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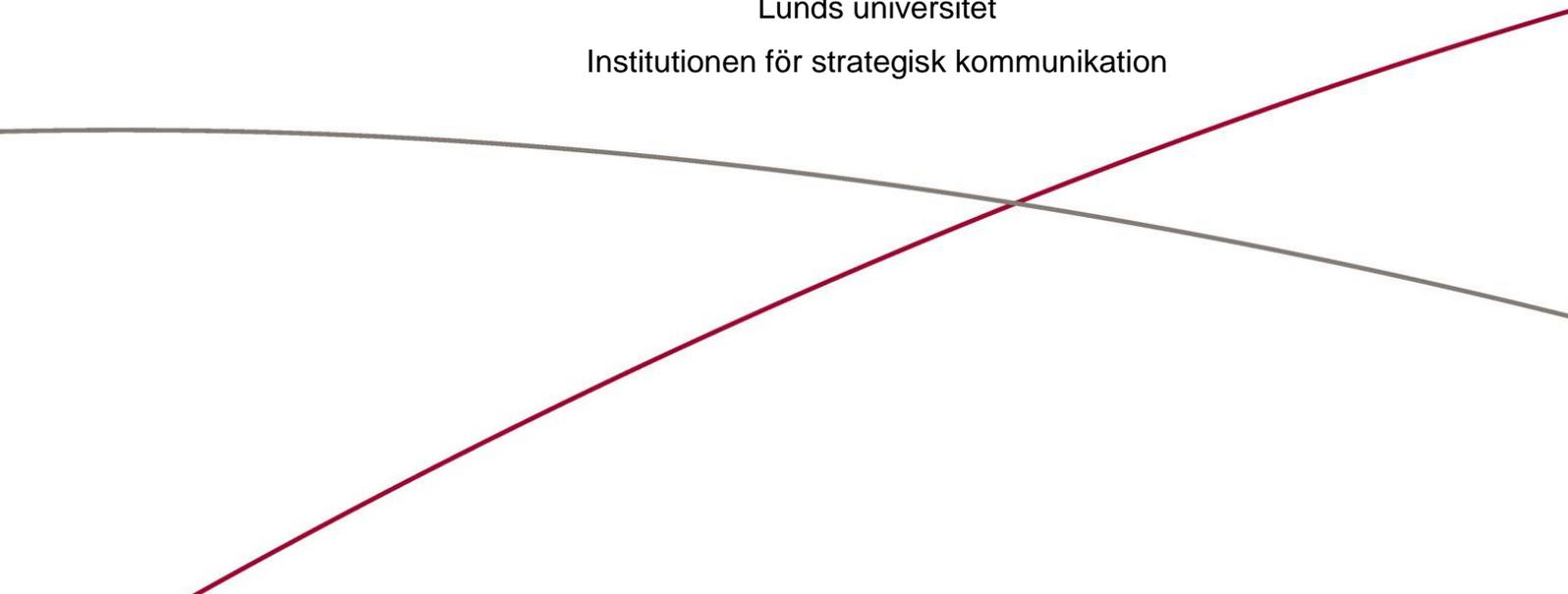
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Twitter is not for everyone

Political Public Relations of the Italian Prime Minister
Matteo Renzi

ALBA CHIARA DI BARI

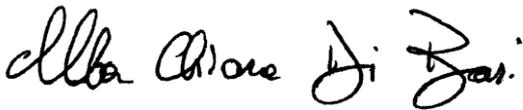
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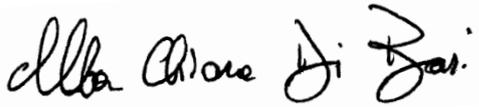
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Abstract

Twitter is not for everyone

Political Public Relations of the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi

Politicians and public relations practitioners need to consciously and strategically communicate on Twitter not only during elections, but also during incumbency. However; previous approaches to PR failed to offer candidates successful long-term strategies. In addition, political PR research underestimated the influence of the characteristics of Twitter on the tone and the rhetoric of political communication. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the PR strategy of the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi on Twitter to fill these gaps. Tweets posted on his profile during his first year in office have been analysed and their interpretations validated by interviews with public relations practitioners in charge of his digital communication. His public relations strategy resulted made up of branding, media agency, communicating delivery and interaction with citizens and backed up by deep knowledge of the platform and its audience. The success of Matteo Renzi on Twitter may be related to the extent the characteristics of the platform, such as humour and informal communication, are close to his core brand associations. Therefore, it may be inferred that the characteristics of the main social media channel in a political PR strategy need to match the brand, the identity and the person of the politician. The analysis here reported illustrated that Twitter may be better suitable tool for community-minded, informative and ironic leaders. However, it also opened up further questions about the impact of social media on the personalisation of politics and about the obstacles to effective interaction between politicians and citizens.

Keywords: Twitter, political public relations, Matteo Renzi, incumbency, Italy, political communication

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1 Definition of the Research Problem

In the last six or seven years, Twitter has become a “must-have” tool in the politicians’ communication toolkit. However; researchers are in disagreement about the most efficient way of using it (Frame & Brachotte, 2014). While some point out that the majority of politicians still rely on top-down broadcasting models when spreading their messages online (Goldbeck, Grimes & Rogers, 2010; Larsson & Moe, 2011; Bentivegna, 2014; Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014), others seem to identify more mature patterns of usage aimed at exploring the opportunities given by Twitter to shrink the distance between politicians and citizens (Grant, Moon & Grant, 2010; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Frame & Brachotte, 2014). Other authors tend to collocate politicians’ through a continuum ranging from self-promotion to partisan role and constituency service according to their approach (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Bentivegna, 2012). However, few of them addressed the changes introduced by this social media in the language and objectives of political communication, which appear to differ from previous mass media logic and formats.

Italy, in this regard, has been an interesting case, since in the last twenty years its political and media system were concentrated in the person of Silvio Berlusconi. The consequences of his political communication focused on marketing principles are still evident in the slowness with which Italian politicians nowadays try to adapt to new digital technologies, persisting in broadcast approaches and lagging behind their European colleagues (Reda & De Notaris, 2012). However, a new figure emerged from the Italian political panorama, considered at the same time the antithesis to and the evolution of Berlusconi (Barile, 2014a): Matteo Renzi, current non-elected Italian Prime Minister and Secretary of the Democratic Party, excels in his innovative use of Twitter, to a degree that he is the most followed Italian politician with 1.8 million followers (Dnsee, 2015). His communication strategy and his language, full of slogans and punch-lines, humorous and spontaneous, liked and disliked at the same time by both journalists and citizens, represent a valid case study for the

use of Twitter to draw interesting insights both for politicians and for public relations practitioners.

The purpose of this research is to explore with a case study about Matteo Renzi the use of Twitter as a political public relations tool during incumbency. Moving away from the tradition of permanent campaign, which sees both campaigning and governing strategies focused on gaining new voters as if they were seamless (Blumenthal, 1982), this analysis aims at enlarging the body of literature about political incumbency and at the same time compensating for the lack of rhetorical approaches to social media, both areas under-represented in public relations research (Ihlen, 2010; Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011; Johnson, 2012). The significance of this study in PR practice lies in the extent to which it will give in-depth insights both to politicians and public relations practitioners about a complete PR strategy on Twitter, relating the characteristics of the platform for the specific objectives of political communication. In this way, it is the hope of the author to stimulate the debate around social media and their adoption in politics, in relation to the strategic purposes to be fulfilled. Therefore, the research questions which this study will try to answer are:

RQ: What was the political PR strategy used by Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi on Twitter during his first year in office?

SQ1: What impression management strategy did he use?

SQ2: What political function did his tweets have?

SQ3: What rhetorical behaviours did he employ?

2 Literature Review

After 2008 American Elections, the role of social media in politics has been widely investigated by academics in different disciplines, such as journalism, marketing and public relations. In the last years, in particular, Twitter appears to be the platform where journalists and politicians tend to be more active compared to other social media (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014; Ekman & Widholm, 2015). This literature review will outline the media and political framework within which social media act nowadays, before reviewing previous research about politicians' use of Twitter. In this section the focus will be on the wider context of PR research on Twitter, while during the analysis and the discussion of the case study further details will be illustrated. Deficiencies in previous studies which led to the need for this research will also be provided at the end of this literature review, and will be followed by a chapter describing Italian political and media background to understand the context of this research.

The advent of new technological communication tools, such as the Internet and above all social network sites (SNS), subverted the traditional media system that dominated politics, traditionally made up of politicians, media and citizens. While slightly decreasing the importance of media actors in regard to the portion of the population with web access, SNS gave both politicians and citizens the opportunity to reach each other directly bypassing the previous "gatekeeper" (Sweetser, 2011; Tedesco, 2011; Gainous & Wagner, 2013; Frame & Brachotte, 2014). On the one side, the interactive virtual space of web 2.0 encouraged citizen collaboration and participation in politics and social movements (Sweetser, 2011). On the other hand, politicians learned to exploit SNS focus on self-presentation to their advantage using marketing concepts and branding theories (Needham, 2005; Castells, 2007; Jackson, 2006; Barile, 2014a). In addition, societal transformations due to the economic crisis and a general feeling of distrust towards political elites require politicians to constantly reinforce their legitimization with citizens, suggesting a strategic use of SNS based on their increasing importance in daily political discourses (Sweetser, 2011;

Gainous & Wagner, 2013) and on citizen appreciation of their use (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009).

2.1 Politics on Twitter

In the last years, there has been a major tendency among politicians and journalists in Europe to value Twitter more than other social media for political communication (Cision, 2012; Ekman & Widholm, 2015), boosting two main branches of research in political public relations. The first set of studies addressed effects of politicians' use of Twitter, both on voters, relating Twitter sentiment and election outcome (Tedesco, 2011), and on media actors. If the former used relationship management approaches emphasising the role of para-social relations (Ledingham, 2011; Stever & Lawson, 2013), the latter proceeded from journalist perspectives, such as agenda building and indexing (Lieber & Golan, 2011; Tedesco, 2011; Parmelee, 2014). In particular, some research pointed out that social media tools allow politicians to exert more influence on public opinion than mass media (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009) and to frame the information flow quicker if compared to traditional press office techniques (Parmelee, 2014; Frame & Brachotte, 2014).

