. Roma: Castelvecchi, 2019.

²⁸⁶ Data are available at the following link: <https://parlamento18.openpolis.it/parlamentare/matteo-salvini/63>. Openpolis regularly updates data so it might be possible that at the time of future consultations, they will be different from those reported in our work. By way of accuracy, data presented here are the one following the vote in the Senate of the 12th June 2019.

²⁸⁷ Gabanelli, Milena, and Gian Antonio Stella. "Matteo Salvini è Ovunque (ma Poco Al Viminale)." *Corriere Della Sera*. March 13, 2019. <https://www.corriere.it/dataroom-milena-gabanelli/salvini-viminale-ministro-interni-campagna-elettorale-parlamento-presenza/3b72100a-44ea-11e9-b3b0-2162e8762643-va.shtml>

²⁸⁸ Otto E Mezzo. "Le Assenze Ingiustificate Di Salvini E Di Maio per Seguire Le Campagne Elettorali." *Openpolis*. March 21, 2019. <https://www.openpolis.it/rassegnastampa/le-assenze-ingiustificate-di-salvini-e-di-maio-per-seguire-le-campagne-elettorali/>

²⁸⁹ <https://twitter.com/lumorisi/status/1002339405879758848>

commitments over official ministerial duties. In Salvini's political narrative, the rhetoric of the rallies guarantees an irrational psychological effect of group cohesion that promotes supporters' sense of belonging and, it amplifies leadership's legitimacy. Under these circumstances, we can find similarities between Salvini's attitude at mass meetings and Gustave LeBon's study of the popular mind regarding affirmation, i.e. an expedient to stir up crowd²⁹⁰. LeBon refers to affirmation as a concise, pure and simple artifice free of all reasoning that, through repetition succeeds in driving contagion²⁹¹. Similarly, Matteo Salvini relates to rallies' participants directly by resorting to a fast language, and arguments *for exempla*, moulding the collective feelings of excitement or anger that ultimately propagate among the audience²⁹². However, contagion is not purely a top-down process, but the leader and his followers build each other's' modes of feeling: Matteo Salvini incites the crowd that in turn incites him²⁹³. The aforementioned psychological relationship is called "emotional contagion" and it lays on the ground of our idea of mass meetings as serving a dual function: they persuade the audience and they reinforce leader's confidence, ultimately strengthening the power dynamic of the *Capitano*. In this regard, when on stage, he cherishes immediately the audience by either applauding it or bowing before it to show his gratitude and, to stress his existence among the people rather than above them. For this purpose, he takes selfies with the supporters and he plays with children while paying attention to parents' stories and older' worries, tearing down the barriers between the politician and the man. Illustrative has been the manifestation in Milan on 18 May 2019 in which the Minister came off the stage to greet his supporters, a moment which has been simultaneously shared on his Facebook page²⁹⁴. Along with the role of the community and the informal tone, the aforementioned event can also serve to show consistency among the other pillars. In that regard, we find recurring references to the common sense like "The Europe of common sense" or "Here, today, there are no fascists or extremists but just common sense". Likewise, the polarizing narrative appeared to be dominant, opposing Eurocrats to Salvini's narrative whose purpose lays with the re-establishment of the original European spirit. Furthermore, the event has been strictly central in the online communication of Matteo Salvini both in the days before the manifestation and in those following it, to create appeal and to reinforce contents across platforms.

To sum up, territorial dimension is vital to Matteo Salvini's communicative strategies as he recognizes the importance for people to actually experience an allegedly direct relationship with the leader who in turn, gain further self-confidence in reaction to the emotive flow of his audience. Furthermore, also within this context, we have found significant evidence of harmony of the pillars and multimedia reinforcement of contents.

²⁹⁰ LeBon, Gustave. "THE LEADERS OF CROWDS AND THEIR MEANS OF PERSUASION." In *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Bottom of the Hill Publishing, 2015.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Di Caro, Roberto. "Rivoluzione Nella Lega: Cambiano Nome E Simbolo." *L'Espresso*. July 24, 2017.

<http://espresso.repubblica.it/attualita/2017/07/24/news/rivoluzione-nella-lega-cambiano-nome-e-simbolo-e-scompare-il-nord-1.306615>

²⁹³ Koerth-Baker, Maggie. "Donald Trump Incites His Crowds - And His Crowds Incite Him." *FiveThirtyEight*. March 15, 2016.