The second and largest group of research revolves around strategies and purposes fulfilled by politicians on Twitter, mainly focused on campaign periods (Sweetser, 2011). Writing from interpretative perspectives, the majority of them pinpointed the impression management techniques employed by politicians on the platform for self-promotion (Goldbeck et al., 2010; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Page, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012). This behaviour fostered one-to-many updates, causing the mass-mediatisation of Twitter through the reproduction of broadcasting models on social media (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014; Grant et al, 2010; Larsson & Kalsnes, 2014) and the perpetuation of personalisation of politics through the display of details from private lives of politicians (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Frame & Brachotte, 2014; Ekam & Widholm, 2015). Other studies pointed out how politicians prefer justifying and informing about political positions and decisions, linking to news articles, reporting and showing participation in political events and activities (Goldbeck et al., 2010; Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014; Frame & Brachotte, 2014), rather than developing an effective and active relationship with citizens (Goldbeck et al., 2010; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011). In fact, because of the low

amount of listening and active interactions, politicians seem more interested in showing that they speak for the constituency, rather than with it (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009).

Despite the previous research being useful in identifying common patterns among politicians adopting the platform, few addressed the consequences of specific language requirements and opportunities on Twitter in the tone of their messages. In fact, as with television in its early days, SNS are opening up more opportunities and challenges for political communication. However, while the former focused political discourse on emotional appeal rather than logical reasoning, this same approach may be unsuitable for social media (Ihlen, 2010; Johnson, 2012). Especially Twitter, due to its 140 characters updates, facilitates rhetorical behaviours in political discourse and increases the risk to reproduce televised punch lines and sound bites. Even if this approach may have been successful during campaigning, when the importance of intangible aspects is higher, during incumbency there is a need to also assess functionality and rationality, causing new necessities and desires to be fulfilled (White & de Chernatony, 2002; Di Pietro, 2010). All these aspects may be addressed through rhetoric, intended as the use of language to persuade and convince an audience employing three arguments as in Aristotle's definition: credibility (*ethos*), emotions (*pathos*) and logic (*logos*) (Ihlen, 2010).

Proximity between writing and speech, new standards and expressions in daily as well as political language are some of the tendencies which underline the importance of being able to apply rhetorical knowledge in digital public relations (Ihlen, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012). In addition, the spreading of web 2.0 tools and their potential for citizen participation in and monitoring of politics focus the attention on government delivery, an aspect which previous political PR approaches dedicated little attention to, causing in part a decrease in public appreciation and failing to ensure legitimization in the long-term (Needham, 2005; Needham, 2006). However, if politicians learn to communicate a clear, concise and effective message at the right time and to the appropriate audience through the use of rhetoric, the opportunities to frame the information flow to their advantage increase considerably. For all these reasons, this research has the purpose to fill the lack of qualitative research about rhetorical use of Twitter during incumbency from a strategic public relations perspective.

3 Italian Background

In its early days, the Italian broadcasting system was state-owned and equally divided between the three main parties (DC, PCI, PSI) according to the logic “one channel-one main party”. In the same period, all over Europe, political communication was changing its formats in the wake of personalisation, emphasizing aspects of storytelling around the leader who resembled a small screen celebrity (Mazzoni & Ciaglia, 2014). In this era of “Political Advertising”, politicians simplified their language, adapted their programmes to the results of polls and applied political marketing techniques packaging their images to be sold at elections, relegating citizens to a marginal role in the political arena (Savigny, 2009; Epifani, Jacona, Lippi & Paolillo, 2011; Karlsson, Clerwall & Duskqvist, 2013). The peak of these tendencies was realized in the so-called “Italian anomaly” in 1994, when Berlusconi, owner of the other three main Italian broadcast channels, entered the political arena, concentrating in his hands both the political and the media system of the country (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014).

With the advent of the Internet and especially social media, television decreased in its importance within the media system, changing the dominant communication paradigm from one-to-many to one-to-one. These tendencies, the rise of political branding and the disaffection of the electorate after twenty years of Berlusconi’s politics gradually influenced Italian political communication (Epifani et al., 2011). However, compared to other countries, in Italy the adoption of social media technologies has been slower: research reported that nowadays only 4 million Italians are active on Twitter (ISTAT, 2009). Nevertheless, many academics agree in identifying it as the principal platform used to discuss about political or journalistic issues (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014), while other studies found that only 10% of the conversations among the Italian users are actually about politics (Marchetti, Ceccobelli & Gazzè, 2013). However, the importance of this channel is due to the nature of its audience, mainly made up of traditional opinion leaders, such as journalists, politi-

cians and media-savvy elites, who filter messages on Twitter and report them to the mass media public (Marchetti et al., 2013; Bentivegna, 2013).

Italian politicians' use of Twitter has been the focus of much research in the last years. Antenore's study (2012), the first of its kind in Italy, found that politicians on Twitter maintained an informative role with little or no interaction, making the platform resemble a personal digital press office. Bentivegna (2013) analysed the 2013 Italian elections and pointed out a prevalence in broadcast communications, ascribed to the unfamiliarity of politicians with the structure, culture and community of the platform (Bentivegna, 2013). However; since the updates on Twitter decreased consistently after the campaign period, studies emphasised the self-promoting use of the platform resembling websites and blogs, primarily aimed at obtaining more visibility during elections and to influence mass media agenda (Epifani et al., 2011; Reda & De Notaris, 2012; Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014). In addition, tweets during elections were mainly about the candidates rather than about policies, confirming the characteristic of the Italian political discourse to focus on skirmishes between parties and politicians according to the logic of the political spectacle (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014).

After the 2013 national elections, considered the first "social elections" both because the majority of candidates used Twitter and because of the attention given to it by the traditional media (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2013), Italy was left without a proper government. The Italian electoral law effective at the time, with blocked electoral lists where the candidates were chosen within the party, has increased citizen disillusionment with politicians and has led to coalition governments since its implementation. However; for the first time no party reached absolute majority: the Democratic Party (PD), led by Pierluigi Bersani, received the most votes, followed by People of Freedom (PdL), with Berlusconi as leader, and by the anti-political Five Star Movement (M5S) led by the former comic Beppe Grillo. Bersani was unable to create a coalition with the Five Star Movement, and thus resigned from his position as Secretary of the Democratic Party. The formation of the first broad base government between the main parties in Italian history was assigned by the President of the Italian Republic to Enrico Letta, vice-secretary of the Democratic Party.

On December 2013, the Democratic Party held primary elections to decide the Secretary of the party. On that occasion, Matteo Renzi, who was Mayor of Florence at the time and had already run for Secretary of the party in 2012, losing against Ber-

sani, succeeded over the other four candidates. He entered the Parliament as Secretary of PD while the government led by Enrico Letta was undergoing difficult months of crisis. PdL broke up in two different parties, Forza Italia (FI) and New Right-Centre (NCD), and the former left the government after the vote for the dismissal of Berlusconi from the Senate due to the trial regarding Mediaset TV rights. On 17th January 2014, Matteo Renzi took part in a talk show and, replying to rumours which alluded to his ambitions to govern, launched in direct broadcast a hashtag, #Enricostaisereno (“Enrico, stay serene”), which became an immediately trending topic on Twitter. Some days after, Letta presented his resignation because of lack of confidence in his government and the President of the Republic Giorgio Napolitano called Matteo Renzi to form a new one. On 21st February 2014, Matteo Renzi became the youngest Italian Prime Minister.

Matteo Renzi underwent two primary electoral campaigns before being appointed Prime Minister without elections. During 2012 he reproduced the formats of the 2008 Obama’s electoral campaign, travelling all around Italy in a campervan. He was suggesting a “renovation of the old political elite”, causing annoyance among the ruling class of the PD. Many scholars have underlined the fact that Renzi represented a disruption in the traditional communication strategy of Italian centre-left parties, which were never primarily worried about how their politics were communicated to citizens (Di Pietro, 2010; Barile, 2014b; Di Cuia, 2014). His personalised campaigns, his branding and his simplified language and slogans resembled Berlusconi’s methods of communication: if the latter was the peak of political televised marketing, the former has been appointed as the symbol of the renewed political public relations on social media (Barile, 2014a). Matteo Renzi’s communication and politics styles were replicated from American and UK examples, introducing into the Italian context the “third way” politics used by Blair among others and stressing the use of new digital technologies, especially Twitter, to reach stronger relations with his constituents (Barile, 2014a). For example, in the wake of Obama, he introduced the question time #matteorisponde (“Matteo answers”) in 2013 and renewed it approximately every month since then.

4 Research Design and Method

4.1 Research focus and questions

This research holds the poststructuralist view that language is a source of reality and contributes to shape power relations which govern human lives and society (Ruth, 1989; Prasad, 2005). Therefore, rhetoric represents a powerful instrument to frame communication and fulfil public relations objectives, such as crisis communication, issue management and positioning of strategic definitions and identities (Cheney, 2004; Heath, 2010; Nord & Olsson, 2013). These aspects have been explored deeply through the analysis of the uncommon case of Matteo Renzi, as current non-elected Italian Prime Minister. In fact, his political situation, needing citizen legitimisation, might foster impression management techniques, maximising the utility of information from this one single case (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Thus, in order to deepen the knowledge about political applications of rhetoric on Twitter during incumbency, one broad research question has been stated, followed by three subquestions which helped group the findings according to the themes and the examples from data:

RQ: What was the political PR strategy used by Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi on Twitter during his first year in office?

SQ1: What impression management strategy did he use?

SQ2: What political function did his tweets have?

SQ3: What rhetorical behaviours did he employ?

4.2 Research Strategy

The aim of this research is not to describe patterns or practices common to the population of Italian politicians as a whole, neither to primarily generalize the results to confront them with international settings, as this has already been done by other authors (Bentivegna, 2014; Reda & De Notaris, 2012; Grant et al., 2010). On the contrary, the method of qualitative case study has been chosen in order to explore how

rhetorical behaviours may be employed on Twitter for the sake of political public relations. Reasons to approach this topic with qualitative methods lie in the unsuitability of quantitative methods to grasp differences in tone and expressions in the messages of politicians: often they need to be contextualised with background information held by the researcher, who becomes a key instrument for data analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2014). In addition, the perspective of participants is also significant since the chosen PR strategy depends on and is shaped by it, thus case study has been considered the most suitable method to investigate this topic (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Daymon & Holloway, 2011).

Case studies have suffered from a general distrust in Academia because they are considered carriers of context-dependent knowledge hard to generalize from and of a bias towards verification (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However; some authors suggested that examples of theory application may form the bases for expert knowledge, which is not reachable only with context-independent theory (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Siggelkow, 2007). Also, the second point of criticism is fallacious, since as with every other method, case studies also have their own rules to assess validity and reliability of the research (Flyvbjerg, 2006; May, 2011). In this study, two different methods have been chosen to analyse the case and infer results (Farquhar, 2012). Firstly, a qualitative multimedia content analysis of tweets has been carried out in order to identify not only political purposes, as the primary content, but also implied impression management and communication functions intended by the author, as the latent content of tweets (Mayring, 2000; Stocchetti & Kukkonen, 2011). Secondly, semi-structured interviews have been conducted to validate the interpretation of data from content analysis and eventually integrate it with new themes and information.

4.3 Data Collection

Data was purposefully selected from the uncommon case of non-elected PM Matteo Renzi, selecting a sample of one year in order to investigate long-term strategies. As result of the research strategy, data collection was carried out using with two methods. Data for the content analysis were downloaded with the appropriate tool offered

by the software QSR NVivo¹ for content analysis. Tweets published by Matteo Renzi's account on Twitter (@matteorenzi) from 21st February 2014 to 21st February 2015 were recollected, resulting in 531 tweets in total. The unit of analysis was the single textual tweet, considered together with images, videos and/or hyperlinks eventually included in its structure. Subsequently, two interviews have been conducted with people from the communication team of the Prime Minister, since the Prime Minister in person was not reachable. Participants in the interviews were Franco Bellacci, communication consultant for Matteo Renzi since when he was Mayor of Florence, and Roberta Maggio, appointed head of the digital communication team of the Office of the Prime Minister in November 2014. The interviews took place on 17th February 2015 at Palazzo Chigi, residence of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in Rome.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis has been guided by the subquestions (SQ1, SQ2, SQ3) early formulated to answer the main research question (RQ). Content analysis has been carried out with an abductive approach, working with theory and data at the same time to develop comprehensive classes clearly differentiable from each other (Greener, 2011). Applying principles of direct content analysis, main themes identified by the literature were used as coding at the beginning and subsequently integrated and modified according to the themes emerging from tweets (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Data have been analysed in two consecutive phases, in order to distinguish between latent and manifest content of tweets. Firstly, impression management techniques hidden behind the choice of language of each tweet have been catalogued (SQ1). Secondly, their political purpose was coded around main themes and further analysed in their practical applications (SQ2). This resulted in two different coding sheets, explicated in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2. Rhetorical behaviours have been pinpointed throughout the analysis in relation to the other levels of analysis (SQ3). The interviews validated the findings of the content analysis and helped creating a narrative

¹ QSR Nvivo is a computer software for qualitative data analysis, produced by QSR International, based in Melbourne, Australia. It supports the collection and deep analysis of big clusters of social media data, both text-based and multimedia ones.

for the results discussed in Chapter 6 (RQ).

	Code	Description	Jackson & Lilleker (2011)	Pollach & Kebler (2011)
Impression Management Tactics	<i>Self-Promotion</i>	Displaying competence referring to personal achievements, abilities (e.g. hardworking), qualifications or position held. Attributing positive outcomes to oneself, enhancing their and his own positive value.	‘Self-Promotion’	‘Self-Promotion’ ‘Entitlements’ ‘Enhancements’
	<i>Ingratiation</i>	Appearing likeable mentioning that he has helped people or organizations, agreeing with and thanking other tweeters. Displaying social desirability, arising sense of belonging to a community, appearing as “one of us”.	‘Ingratiation’	‘Attractiveness’
	<i>Exemplification</i>	Claiming worthy attributes or moral values, presenting oneself as a role model in particular areas (e.g. integrity), displaying credibility through match between words and deeds.	‘Exemplification’	‘Exemplification’ ‘Credibility’
	<i>Intimidation</i>	Appearing dangerous or threatening, expressions of power, suggesting punitive actions.	‘Intimidation’	-
	<i>Personal</i>	Revealing details of personal life (family and everyday activity of non-political nature), identifying personal interests (e.g. sport, music, film or leisure)	‘Promotion of Self’	-
	<i>Humour</i>	Displaying sense of humour.	‘Promotion of Self’	-
	Neutral tweets	<i>Party</i>	Promotion of party, its activities and political stance, endorsement and interaction with partisan politicians.	‘Promotion of Self’
<i>None</i>		Daily chatting, meta-language, statements with no evidence of impression management strategies.	-	-

Table 4.1: Coding sheet for impression management on Twitter. Categories and their correspondence to literature.

Two main categories and eight subcategories were coded for the impression management techniques employed by Matteo Renzi. Subcategories for the first main category, *Impression Management Tactics*, were initially drawn both from Jackson and Lilleker’s (2011) and Pollach and Kebler’s (2011) studies. The first research

adapted a taxonomy derived from Jones and Pittman’s (1982) and Schutz’s (1997) models of impression management, resulting in five behaviours likely undertaken by MPs on Twitter (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011). The second study applied Tedeschi and Melburg’s (1984) conceptual framework to investigate techniques used by CEO to develop their identity online (Pollach & Kebler, 2011). During data analysis, while some categories were eliminated for lack of evidence, two other classes were added to the coding sheet because they were identified as impression management techniques: displaying personal details and interests, as well as humour. They have been considered consequences of personalisation of politics and of the specific of the platform (Bentivegna, 2014; Frame & Brachotte, 2014). On the other hand, the second category, *Neutral Tweets*, included tweets with no evidence of personal branding and with reference to the Democratic Party brand.

Code	Description	Glassman et al. (2009)	Goldbeck et al. (2010)	Antenore (2012)
<i>Media Agency</i>	Sharing information about official activity as PM or about PM’s mass media presence, leader agenda, interaction with journalists	‘Press or web link’ ‘Official or congressional action’ ‘District or state business’	‘Information’ ‘Media’	‘Media appearances’ ‘Information’
<i>Delivery</i>	Communicating delivery, fulfilling of electoral promises, achievements in political activity, signature of laws and decrees		‘Official business’	‘Political activity’
<i>Positioning</i>	International meetings, press conferences, council of ministers, official activity as PM Position-taking about policy or political issues	‘Position-taking’		‘Political activity’
<i>Institutional</i>	Physical location, non-official activity, interviews, party activity	–	‘Location or activity’	‘Institutional’
<i>Interaction with citizens</i>	Interaction with citizens	‘Reply’	‘External direct communication’	‘Direct Interaction’
<i>None</i>	Non-political tweets			‘Personal tweets’

Table 4.2: Coding sheet for political public relations on Twitter. Categories and their correspondence to literature.

Regarding the political purposes of tweets, different categorisations have been considered from previous studies. After distinguishing between elections and incumbency periods, a final group of code has been determined resulting in six main categories: *media agency*, *positioning*, *delivery*, *institutional*, *interaction with citizens* and *none*, for non-political tweets. Media agency collected all the tweets displaying information links, leader agenda, media appearances and interaction with journalists considered as media relations, following the informative purpose identified by Glassman, Straus and Shogan (2009) and Goldbeck et al. (2010). Delivery included official business and activities (Goldbeck et al., 2010; Antenore, 2012), while positioning joined position-taking tweets about policy or political issues (Glassman et al., 2009). Institutional tweets were those based on institutional activities as Prime Minister, while the conversational tweets with citizens formed the last political category.

4.5 Validity of the research

Validity in qualitative research may be assessed first of all recognizing the researcher's role within the study, who is unlikely truly objective and detached as claimed by quantitative authors (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). However, the active role of the researcher is considered a strength inasmuch s/he co-constructs the findings with participants to make sense of the world (Creswell, 2014). To define a common understanding of the topics at stake, definitions of some terms used during the research have been decided together with the participants of the interviews. Although every effort has been made to maintain an unbiased view, some assumptions I hold may have influenced the collection and interpretation of data. I developed an interest in social media during my Bachelor dissertation about Western frames and discourses around the Arab Spring. Analysing different definitions and concepts of "revolution", I arrived at the conclusion that language has a strong influence on the interpretation of the world around us and thus on our actions. Social media offer a good ground to shape definitions and, before developing resistance movements, they may support traditional power in different forms than previous mass media.

However, scientific standards have been followed in order to assure validity and reliability to this case study. First of all, a between-methods triangulation has been applied, using two different methods to collect and interpret data from multiple sources (May, 2011; Farquhar, 2012). Coding of data has been carried out until

reaching inter coding reliability, applying a holistic approach and aiming at comprehensive classes clearly differentiable from each other which combined literature and data patterns. First interpretations of the data from the content analysis were validated through the interviews with the people within the communication team of the PM. Interviews followed a protocol which is attached in Appendix A and were recorded with the informed consent of the interviewees (See Appendix B), to assure unbiased collection of data.

4.6 Ethical issues

Finally, some words are worth spending about ethical issues related to the research. Data collected for content analysis were available to the author of the research in respect of Twitter terms², however, privacy of individual users not object of this case study has been protected by substituting their name with “@user” followed by a number, if not functional to understand the context (Rivers & Lewis, 2014). Participants to the interviews were chosen according to the possibility of access of the author and to the interviewees willingness to participate in the study. Access to the setting was gained through official channels of the Press Office of the Prime Minister by presenting a brief proposal of the research describing purposes and benefits for the participants. Interviewees’ rights have been safeguarded by 1) articulating both in verbal and written form research objectives, 2) informing participants of data collection and analysis procedures, 3) obtaining informed consent from them before proceeding with the interviews (see Appendix B), 4) making data collected and findings available to the interviewees, 5) considering participants’ wishes and rights first when choosing to report data.