<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/donald-trump-incites-his-crowds-and-his-crowds-incite-him/>

²⁹⁴ Video: <https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/2346225872299439/>

CONCLUSION

In political communication, to draw conclusions does not involve a definitive and comprehensive understanding of the phenomena taking place in production and procession of information. Contrarily, it merely refers to pointing out of a set of potential explanations and determinants behind a specific trend. In the present analysis, we have chosen to focus on the communicative appeal of the Italian Home Secretary, Matteo Salvini to investigate the peculiarities of his success in the Contemporary Media Environment.

In politics, communication attempts to persuade; it is the instrument a representative has in order to manipulate an audience and to convince voters that he deserves trust because he has understood people's needs and care about them. However, what it is of utmost importance to stress is that persuasion lays on emotional appeal that relies on affective rather than rational mechanisms to exploit individuals' cognitive shortcuts. Within this context, emotions, as well as cognitive fallacies, became valuable assets to politicians, especially within the contemporary Media system characterised by Disintermediation that allows representatives to engage in a direct relationship with their followers. In this regard, special attention is paid to Salvini's exploitation of anger because of its role in promoting support for punitive policies, e.g. self-defence, and due to its connection to pro-opposition discourses and blame-seeking. Within this context, Salvini carefully distances himself from incumbents to authenticate his relationship with ordinary people and his inherent representative nature. Furthermore, drawing on Carl Schmitt's dichotomy friend-enemy²⁹⁵, we have found enemy-seeking to be a crucial element in Salvini's narrative to the extent that his whole storytelling exists only as long as he fights something. In this regard, he emphasises the alleged distinction between "us" and "them", where "them" serve to bring "us" closer in a cycle of confirmation bias (group identification)²⁹⁶. His main targets lay with inland foreigners, namely migrants and minorities isolated from nationals and the EU's austerity; but, the list of his enemies is more extensive as we have seen analysing his campaign "He/She will not be there". Under these circumstances, Matteo Salvini resorts to informal language and simplification of issues and solutions to address his messages clearly and directly, promoting a discourse rich in ideology but weak in details. As a result of Framing Bias, people will settle for such de-contextualised picture of reality, as long as it is consistent with their views and, the leader is trusted and legitimated by perceived homogeneity²⁹⁷. Therefore, he made his narrative accessible to everyone strengthening the imaginary of himself as a common man, an element which will be ultimately fostered by his rhetoric of common sense and the contamination between his public office and his private life. Indeed, Matteo Salvini depicts himself as a politician who is first and foremost, an honest voter committed to traditional Italian values, a vigilant father, a football fan and an Italian food lover who always takes pictures of what he eats. Furthermore, he constantly interrogates his voters to collect their opinions, pledging future stability and security to reinforce the "plebiscitary tie" with the people in reaction to

²⁹⁵ Norris, Andrew. "Carl Schmitt on Friends, Enemies and the Political." In *the Fate Of Modernity*, 68-88. 2nd ed. Vol. 30. New York: Telos Press Periodicals, 1998.

²⁹⁶ "Searching for a Cause: The Case Against Defining the Common Enemy." Harvard Political Review. May 2, 2016.

<https://harvardpolitics.com/covers/covers-summer-2016/searching-for-a-cause-the-case-against-defining-the-common-enem/>

²⁹⁷ Busby, Ethan C., D. J. Flinn, and James N. Druckman. "Studying Framing Effects on Political Preferences: Existing Research and Lingering Questions." In *Doing News Framing Analysis II: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, 27-50. New York: Routledge, 2018.