² Terms of Service available at <https://twitter.com/tos?lang=en>.

5 Analysis

Accounts of politicians on Twitter may be managed in at least three different ways: by the politician himself/herself, by his/her staff, or by both of them. There are pros and cons to all three methods, but the choice mostly depends on the identity the politician desires to show. Franco Bellacci confirmed in the interview that Matteo Renzi's profile is «autonomously managed by the PM, so he does not have a proper communication strategy behind it, (...) but he tweets in an ordinary way, as everyone else does». The positive side to a personally managed Twitter account of a politician is that, in Bellacci's words, «Twitter works if it is used in a spontaneous way, while there are many examples of artificial and studied approaches which eventually have shown to be unsuccessful». These statements seem to be confirmed by the steadily increasing number of followers of the Prime Minister in the last year (Dnsee, 2015) and by the fact that he is the most followed Italian politician on Twitter (1,81 million followers) at the moment of this thesis.

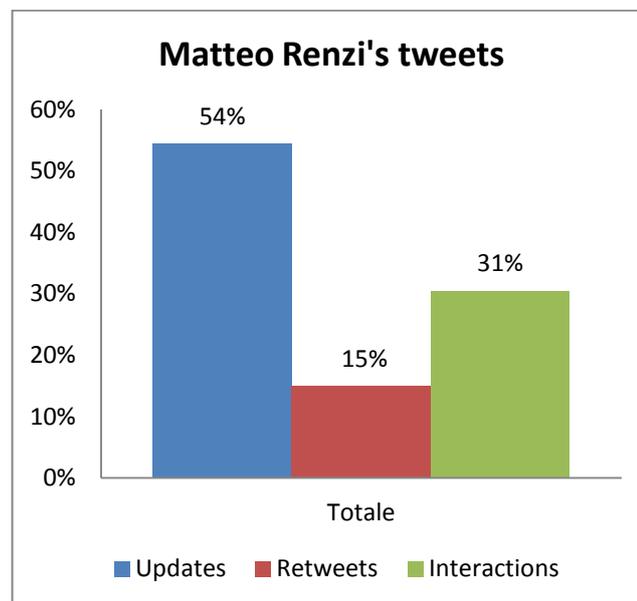


Figure 5.1: Types of Tweets on Matteo Renzi's profile on Twitter [21 February 2014 - 21 February 2015]

Tweets from Matteo Renzi's account have been initially divided according to their nature as updates, retweets or public messages addressed to other individuals. As shown in Figure 5.1, the majority of them were one-to-many messages, accounting for 54% of the total, while the least frequent tweet type was retweet, amounting to 15% of the total. While these first results appeared to confirm previous research about *mass-mediatisation* of the platform (Graham, Broersma, Hazelhoff & van't Haar, 2013; Goldbeck et al., 2010; Larsson & Moe, 2011; Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014), the amount of interactions (31% of the total) showed that Renzi has been taking advantage of the possibilities for interaction offered by social media. Despite being a novelty in the Italian context, where the majority of politicians seem to limit their interactions on social media (Bentivegna, 2014), if compared to international research, Renzi eventually confirms the idea that politicians are slowly adapting their behaviour to the new standards of social media communication (Graham et al., 2013; Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014).

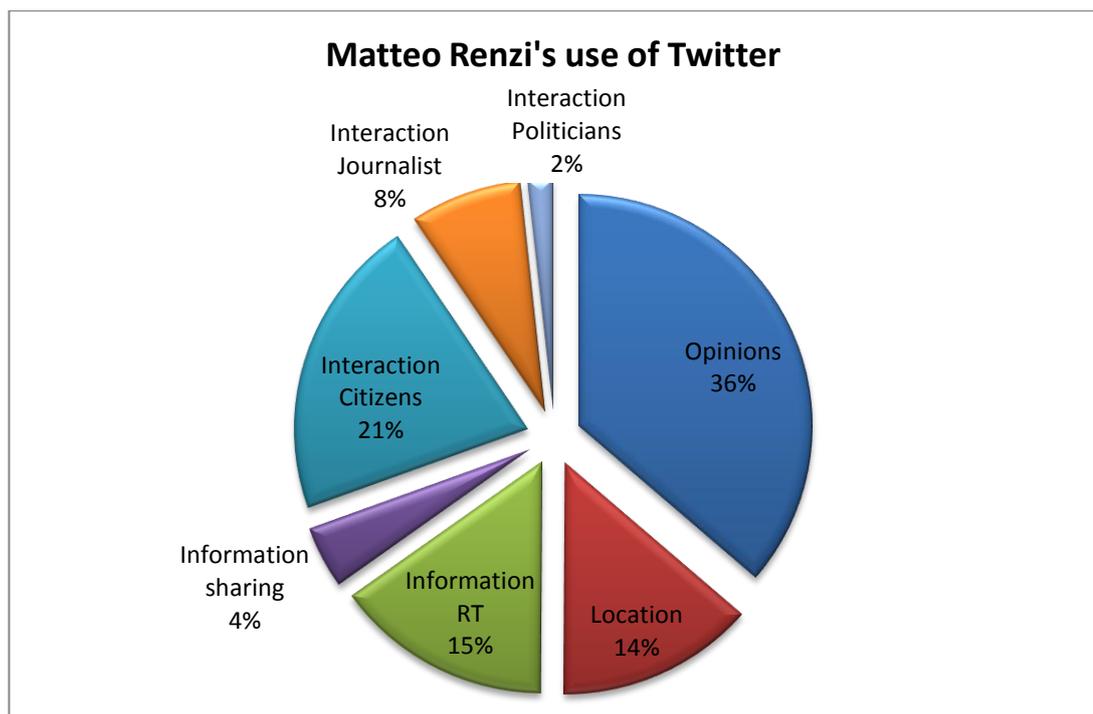


Figure 5.2: Function of tweets on Matteo Renzi's profile on Twitter [21 February 2014 - 21 February 2015]

More in detail, as shown in Figure 5.2, updates were mainly made up by Renzi's opinions and statements (36% of the total), tweets about his location (14%) and information tweets with links to news articles, government websites or posts on his Facebook page (4%). The huge difference between author-centred tweets (opin-

ions and location) and information tweets, which appears to contradict one of the *golden rules* of Twitter “sharing is caring”, has been explained by Bellacci with the intention of the Prime Minister to «maintain his profile on Twitter personal, considered his main communication channel», while leaving institutional matters to official profiles. While he shared political statements and sometimes institutional information on his personal account, the main informative tasks were fulfilled by the official channel of the Office of the PM (@Palazzo_Chigi), which was focused on sharing useful information with citizens. In fact, in Roberta Maggio’s words, «the difference between a personal and an institutional profile is on the informative side».

As far as retweets are concerned, on Twitter they represent both a way of participating in the conversation and of giving merit to the content of other users (boyd et al., 2010; Dann, 2010; Giansante, 2014). However, the majority of Renzi’s retweets were from politicians of the same party or other political associates, shared for the purpose of giving information about political activities and delivery, while a minor part were retweets from media profiles, such as newspapers, radio or TV broadcasters, containing links about the PM. Also, considering retweets regarding sport victories of national athletes or achievements of internationally-known Italians, coherent with his political stance in defence of “Made in Italy”, it may be argued that Renzi used retweets for purposes of political endorsement and implied self-branding. Real endorsements were limited to an Emergency national football match for charity and events regarding European Digital Agenda, but their quantity was insignificant compared to the others (3 out of 80), confirming the self-branding function of the account.

Within the 162 interactions tweets recollected during the analysis, 112 of them were exchanges with common citizens, accounting for 21% of the total tweets, while 8% of them were addressing journalists. As explained by Bellacci and confirmed by a quick research on the accounts the PM interacted with, Renzi «tries to answer the most stimulating questions about policies, especially if the answer can be useful to other users, regardless of the number of followers». The interactions with other politicians or associates were surprisingly low: 2% of the total tweets collected, totalling 9 tweets out of 531, with 3 of them addressing opposing politicians. The relations with politicians of his own Democratic Party were limited to retweets and acknowledgments of their official business in Parliament when supporting policies. As will be explained later, these last kind of interaction tweets with the political elite seem to

be designed more to position the leader, either attacking opponents or endorsing colleagues, and to communicate delivery, than to develop a real interaction.

On Twitter an important part of the conversation is made up of hashtags, thus those used by Matteo Renzi have been categorised according to whether the tag was indexing a topic or whether it was expressing an evaluative sentiment (Page, 2012). Despite the former being definitely more numerous, the latter were more interesting for the purposes of this analysis. In fact, if the presence of topical hashtags is shared with informative or institutional accounts, the use of evaluative hashtags is almost a privilege of individuals, since they require creativity, knowledge of the platform and a will to communicate a vision of the world. As confirmed in the interview with Roberta Maggio, «on Twitter there is a need to be able to find the right word, the right hashtag, (...) as well as to be able to express oneself in 140 characters and not be lengthy». In addition, the majority of hashtags were found in one-to-many messages and not in addressed tweets, supporting the idea that hashtags serve a self-branding function (Page, 2012).

Topical Hashtags	Topic	Frequencies (v.a. on 531 tweets)
#millegiorni	Policy	11
#inpiazza	Party	9
#JobsAct	Policy	9
#palazzochigi	Institutional Affairs	9
#twitintervista	Media	8
#buongiorno	Interaction	7
#80euros	Policy	5
#Leopolda5	Party	5
#skytg24	Media	4
#matteorisponde	Interaction	4
#NormanAtlantic	Institutional Affairs	3
#sbloccaItalia	Policy	3
#regole	Institutional Affairs	1

Table 5.1: Frequencies of selected topical hashtags used by Matteo Renzi's profile [21 February 2014-21 February 2015]

Thus, besides topical hashtags related to his role (#palazzochigi), to the party (#Leopolda5, #inpiazza) or to policies (#JobsAct, #europa, #80euros), it was possible to find others created by the Prime Minister himself. Roberta Maggio highlighted that «some of them have been used since his electoral campaign, and they all under-

lined the concepts of “rebirth” and “change”», coherent with his overall brand. Therefore, hashtags such as #cambiaverso (“change direction”) and #italiariparte (“Italy restarts”) were integrated during incumbency with new ones, such as #lavoltabuona (“the right time”, launched some days before the official designation to PM) or #laSvoltabuona (“the right turning point”, used during his first press conference). In other occasions, Matteo Renzi took advantage of this feature to create hashtags at the same time topical and evaluative, such as #labuonascuola (“the good school”, reforms of the education), #millegiorni and #passodopopasso (“one thousand days” and “step by step”, indexes of time schedules and progress of his government), and at President Giorgio Napolitano’s resignation, when Renzi launched the hashtags #GrazieGiorgio and #GraziePresidente (“Thank you Giorgio”, “Thank you President”).

Evaluative Hashtags	Topic	Frequencies (v.a. on 531 tweets)
#lavoltabuona	Leader brand	62
#italiariparte	Leader brand	54
#cambiaverso	Leader brand	8
#passodopopasso	Policy – Leader brand	7
#labuonascuola	Policy	6
#amicigufi	Humorous	4
#cosedilavoro	Humorous	4
#ciaovacanze	Interaction	2
#mettiamocelatutta	Interaction	2
#allafacciadeigufi	Humorous	1
#gufi	Humorous	1
#sorciverdi	Humorous	1
#rassegnati	Humorous - Interaction	1

Table 5.2: Frequencies of selected evaluative hashtags used by Matteo Renzi's profile [21 February 2014-21 February 2015]

Matteo Renzi did not hesitate to mix institutional hashtags with less formal ones, generating a lot of buzz around him on traditional mass media. As well, he made use of “communitarian” hashtags, i.e. informal ones used by common users (Giansante, 2014), such as #buongiorno (“good morning”), #sipuofare (“we can do it”), #ciaovacanze (“goodbye holidays”), to participate in the flow of conversation and show that he belonged to the Twitter community (Page, 2012; Zappavigna, 2012). But far more interesting were humorous hashtags, which included #amicigufi

(“owl friends”), #allafacciadeigufi (“in the face of owls”) and #gufi (“owls”), with reference to politicians and journalists who were opposing Renzi’s government. Far from labelling this communication inappropriate, in Bellacci’s opinion it is essential «to take into consideration the tone and the target, according to the role of the account. (...) @matteorenzi is first of all a person, not only the Prime Minister or the Secretary of Democratic Party.» Consequently, as affirmed by Roberta Maggio, «in the wake of Matteo Renzi’s informality, we are assisting in a mitigation of the [Italian] institutional communication».

5.1 Impression Management on Twitter

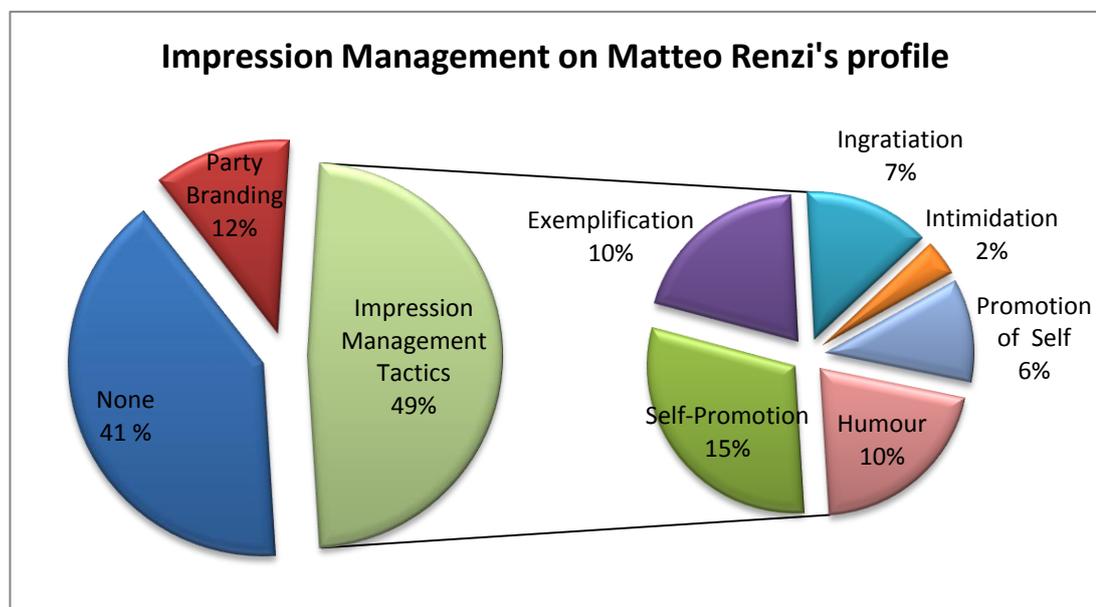


Figure 5.3: Impression Management on Matteo Renzi's profile on Twitter and details of tactics used [21 February 2014 - 21 February 2015]

As shown in Figure 5.3, tweets identified as having evidence of impression management accounted for 49% of the total, equalling 255 out of 531 tweets. The other 61 (12%) were related to the Democratic Party brand and the remaining 43% did not contain signs of branding of either kind. The high number of this last group is considered consistent with what Bellacci stated: «Renzi’s profile is dependent on his intuition of the moment, he tweets only if he feels like it, otherwise he is silent. (...) It is difficult to explain and to understand: it always looks like there is a fine strategy behind it, but it is more spontaneous than what it could appear from the outside». Nevertheless, still a large part of Renzi’s tweets have been found to make use of im-

pression management techniques, either consciously or not. Since the majority of brand building and positioning had already been done during his electoral campaigns in 2012 and 2013, the function of these tweets during incumbency was to reinforce his brand by remaining coherent with it.

5.1.1 Self-promotion

The impression management tactic most often employed by Renzi was self-promotion (15% of the total tweets), mainly displaying the positive outcomes of his political activity and his qualities as a hardworker. The former group of tweets celebrated political victories more as national and collective successes rather than personal achievements, emphasizing the communitarian aspects of the PM's office. However, they have still been considered under the category "self-promotion" because, as well as delivery tweets which will be analysed later, they contributed to enhance the leader's brand by differentiating his "politics of doing" ("politica del fare") from what was or was not accomplished by his predecessors (Grandi & Tallei, 2014). Thus, as already observed in the previous research, in order to get re-elected politicians display on websites and SNS not only their commitment and competence, but also their hard work, fulfilling the role of the "good constituency man" (Stayner, 2008; Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011).

@matteorenzi: A girl who gave birth in chains for her faith is free today. Italy is also this. Politics is also this. #meriam¹ [24 July 2014]

@matteorenzi: Taxes minus 18 billion (80 euros, irap, babies, open-ended contract) We can do more. But for now less taxes for the first time in years #Happy2015² [2 January 2015]

Matteo Renzi's commitment to working at unusually early times of the day has been a key theme of his previous propaganda in electoral campaigns, when he was appearing in public with the sleeves of his shirt rolled up to the elbow symbolising his will power to get to work (Grandi & Tallei, 2014; Venturini, 2014). Thus, tweets

¹ @matteorenzi: "Una ragazza che ha partorito in catene per le propria fede, oggi è libera. L'Italia è anche questo. La politica è anche questo #meriam"

² @matteorenzi: "Tasse meno 18 miliardi (80 euro, irap, bebè, contr.temp.ind) Si può fare di più. Ma dopo anni intanto x la prima volta meno tasse #Buon2015"

posted early in the morning or late in the evening stating that the PM is “at work”, immediately replicated on all mass media, appeared totally coherent with the brand Renzi has been building since 2012. The success of it can be measured to the extent followers recognized it as core characteristic of the Prime Minister, amplifying the reach of the message and fulfilling both his followers’ desire for mentions and Renzi’s self-promotion objectives (Zappavigna, 2012). Besides, these tweets also give practical examples of political activity, strengthening the relation between the leader and his constituents conveying the idea that he is, in the end, a regular working person as all other citizens (Grandi and Tallei, 2014; Venturini, 2014).

*@matteorenzi: G7 concluded, I am in Rome to work on our dossiers: provinces, senate, title V [of the Constitution, nda], CNEL, schools, stability agreement #goodmorning*³ [06.15am, 25 March 2014]

@matteorenzi: At #PalazzoChigi working on the most urgent dossiers of the government. #goodmorning #therighttime (See Figure 5.4) [06.40am, 26 February 2014]

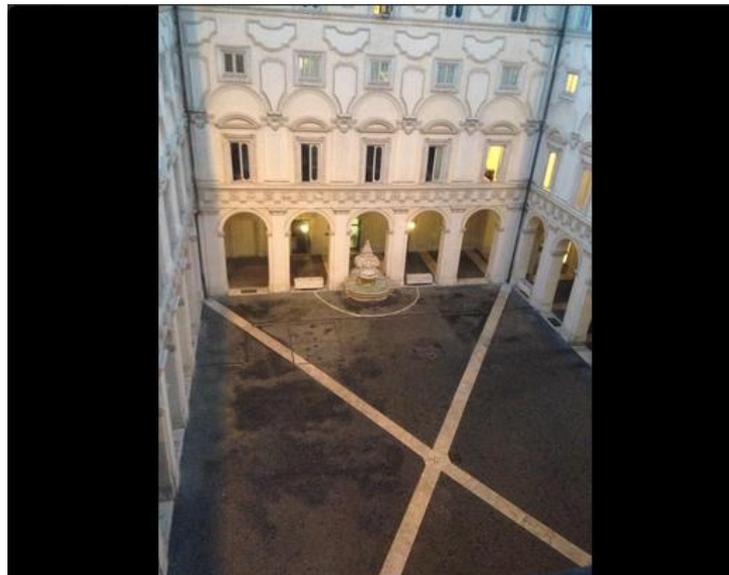


Figure 5.4: Matteo Renzi’s tweet on 26 February 2014

³ @matteorenzi: “Terminato il G7, sono a Roma per lavorare sui nostri dossier: province, senato, titolo V, CNEL, scuole, patto di stabilità. #buongiorno”