previous elite's mismanagement of power²⁹⁸. In other words, the new leader is no longer a representative chosen because of his greater skills, but he is a spokesman of the people, the actual *vox populi*²⁹⁹. Salvini's efforts in establishing this unmediated relationship alongside the aforementioned doctrine of the common man, are visible in his massive physical presence on TV and in particular on the territory, whereby he disrupts Kantorowicz's distinction between the "two bodies of the king". In the age of selfie, and of forced yet illusory intimacy, there is no longer any distinction between the physical and political bodies of the Head to reinforce the allegedly direct relationship with the leader who in turn, gain further self-confidence in reaction to emotive contagion³⁰⁰. Identification as a leader, alongside a programme of ideological and visual nationalization, have been vital in League's re-branding by favouring cognitive dissociation between the traditional League's narrative and his leader's current ideology. Remarkably, Matteo Salvini's leadership has been found to resemble Weber's Charismatic responsible demagogue as both resort to deceit in exploiting audience unconscious predispositions while actively nourishing followers' views through discourses and promises³⁰¹. In this regard, empathy among the League's electorate toward the leader is incredibly strong as he is not only in charge of representing them but, he incarnates these people being their *Capitano*, a "saviour" to who rely on. It is not about representativeness anymore: individuals are no longer looking for a general program that might reflect their beliefs but for a person who sympathises and understands them along with their concerns. Hence, Salvini's speeches or posts are nothing more than a catalogue of popular beliefs and clichés that, once integrated into the particular contemporary scenario and at the light of the fideistic mood around the figure of the Minister, succeed in mobilise masses. However, as in Weber's "Charismatic Democracy", the leader is a "responsible" one; thus, he keeps power as long as he keeps his word³⁰². Under these circumstances, there's an interesting question to be tackled: how long will this idyllic plebiscite bond last? Googling "Promises of Salvini", more than 300,000 results appear and, probably he will not be able to keep them all. However, since his narrative does not focus on ideological stance but on the Man, the primary threat for his power concerns leadership. If someone would succeed in galvanizing masses as he does but, concerning genuinely new topics rather than expressing himself on those controlled by the Minister, then Salvini would have a problem. Under these circumstances, slogan as the left-wing one "*Prima le persone*" - "People first"- appears as subordinated ones, strengthening the original slogan "*Prima gli Italiani*" and implicitly nourishing League's control on the political agenda. At the light of the present findings, it is legitimate to conclude that people prefer to talk about national identity, belonging and cultural heritage and, above all they want to protect their traditional values. The biggest mistake of the Left was perhaps not being able to listen to these needs, refusing to speak to the emotive dimension of the country as well as any discourse on sovereignty, gradually assuming the role of

²⁹⁸ Viviani, Lorenzo. "A Political Sociology of Populism and Leadership." *SOCIETÀ MUTAMENTO POLITICA* 8, no. 15 (2017): 270-303. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/SMP-20860> p. 288

²⁹⁹ Kriesi, Hanspeter. "The Populist Challenge." *West European Politics* 37, no. 2 (2014): 361-78. doi:10.1080/01402382.2014.887879.

³⁰⁰ Koerth-Baker, Maggie. "Donald Trump Incites His Crowds - And His Crowds Incite Him." *FiveThirtyEight*. March 15, 2016. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/donald-trump-incites-his-crowds-and-his-crowds-incite-him/>

³⁰¹ Márquez, Xavier. "Max Weber's Charismatic Democracy." In *Democratic Moments: Reading Democratic Texts*, 145-52. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

oppressors rather than leaders. The Left cloaks its inability to speak the same overall language of their voters behind fights on the most appropriate vocabulary of the “politically correct”. Contrarily, opponents must forsake the belief that a phenomenon well embedded in the *Zeitsteig* as the one of Salvini Premier, can be fought by merely reducing it to racism, xenophobia or extremism that, contrarily, favours a backfire effect. Although, it might be perhaps true that the politically correct has failed, first of, what seems to have proved to be inefficient has been policy of opposition. Because, as in George Orwell’s words: “All issues are political issues, and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasion, folly, hatred and schizophrenia”³⁰³.

³⁰³ Orwell, George, and George Packer. *All Art Is Propaganda: Critical Essays*. Orlando: Harcourt, 2009.

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ABSTRACT

Il presente elaborato si propone di esaminare la strategia comunicativa di Matteo Salvini, la quale sarà analizzata contestualmente ai cambiamenti della comunicazione politica e alla profonda trasformazione dei mezzi a disposizione con l'avvento dei Social Media nella società contemporanea. La scelta è stata dettata dal desiderio di analizzare le peculiarità del successo elettorale del Ministro piuttosto che fornire un'indagine completa delle dinamiche d'elaborazione delle informazioni nell'elettorato. Confrontando i nuovi modelli di marketing e la comunicazione a scopi politici, abbiamo riscontrato cospicue similitudini per cui, in entrambe le circostanze, lo scopo generale non è quello di piacere ma di persuadere. In queste circostanze, la persuasione è volta a strumentalizzare i meccanismi emotivi per influenzare le scelte del singolo, privilegiando quei modelli sistematici di deviazione dalla razionalità nel giudizio. Ovvero, la comunicazione svolge la funzione di creare una comunità di utenti interessati al leader politico e alle sue idee, sfruttando i loro desideri e le loro convinzioni.