@user1: *Usually at this hour on Twitter there is only @matteorenzi* ⁴ [06.43am, July, 25 2014]

@matteorenzi: *@user1 there are many of us, Matteo. I am studying the dossier about infrastructures :-)* ⁵ [06.45am, 25 July 2014]

5.1.2 Exemplification

10% of the total tweets accounted for two other characteristics of successful political brands through exemplification: willing to work for broader societal well-being and commitment to worthy values such as integrity (Ledingham, 2011; Jackson, 2006). In the first case, rhetoric was used to restate the idea of “changing direction” to politics carried on during campaigning, distancing himself from other politicians while at the same time getting closer to citizens leveraging on emotions (Barile, 2014a). For the first purpose, he used the rhetorical behaviour called “agonism” to emphasise certain aspects of political conflict, juxtaposing and enhancing differences between him and the opposition through the pronouns “we” and “they” (Sousa & Ivanova, 2012). For the second aim, he preferred not only to let people address him with the first name, as Tony Blair did at the beginning, but also to refer to citizens (and followers) in the same way to stimulate proximity. In particular, the third tweet reported here links to a video in which the PM tells stories of common people calling them by first name, as already done by Barack Obama.

@matteorenzi: *We'll push the reforms. Italians will have the last word with referendum. And we'll see if they will chose us or those who don't ever want to change.* ⁶ [4 February 2015]

@matteorenzi: *Camusso [Italian trade unionist] and Salvini [Leader of Lega Nord] are two sides of the same coin. They bet on things that do not work. Instead, we try to change them. @rtl1025* ⁷ [20 November 2014]

⁴ @user1: “Di solito a quest'ora su Twitter c'è solo @matteorenzi”

⁵ @matteorenzi: “@user1 siamo in tanti, Matteo. Io sono a studiare il fascicolo infrastrutture :-)”

⁶ @matteorenzi: “Porteremo a casa le riforme. Gli italiani con referendum avranno ultima parola. E vedremo se sceglieranno noi o chi non vuole cambiare mai.”

⁷ @matteorenzi: “Camusso e Salvini sono due facce della stessa medaglia. Scommettono sulle cose che non vanno. Noi invece proviamo a cambiarle @rtl1025”

@matteorenzi: We are not thinking about Margaret Thatcher, we are thinking about those no one ever cared about <https://t.co/8ISZp7Xv8x>⁸ [19 September 2014]

Since strong messages are those which combine both emotional and cognitive elements (Giansante, 2014), integrity was another characteristic displayed quite often by Matteo Renzi, underlining on more than one occasion the match between his words during campaign and his deeds during incumbency. Such behaviour was functional to enhance Matteo Renzi's credibility within the constituency, and represented an attempt to respond to Italian citizens' intolerance towards politicians' false promises developed due to the latest 20 years of televised politics (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014). In particular, his entire brand was synthesized in one of the first tweets as soon as he was appointed, where he stated his intention to focus on "method" and "concreteness as Mayors", emphasizing that this was the only office that has not been contaminated by the happening of the Second Republic (Barile, 2014a), as opposed to "spot messages", symbols of Berlusconi's government.

@matteorenzi: Today with @graziano_delrio on dossiers. Method, method, method. No spot messages, but high vision and concreteness as Mayors #happySunday⁹ [23 February 2014]

@matteorenzi: On 14-5 I promised that every 3 months I would come back in CampaniaCalabriaSicilia to monitor European capitals. Promise kept. Happy Feast of the Assumption¹⁰ [14 July 2014]

@matteorenzi: #80euros is a reality. A promise that has been kept. For me it's social justice, but also anti-cyclical action. @24Mattino #owlfriends [16 May 2014]¹¹

⁸ @matteorenzi: "Noi non pensiamo a Margaret Thatcher, noi stiamo pensando a quelli a cui non ha mai pensato nessuno"

⁹ @matteorenzi: "Oggi con @graziano_delrio sui dossier. Metodo,metodo,metodo. Non annunci spot, ma visione alta e concretezza da sindaci #buonadomenica"

¹⁰ @matteorenzi: "Il 14-5 ho promesso che ogni 3mesi sarei tornato in CampaniaCalabriaSicilia per monitorare fondieuropei. Promessa mantenuta. Buon ferragosto"

¹¹ @matteorenzi: "Gli #80euro sono una realtà. Una promessa mantenuta. Per me è giustizia sociale, ma anche misura anti ciclica. @24Mattino #amiciguffi"

5.1.3 Ingratiation

Also, ingratiation, that is the attempt to appear likeable and to create an emotional bond with the constituency through feelings of belonging, has been found in Renzi's tweets, albeit in a small amount (7% of the total). As previous research showed (Stayner, 2008), empathy is a core value moving constituents to vote for a specific candidate, and it corresponds to that *phatos* identified by Aristotle necessary for a rhetor to connect with the audience (Johnson, 2012). Agreement with and the thanking of other tweeters were the most frequent instances in ingratiation, with Renzi showing publicly positive appreciation and evaluation both for his followers and other politicians. Besides having a politeness function, the act of thanking has been identified as an indicator of interpersonal reciprocity, and it has been considered fundamental in social media interactions because of their primary aim to create and solidify social bonds among people interested in the same topics regardless of their geographical location (Zappavigna, 2012; Grandi & Tallei, 2014).

*@matteorenzi: @user1 @user2 I like it. Those who always helped us, today they are seeing this challenge as a personal one. Nice! Thanks*¹² [23 February 2014]

*@matteorenzi: @user3 @user4 This is the responsibility I feel the most strongly about: Italy as a land of opportunity, not of undue revenue. Thanks*¹³ [23 February 2014]

Even though the tweets actually defined as “displaying a sense of community” were not as numerous as the other two, the frequent use of the pronoun “we” in the majority of the tweets of the PM enhanced the possibilities for the leader to be seen from the audience as “one of us”, shortening the distance between him and his followers (Stayner, 2008; Sousa & Ivanova, 2012; Grandi & Tallei, 2014). The usage of the first person plural pronoun plays an important role in persuasion because of its potential to generate group memberships and identifications (Sorning, 1989; Sousa & Ivanova, 2012). On the other hand, the singular pronoun “I” has been used during

¹² @matteorenzi: “@user1 @user2 Mi piace!. Chi ci ha sempre aiutato, oggi vive questa sfida come una sfida anche personale. Bello! Grazie”

¹³ @matteorenzi: “@user3 @user4 Questa è la responsabilità che sento più forte: l'Italia come terra di opportunità e non di rendita. Grazie”

difficult situations to show the PM's intention to assume responsibility without being ashamed of admitting his own errors (Di Cuia, 2014). Thus, the will not to hide even in the case of political defeat, that is to show accountability, became another characteristic of the leader's brand which disrupted the usual Italian political tradition (Grandi & Tallei, 2014).

*@matteorenzi: Thanks for the messages. Hard and difficult task. But we are Italy, we will do it. One commitment: stay ourselves, independent and down-to-earth.*¹⁴ [22 February 2014]

*@matteorenzi: @user1 This is the point. Either the reform helps to change, or I have lost #therighttime*¹⁵ [9 July 2014]

5.1.4 Intimidation

Contrary to many politicians who appeared to try to avoid severe tones in their communication online (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011), Matteo Renzi did not hesitate to show his "bad side" sometimes. Tweets displaying intimidation practices which made him appear threatening while suggesting punitive actions were 2% of the total, and even though they equalled 10 tweets out of 531, their presence was still functional for branding purposes. In fact, in those cases when the public opinion was expecting reactions of scorn by the Prime Minister, Renzi has been able to demonstrate leadership and firmness through these tweets, matching two other successful characteristics for a political leader's brand (Ledingham, 2011). Thanks to their small number and to a strong ethical background built during previous electoral campaigns and advertised through his young activism in the Boy Scouts (Barile, 2014a), his steadfastness was lightened by a moral aspect, thus intimidation tweets were actually backed up by exemplification tweets.

*@matteorenzi: The #def [Document about economy and finance] keeps all our commitments #inthefaceoftheowls Now those who never paid start to do it. We #changedirection #80euros*¹⁶ [9 April 2014]

¹⁴ @matteorenzi: "Grazie per i messaggi. Compito tosto e difficile. Ma siamo l'Italia, ce la faremo. Un impegno: rimanere noi stessi, liberi e semplici."

¹⁵ @matteorenzi: "@user1 questo è il nodo. O la riforma serve a cambiare questo oppure io ho perso #lavoltabuona"

*@matteorenzi: Expo: who was mistaken, now need to pay. But there are thousands of work places at stake. We stop thieves, not jobs. #Italyrestarts*¹⁷ [13 May 2014]

5.1.5 Promotion of the self

Tweets stating Renzi's personal interests were few compared to what has been found in previous research (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009), in fact they only accounted for 6% of the total. In addition, the majority of them concerned achievements of internationally-known Italians, fulfilling positioning purposes, as already stated (Stayner, 2008). On the contrary, tweets about his personal life were totally absent, apparently contradicting the principle of personalisation of politics (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014). This reaction to the way of doing politics embodied by Berlusconi and his 'royal family' (Mazzoni & Ciaglia, 2014) has become a specific trait of Renzi's brand, depicted as a leader more focused on political matters rather than advertising his private life (Barile, 2014b). Furthermore, the absence of such tweets suggests that it may be possible to empathise and engage with citizens without displaying a great deal of personal information of a politician's life: a three dimensional idea of the leader can be achieved instead through displaying his daily work and political commitment close to the constituents.

*@matteorenzi: In these hours we should think about important stuff and we are doing it. But for the moment Italian pride for Sorrentino and #LaGrandeBellezza is just what is needed*¹⁸ [06.18am, March, 3 2014]

5.1.6 Humour

10% of Renzi's tweets were considered humorous, categorised as impression management technique since they are connected with the intention to appear likeable. As affirmed by Bellacci, «he does not think about his political role when tweeting, so he

¹⁶ @matteorenzi: "Il #def mantiene tutti gli impegni che ci eravamo presi #allafacciadeigufi Inizia a pagare chi non ha mai pagato. Si #CambiaVerso #80euro"

¹⁷ @matteorenzi: "Expo: chi ha sbagliato paghi. Ma ci sono in ballo migliaia di posti di lavoro. Si fermano i ladri, non si fermano i lavori. #italiariparte"

¹⁸ @matteorenzi: "In qs ore dobbiamo pensare ad altro e lo stiamo facendo. Ma il momento orgoglio italiano per Sorrentino e #LaGrandeBellezza ci sta tutto"

can sometimes come up with funny hashtags or expressions (...), but this is something that can be done. He wants to reach people on Twitter, and they do not need the institutional, serious talk of an old politician from the XVIII century that one would expect from people with official roles.» In particular, the relationship with his spokesman, Filippo Sensi (@nomfup)¹⁹, contributes to the impression of a “down to earth” politician through jokes and retweeted comments (Grandi & Tallei, 2014; Barile, 2014a). One example is the retweet posted on 25th July after the third tweet of the day attacking the opposition about institutional reforms, where the spokesman ironically supplicated someone to deprive Renzi of Twitter access. Also, Renzi is able to make fun of his own typing errors, replying with humour instead of trying to delete them.

*@matteorenzi: August newspapers are full of secret governmental projects. So secret that not even the Government knows them #itdoesnotexist*²⁰ [19 August 2014]

*@matteorenzi: Working day on papers and documents. I haven't study so hard since high school. But it's good, really good. It's exactly #therighttime*²¹ [15 April 2014]

*@matteorenzi: RT @nomfup: Ok, ok, now take Twitter away from him, please #workstuff*²² [25 July 2014]

*@matteorenzi: Great impressions from the first working day in Sidney. Today data show export as a core issue. Tomorrow working at #Chigi*²³ [08.17pm, 17 November 2014]

*@matteorenzi: I made a mistake. It's Sydney. Obviously @nomfup caught me immediately... #bluemistake*²⁴ [08.25pm, 17 November 2014]

¹⁹ Filippo Sensi has been appointed spokesman of Matteo Renzi and press office manager of Democratic Party in January 2014. Previously, he has been vice director of the newspaper Europa, and he is known on Twitter as @nomfup, from his blog *Not my Fucking Problem* about political communication.

²⁰ @matteorenzi: “I giornali di agosto sono pieni di progetti segreti del Governo. Talmente segreti che non li conosce nemmeno il Governo #non esiste #maddeche”

²¹ @matteorenzi: “Giornata di lavoro su carte e documenti. Era dai tempi del liceo che non studiavo così tanto. Ma bene, molto bene. È proprio #lavoltabuona”

²² @matteorenzi: “RT @nomfup, Ok, ok, ora levategli Twitter, per favore #cosedilavoro”

²³ @matteorenzi: “Ottimo le impressioni della giornata di lavoro a Sidney. Anche i dati di oggi confermano che export è centrale. Domani al lavoro a #Chigi”

However, even if minor mistakes may be manipulated to the advantage of the PM, some other misuses of the platform may end up with potentially damaging consequences. Two tweets not collected in the data because they were deleted after being posted are important for the purposes of this research. The first concerns the appearance of a *selfie* of the Prime Minister with a weary expression after a long day of work, with “I” as a unique tagline (see Figure 5.5). The picture was immediately deleted and followed neither by an ironic comment of the PM nor by any official declaration by the Presidency, but many users and newspapers were able to reproduce it, generating a buzz of ironic hypothesis regarding its reason. The second misuse happened when a provocative tweet regarding the football match Udinese-Roma appeared on the timeline of the PM for few minutes. This time, the removal of the tweet was followed by an official note from the Office of the Prime Minister in which its authorship was attributed to Franco Bellacci, who happened to be using Matteo Renzi’s account.



Figure 5.5: Matteo Renzi's selfie on 7 September 2014

²⁴ @matteorenzi: “Ho sbagliato. Si scrive Sydney. Ovviamente @nomfup mi ha sgamato subito... #erroreblu”

*@matteorenzi: @user1 talking about theft is distortion of reality @user2 @user3 @user4 @user5*²⁵ [6 January 2015]

The difference in the approaches may not only be the result of a change in management in the communication team at the Office of the PM that took place in between. In fact, the first can be considered a miscalculation, or maybe an excess in informality, by the Prime Minister, thus spreading an official communication or referring back to it even with humorous comments by the leader would only have given more visibility to it. In this way, the episode was (almost) forgotten after a couple of days and the major national newspapers did not report the news. In the second case, probably also because the tweet was mentioning other users and replying to the former spokesman of Renzi when he was Mayor of Florence, an official communication was the channel considered less damaging. According to Roberta Maggio, «dynamics on Twitter are aggressive», thus the official clarification of the episode was also useful to reply to hypotheses that Renzi's account could be managed by others rather than him.

Humour on Twitter is also a good way of replying to politicians (Grandi & Tallei, 2014), as showed in the discussion with Giorgia Meloni, politician of the opposing party Forza Italia, who replied to a tweet of the Prime Minister supporting the new electoral law, the Italicum (20 February 2015). Here it is also possible to highlight the use of personal pronouns “we” and “you” to emphasise the opposition and the distance between the two politicians. At the same time, in the last tweet the Prime Minister repeated what Giorgia Meloni had stated, almost mocking her but also reinforcing his message. At the end, he closed the tweet with humour adding a smiling emoticon and calling her by her first name. The use of emoticons by Renzi is not casual, but it symbolizes leader's familiarity with the technological tool and its conventions, showing a self-confidence that may be easily transferred in the mind of readers from the person to the topic of the debate (Zappavigna, 2012).

*@matteorenzi: With Italicum preferences on selections and individual local candidates. Blocked lists disappear. Second ballot is anti fraud guarantee #therighttime*²⁶

²⁵ @matteorenzi: “@user1 parlare di furto è stravolgimento della realtà @user2 @user3 @user4 @user5”

@GiorgiaMeloni: *@matteorenzi with blocked nominators 2/3 of candidates will still be selected by parties. You know that well, tell the truth sometime.*²⁷

@matteorenzi: *@GiorgiaMeloni our law is based on preferences and local candidates. It deletes the blocked lists voted by you, do you remember?*²⁸

@GiorgiaMeloni: *@matteorenzi I never voted for blocked list. You did: your proposition let parties chose 70% of deputies. The rest is chitchat*²⁹

@matteorenzi: *@GiorgiaMeloni I never voted for blocked lists. I was never elected with blocked lists. A late, but appreciated conversion. :-) Bye Giorgia!*³⁰

The previous was the only actual interaction with an opposing politician found in the data collected. On the other hand, relations with another opposing party, the Five Star Movement, happened through tweets that looked more like mini press releases, both because of the absence of direct mentions and because immediately replicated with big hype in traditional mass media. For example, Twitter has been used to wish good luck with humour to Roberto Casaleggio, founder of the Five Star Movement, when he was undergoing a serious clinical operation, and to counterattack several statements by Beppe Grillo, leader of the party, accustomed to aggressive and not politically correct verbal assaults. In this case, the use of humour by the Prime Minister not only avoided the so-called *flame wars* between the two politicians, softening the tension and showing the absence of worries about political attacks, but was also able to gain many retweets because of the ironic tone, considered the most suitable on the micro-blogging platform (Bentivegna, 2014; Giansante, 2014).

@matteorenzi: *A sincere good luck wish to Roberto Casaleggio. Really, from the heart. We wait for him to be in shape to be... in disagreement with him again!*³¹ [8 April 2014]

²⁶ @matteorenzi: “Con Italicum preferenze e singoli candidati di collegio. Spariscono le liste bloccate. Ballottaggio è garanzia anti inciucio #lavoltabuona”

²⁷ @GiorgiaMeloni: ”@matteorenzi con i capilista bloccati 2/3 dei deputati saranno ancora nominati dai partiti. Lo sai benissimo, ogni tanto racconta la verità.”

²⁸ @matteorenzi: “@giorgiameloni nostra legge si basa su preferenze e candidati di collegio. Cancella le liste bloccate che avevate votato voi, ricordi?”

²⁹ @GiorgiaMeloni: ”@matteorenzi mai votato liste bloccate, io. Tu si: la tua proposta fa nominare dai partiti il 70% dei deputati. Il resto sono chiacchiere.”

³⁰ @matteorenzi: “@giorgiameloni mai votato liste bloccate, io. Mai eletto in liste bloccate, io. Conversione tardiva la tua, ma apprezzata :-) ciao Giorgia!”

*@matteorenzi: Reforms: Grillo says that ours is a coup d'etat. Dear Beppe: it's a sun. Yours is a sunstroke! #noalibi #itssun*³² [In Italian there is a pun between the words *colpo di stato* (“coup d’etat”) and *colpo di sole* (“sunstroke”)] [25 July 2014]

5.1.7 Party Branding

Matteo Renzi being not only the Italian Prime Minister, but also the Secretary of the Democratic Party, a high number of tweets promoting his party would be expected. However, these kind of tweets accounted only for 12% of the total, and actually were perfectly in line with Matteo Renzi’s general communication strategy, which has never been particularly focused on the party itself (Grandi & Tallei, 2014). In fact, a large amount of party tweets were found to be retweets of partisan politicians with the aim to support government policies or communicate delivery, while another large portion was related to the events and activities organized during the 2014 European and regional electoral campaign. As stated by Bellacci, «obviously there have been retweets of party activities, but it was to the extent to which Twitter is a mere communication tool», confirming previous research which sees politicians as less likely to highlight party affiliations in candidate-centred systems (Stayner, 2008). However, it is interesting to analyse some pictures and tweets posted during the electoral campaign.