L'elaborato è stato organizzato in tre sezioni complementari; la prima (Cap. 1) è volta a fornire un'analisi del contesto teorico e delle sue peculiarità inerenti ai cambiamenti degli strumenti e dei fenomeni comunicativi caratterizzanti. In primo luogo, il presente sistema mediatico è frutto di una "mediamorfosi", cioè di una serie di trasformazioni ed adattamenti dovuti all'interazione tra bisogni ed innovazioni sociali e tecnologiche nell'era digitale. Inoltre, essendo un sistema ibrido è caratterizzato dall'influenza reciproca tra i media tradizionali e le dinamiche online, sia in termini di tecnologie che di modelli d'utilizzo. Nella fattispecie, i nuovi Media si basano sui Media tradizionali i quali hanno dato prova di resilienza adattandosi ed integrando nuove funzionalità (Ibridità Strutturale). La genesi dei nuovi Media è, quindi, caratterizzata da un fenomeno di imitazione, tecnico e contenutistico per cui il Web appare come una "televisione interattiva" che ripropone la tradizione orale, radiofonica e televisiva combinando intrattenimento ed informazione in un'ottica governata dallo *storytelling* e dal sensazionalismo. L'imitazione è attribuita a tre diverse ragioni: (1) la volontà di apportare miglioramenti; (2) nascondere le proprie carenze e (3) la necessità di evitare sostanziali discontinuità che ne limitino il consenso. Se la genesi dei Media digitali si fonda sull'imitazione, l'evoluzione di quelli tradizionali è marcata da un "risanamento". Questi, per rispondere adeguatamente alla crescente varietà di contenuti, all'immediatezza e all'interattività del WWW, si sono visti costretti ad espandere le loro performance, a riposizionarsi nel mercato ed a rivedere il loro stesso modello di utilizzo. A riprova di ciò vi è l'inedito connubio tra autorità editoriale e partecipazione popolare con l'introduzione della possibilità di commentare o la presenza di testate giornalistiche, radio e canali televisivi sui Social Network. Inoltre, il contesto elettorale italiano del 2018 ha evidenziato un altro elemento per cui, Social Networks diversi e con logiche di utilizzo asimmetriche integrano caratteristiche proprie di altre realtà online (Ibridità integrativa). Si tratta di una transizione orizzontale tra canali di distribuzione simili ma diversi in orientamento e scopo, come nel caso di Facebook e Twitter. Quindi, il sistema ibrido è definito dalla convergenza temporale ed orizzontale. Tali istanze speculative sono confermate dai dati raccolti dall'agenzia Censis che mostrano una tendenza positiva relativa all'uso dei media digitali e tradizionali, in cui Facebook e la televisione si confermano leader

nell'informazione. Il pubblico italiano si avvale sempre più spesso delle tecnologie a disposizione, pur continuando ad affidarsi in modo significativo ai media tradizionali. Tra i fenomeni qualificanti di questo sistema c'è la disintermediazione, cioè la destituzione degli intermediari per cui, gli utenti - potenziali elettori o politici - divengono "editori di sé stessi" e forniscono risposte immediate a questioni e dibattiti rilevanti scegliendo il momento e le modalità migliori. Pur non escludendo il dibattito politico, infatti, la disintermediazione elimina il ruolo di portavoce di uffici stampa e giornalisti, esonerando il candidato dal dover rispondere a domande scomode o confutazioni. Ciò è stato fondamentale per il successo di Barack Obama e Donald J. Trump, mentre si è rivelato sfavorevole per il PD che non ha saputo sfruttare la possibilità di un rapporto diretto, che invece era visto di buon grado dal 43% degli Italiani. Date le circostanze, non sorprende che il discorso promosso dalla disintermediazione risponda ai criteri dell'individualismo, il cui fulcro risiede nel leader-persona piuttosto che nel partito. La personalizzazione ha poi incoraggiato la cosiddetta "epidemia dei narcisismi", ovvero la tendenza a promuovere noi stessi e le nostre idee in un contesto ostile al dibattito con l'altro. Il narciso è disinteressato agli altri pur essendo alla continua ricerca della loro approvazione tramite like e commenti. Un disinteresse che risulta quindi circoscritto a chi è diverso, mentre l'interazione è tra simili. Quanto detto, insieme all'incidenza delle *filter bubbles*, algoritmi che inavvertitamente privilegiano l'aggregazione promuovendo quei contenuti che "ti potrebbero piacere", hanno portato al manifestarsi delle *Echo-Chambers*, poli di opinione omogenei. All'interno di queste bolle, gli utenti interagiscono principalmente con contenuti coerenti alla loro prospettiva, rafforzando i loro pregiudizi iniziali (*confirmation bias*) fino a credere di avere ragione *a priori*. Inevitabilmente, questo comporta una polarizzazione del discorso, esente da dubbi e sfumature, che assume le sembianze di una gara a chi urla di più, specialmente tra gruppi simili, ex. le minoranze. Tuttavia, nonostante promuovano divergenza nella narrazione, queste camere d'eco favoriscono una convergenza lessicale sia tra i membri di una determinata camera sia nella comunicazione tra esponenti appartenenti a diversi poli.

La seconda parte del lavoro (Cap. 2) è orientata verso un'indagine del concetto di comunicazione politica e delle logiche emotive che costituiscono il consenso e la fiducia nei confronti di un leader. Come noto, la comunicazione politica si inserisce nel contesto narrativo della retorica greca, come capacità di trovare gli strumenti più adatti a persuadere il pubblico. Non essendo l'essere umano scevro da vincoli cognitivi nel ragionamento, la persuasione fa leva sulla dimensione emotiva ed affettiva dell'individuo per influenzarne le scelte in maniera inconscia. Le emozioni, reazioni cognitive ad eventi o questioni rilevanti per l'individuo, sono quindi determinanti nel processo decisionale lasciando, però, aperto il dibattito su come queste influenzino le nostre scelte. In questo elaborato, abbiamo fatto riferimento all'*appraisal theory* per cui le emozioni sono il risultato di valutazioni soggettive del contesto di riferimento: ovvero una diversa interpretazione delle circostanze si traduce in una diversa risposta emotiva. Esistono sei criteri di valutazione: certezza, piacere, livello di attenzione, controllo, impegno richiesto e ricerca delle responsabilità. I politici dovranno quindi fornire agli elettori un quadro specifico e condiviso di interpretazione per suscitare l'emozione desiderata ed influenzare il loro posizionamento politico. Non è inusuale il ricorso a metafore per

indirizzare la percezione della realtà, proponendo concetti ed immagini familiari. Esemplificativa è la continuità con cui Matteo Salvini presenta metaforicamente l'immigrazione come un'invasione, richiamando a una situazione di pericolo ed alimentando l'emergere della rabbia. La rabbia, a sua volta, promuoverà tre diverse intenzioni: (1) accresce il supporto a politiche aggressive o intransigenti, incoraggiando gli elettori a sottovalutarne i rischi, ex. legittima difesa; (2) promuove i discorsi favorevoli all'opposizione; (3) istiga alla ricerca di capri espiatori.

Che l'odio verso l'altro fosse l'unica emozione a non vacillare l'aveva già detto Hitler ma sarà Carl Schmitt a riconoscerlo come elemento unificante dell'identità personale. Il nemico comune, costruito con informazioni frammentarie e presunte, ha la funzione di organizzare la realtà sulla base della dicotomia noi *versus* loro, dove "loro" favorisce l'identificazione del "noi" come gruppo omogeneo. Matteo Salvini ha fatto leva sul fatto che siamo, inevitabilmente, più inclini a reagire a stimoli negativi (*negativity bias*) proponendo un'interpretazione della realtà coerente con il gioco a somma zero, in cui "loro" traggono guadagno a nostre spese. Illustrativo di ciò è stato il video "Anziani italiani rovistano nella spazzatura per sopravvivere" in parallelo all'uso del termine "clandestini", volto a suscitare un senso di alienazione o "illegali" per sottolinearne la presunta cattiva fede e giustificarne l'identificazione con elementi minatori.

Ci sono due elementi tipici dell'attuale sistema di comunicazione politica: la semplificazione e la leadership. Il primo si riferisce sia a un appiattimento del linguaggio, incentrato quasi esclusivamente sui criteri di chiarezza, immediatezza e ripetizione, sia a una semplificazione eccessiva dei problemi e delle soluzioni. Alla luce del fatto che un'alternativa elaborata più velocemente sarà considerata di maggiore rilievo (*Fluency Heuristic*), il leader sarà incline ad abbandonare il registro formale per rendere il messaggio accessibile a tutti ed incentrarlo subito sul tema principale. Per contro, la dimensione contenutistica del fenomeno si avvale della cosiddetta *Cherry-picking fallacy*, la selezione esclusiva di dati o affermazioni favorevoli alla propria narrativa politica. Semplificare un contenuto equivale, quindi, a proporre una rappresentazione parziale a scopi manipolativi, con l'obiettivo di servirsi del *Framing Bias*, secondo il quale il modo in cui un esponente politico presenta il suo punto di vista influenza il pensiero del singolo a favore della rilevanza di alcuni temi.

L'attuale nozione di leadership si basa su quella del demagogo responsabile di Weber, un leader carismatico che sfrutta le predisposizioni inconsce del pubblico per perseguire una visione nazionale. Sia il demagogo che il leader moderno propongono un'interpretazione strumentale della realtà basata su meccanismi esemplificativi, un linguaggio informale e la continua ricerca di un colpevole. Inoltre, la loro ascesa politica è solitamente contestuale a periodi di transizione, caratterizzati da incertezza ed insicurezza, alle quali il leader contrappone promesse di stabilità e sicurezza. Tuttavia, egli è "responsabile" e manterrà il consenso solamente fin quando manterrà le sue promesse (Ciclo del Leader).

La costruzione cognitiva della Leadership risulta da due meccanismi: la dottrina dell'uomo comune e il rapporto diretto. Il primo è volto a collocare il leader tra la gente piuttosto che al di sopra di essa: egli non è più un rappresentante scelto per le sue qualifiche ma un portavoce del popolo (*vox populi*). Utilizza un linguaggio colloquiale, si dice detentore di valore morale ed estraneo all'élite politica e, per rafforzare la sua

appartenenza al popolo, non perde occasione di parlare di lavoro e famiglia o di condividere la sua vita privata. Il secondo, invece, risponde alla pervasiva personalizzazione del discorso politico in virtù del quale, non vi è più una ricerca del manifesto coerente ai propri valori ed alle proprie idee ma, si desidera qualcuno che ci comprenda insieme alle nostre insicurezze. Gli elettori diventano dei fan a cui non è più richiesto di partecipare con idee o contributi ideologici ma celebrando il leader, come nel caso del “Vinci Salvini”.

L’ultima parte del lavoro (Cap. 3) ha una natura più pratica in quanto presenta una ricostruzione del Progetto di comunicazione politica del Ministro dell’Interno e Vicepremier italiano Matteo Salvini.

La Lega che ha raggiunto il 34% alle elezioni europee 2019 è un partito completamente diverso da quello del suo fondatore, Umberto Bossi, che nel 2008 vantava solamente 8,3% dei voti. Con la leadership di Matteo Salvini il partito ha abbandonato il suo carattere federalista di protettore del Nord, impegnandosi in un delicato processo di nazionalizzazione. Un così radicale *re-branding* è stato certamente segnato dall’influenza del leader e dal suo pressoché esclusivo controllo sul partito, che ha facilitato una dissociazione cognitiva tra la tradizionale narrazione leghista e l’attuale politica di Matteo Salvini. Tuttavia, non si devono sottovalutare i cambiamenti ideologici per cui la Lega, non più “Nord”, è meno attenta alle piccole e medie imprese del Settentrione e presta invece più attenzione alle politiche del lavoro, del welfare e al settore agricolo e turistico, vitali per il Sud. La relazione con il Sud è rafforzata, inoltre, dal movimento “Noi con Salvini”, estensione del partito nel Meridione. Peraltro, la narrativa salviniana si concentra sui temi della sicurezza e dell’immigrazione, quest’ultimo sempre più spesso in relazione all’austerità dell’EU, responsabile della perdita di sovranità e dell’impoverimento del patrimonio culturale italiano. Al nuovo posizionamento ideologico si uniscono il cambiamento cromatico, dal verde al blu, ed un nuovo logo.

A livello comunicativo, invece, abbiamo identificato sei diversi capisaldi dello *storytelling* di Matteo Salvini. Innanzitutto, la sua spiccata abilità nel controllo dell’agenda politica grazie alla sua visibilità, che gli permette di strumentalizzare a suo favore l’*Anchoring Bias* per cui, gli utenti si basano sulle prime informazioni acquisite nella valutazione delle ragionevoli possibilità. Per questo, i Media tradizionali e le altre forze politiche sono costretti ad esprimersi sui temi promossi dalla Lega ed in cui questa è intuitivamente più forte, come nel caso dell’immigrazione.

Il controllo sull’agenda è inoltre facilitato dalla creazione di distrazioni volte a distogliere l’attenzione da eventi sfavorevoli attraverso prese di posizioni radicali o introducendo temi di minore rilievo per l’elettorato. Esemplificativo è stato il caso delle dichiarazioni del Ministro Lorenzo Fontana o l’enorme attenzione mediatica riservata all’arresto di Cesare Battisti nei giorni in cui erano stati divulgati dati economici negativi. Il terzo elemento riguarda l’utilizzo di un tono informale caratterizzato da frasi brevi, un numero esiguo di argomenti per post (raramente più di uno), un tono aggressivo ed un uso magistrale del maiuscolo per aumentare l’immediatezza dei suoi contenuti. In questo contesto, fondamentale è anche la combinazione tra vita pubblica e privata per cui Salvini si mostra mentre fa colazione, gioca con i figli o scatta fotografie delle vacanze. Allontanandosi dalla tipica sobrietà istituzionale, oltre a promuoversi come uomo comune, riesce a manipolare il pubblico tramite post apparentemente innocui.

È impossibile prescindere dal ruolo della sua comunità che viene regolarmente interrogata con *call-to-action* per promuovere l'idea di un'opinione popolare parificata a quella del leader e per perfezionare il meccanismo di *sentiment-analysis*. Inoltre, il rapporto tra Salvini ed i suoi follower è peculiare in quanto di natura quasi fideistica e segnato da una forte empatia: il leader è un uomo onesto, un Capitano su cui fare affidamento. L'emergere di un rapporto di questo tipo non può essere dovuto esclusivamente ad una buona comunicazione ma piuttosto all'abilità di Salvini nello sfruttare il bisogno di protezione ed identificazione di chi teme la disuguaglianza, presente ed attesa. La dinamica è risaputa: ti creo un disagio dandoti la sensazione di poterlo risolvere.

Quinto elemento è la retorica del buon senso, ovvero il ricorso a valori tradizionali per legittimare e rivestire con un'aura di inevitabilità una narrazione politica altrimenti troppo incendiaria.

Infine, importante è il carattere polarizzante della comunicazione salviniana, sempre attiva nella ricerca di nemici per dividere l'opinione pubblica. “Molti nemici, molto onore” dice Matteo Salvini, la cui narrativa sembra sussistere finché vi sarà qualcosa da combattere.

Questi principi non sono, tuttavia, circoscritti alla dimensione online ma riguardano anche le sue apparizioni televisive e sul territorio, in virtù di una crossmedialità definita da Luca Morisi come “circolo virtuoso TRT”. In questo contesto, ogni dimensione rafforza l'altra. Quanto detto è confermato nell'analisi di Porta a Porta del 27 Maggio 2019. Inoltre, in seguito alla constatazione che molte delle assenze in Senato di Matteo Salvini sono dovute alla sua presenza a comizi leghisti, ci siamo interrogati sull'importanza del territorio per il Ministro. I raduni, garantendo un'esperienza diretta ed un rapporto ravvicinato con il leader, sono essenziali per la coesione del gruppo, la promozione di un senso di appartenenza e la legittimità del leader. Inoltre, il flusso emotivo della folla permette al leader di acquisire fiducia (*emotional contagion*). A questo punto, risulta legittimo chiedersi quanto questo “legame plebiscitario” tra Matteo Salvini ed i suoi elettori durerà. Nonostante l'impossibilità di fornire una risposta esatta, abbiamo ipotizzato che soltanto un leader altrettanto abile nel galvanizzare le masse e disposto ad affrontare tematiche nuove ed estranee alla narrazione leghista, possa essere motivo di preoccupazione per Salvini. Tuttavia, in uno scenario politico caratterizzato da un'opposizione incapace di parlare ai suoi elettori e riluttante nei confronti della dimensione emotiva del paese o di qualsiasi discorso sulla sovranità, non è facile dire quando questo possa avvenire.