@matteorenzi: 25th of May we #changedirection. @pdnetwork retakes the square. #inthesquare (See Figure 5.6) [17 May 2014]

@matteorenzi: When I feel so much hope as in Bergamo today, I realise we have a big responsibility #Italyrestarts (See Figure 5.7) [20 May 2014]

*@matteorenzi: In the square in Naples where others justified whistles, we sang the Mameli anthem, all together #Italyrestarts*³³ [19 May 2014]

³¹ @matteorenzi: “Un sincero in bocca al lupo a Roberto Casaleggio. Davvero, di cuore. Lo aspettiamo in forma per tornare a essere... in disaccordo con lui!”

³² @matteorenzi: “Riforme: dice Grillo che il nostro è un colpo di stato. Caro Beppe: si dice sole. Il tuo è un colpo di sole! #noalibi #sidicesole”

³³ @matteorenzi: “Nella piazza di Napoli in cui altri avevano giustificato i fischi, noi abbiamo cantato l’Inno di Mameli, tutti insieme #italiariparte”



Figure 5.6: Matteo Renzi's tweet on 17 May 2014



Figure 5.7: Matteo Renzi's tweet on 20 May 2014

Both through the language and the selection of pictures, followers received a sense of belonging and proximity between the leader and citizens, thus establishing common vision and common intents. Institutional communication was accustomed to represent politicians during official meetings, when talking to an audience or performing political duties (Giansante, 2014), while Renzi's Twitter profile is full of pictures in which the focus is not the politician, but rather his close relationship with constituents. In addition, while other tweets may be directed to a wider audience not necessarily supporting the leader, these kind of tweets were focused primarily on

currying favour with the existing supporters of the party (Frame & Brachotte, 2014), which might be internally divided because of Renzi's actions and ideas. Also, by thanking or mentioning other partisan politicians he associated himself with the whole political "family", trying to minimise the rift within the Democratic Party, as when Renzi thanked Pierluigi Bersani for being present in the Parliament to give a confidence vote for his government.

*@matteorenzi: Thanks to @pbersani for being in Parliament today. An action not taken for granted, for me particularly important. Thanks*³⁴ [26 February 2014]

*@matteorenzi: A memorable result. Touched and resolute now at work for an Italy that could change Europe. Thanks #onebyone @pdnetwork #withoutfear*³⁵ [26 May 2014]

5.2 Political Public Relations on Twitter

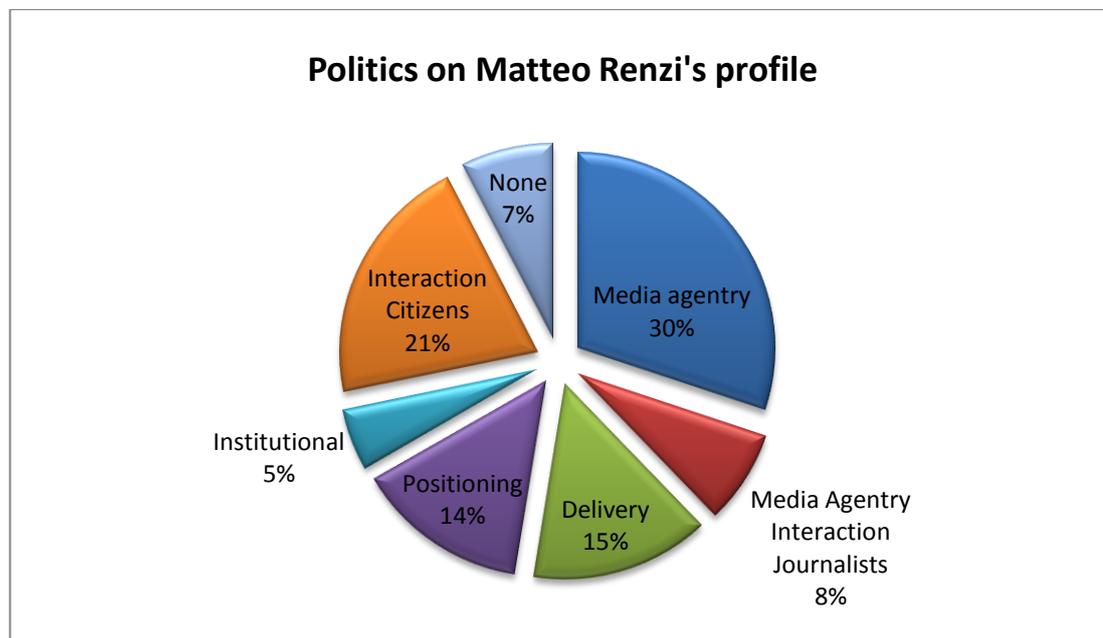


Figure 5.8: Political functions of tweets on Matteo Renzi's profile on Twitter [21 February 2014 - 21 February 2015]

³⁴ @matteorenzi: "Grazie a @pbersani per essere in aula oggi. Un gesto non scontato, per me particolarmente importante. Grazie"

³⁵ @matteorenzi: "Un risultato storico. Commosso e determinato adesso al lavoro per un'Italia che cambi l'Europa. Grazie #unoxuno. @pdnetwork #senzapaura"

The second phase of the research was focused on identifying political PR purposes fulfilled on Twitter by Matteo Renzi. As the majority of his colleagues (Gainous & Wagner, 2013), the Prime Minister mainly used his Twitter account as a digital press office, with 38% of total tweets designed for this purpose. Collaborators of the PM described this tendency as a reaction to the new dynamics of the media system: as Maggio stated, «the fact that the tweets of the PM became a source for traditional media is a sort of natural process». Bellacci added that «maybe years ago some journalists would have complained of knowing things through Twitter instead of press offices, but nowadays it is a well-established practice». The second main function found was the interaction with citizens, accounting for 21% of the total, followed by 15% of tweets communicating delivery and 14% positioning the leader on policy or political issues. Institutional occasions were the subject of only 5% of tweets, while 7% of them were reported not to contain political tone.

5.2.1 Media Agency

When applying tasks on Twitter usually fulfilled by a traditional press office, it is essential to adapt the messages to the new standards. Exploiting the possibilities of integrated communication, Matteo Renzi integrated links to and videos of his interviews or speeches with summaries of his words tailored to 140 characters. Besides being more likely to be noticed and shared, since single links do not draw the attention of online users (Giansante, 2014), these punch-lines were easily quoted by journalists in headlines and articles, influencing media coverage at a greater extent than what is possible with traditional press releases (Frame & Brachotte, 2014). It is important to underline here that these summaries were different from the practice of *live tweeting*, that has not been found in Renzi's profile because it would be incoherent with his intention to manage the account personally. Instead, this practice has been used by @Palazzo_Chigi profile, as in the case of the first press conference of Matteo Renzi as PM (Di Cuia, 2014).

@matteorenzi: #Genova I asked to IIT researchers not to become complacent. They are really good, but we want Italy to win the Nobel Prize again³⁶ [from a speech at Italian Institute of Technology][8 May 2014]

@matteorenzi: The time of postponements, of technical tables, of working groups is over. Now it's time to decide. #therighttime³⁷ [from a TV interview][11 November 2014]

@matteorenzi: Years of talking about Italy on talk shows portrays us as a doomed country. It's not like this. But we need effort and courage to restart @rtl1025³⁸ [from a radio interview][20 November 2014]

Mainly, media agency tweets were focused on sharing information, knowing that the profile of the PM may become an important source not only for media but also for citizens, such as during national accidents. For example, during the tragedy of the Norman Atlantic ferry that caught on fire in the Mediterranean Sea on 28th December 2014, Renzi's tweets helped channel the retrieval of information on official governmental websites. Roberta Maggio said that «it would be possible to issue a press release and spread it to the agencies, but on that occasion the aim was to inform families and relatives as soon as possible. The quickest way was Twitter, not institutional communication». A similar situation happened after the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo. As Maggio said, «the PM told everyone through Twitter that he would be in Paris for the march, there was no press release to the agencies. It is clear that the communication becomes less formal, but it is surely the quickest and most honest way rather than overstating the message with a press release».

@matteorenzi: Official updates every hour on institutional websites. Helicopter was able to collect the first passengers #NormanAtlantic³⁹ [28 December 2014]

³⁶ @matteorenzi: “#Genova Ai ricercatori dell'IIT ho chiesto di non accontentarsi. Loro sono bravissimi, ma vogliamo un'Italia che torni a vincere i Nobel”

³⁷ @matteorenzi: “Il tempo dei rinvii, dei tavoli tecnici, dei gruppi di lavoro è finito. Ora è tempo di decidere #lavoltabuona”

³⁸ @matteorenzi: “Anni di racconti dell'Italia nei talk Tv ci dipingono come paese finito. Non è così. Ma servono fatica e coraggio x ripartire @rtl1025”

³⁹ @matteorenzi: “Gli aggiornamenti ufficiali proseguono ogni ora su siti istituzionali. Elicottero è riuscito a prelevare primi passeggeri. #NormanAtlantic”

*@matteorenzi: On Sunday I will be with @fhollande in Paris #JeSuisCharlie We'll not let the fear change us #Europe*⁴⁰ [tweet written partly in French][9 January 2014]

A particular interesting reflection about the communication of some specific humanitarian cases that happened in Italy during the last year, may be extracted from the analysis of data. These are respectively 1) the break-through in a difficult situation with the Republic of Congo, which allowed Italian couples to be rejoined with Congolese children they had been trying to adopt for six months, 2) the release of Federico Motka, an Italian-Swiss charity worker kidnapped in Syria in 2013 (both happened at the end of May 2014) and 3) the release of Greta Ramelli and Vanessa Marzullo, volunteers also kept captive in Syria for six months, which occurred in January 2015. The first two were announced by tweets on Matteo Renzi's profile, who was the first to disseminate the news and make it official. The last case, however, was not mentioned on the account of PM, but on the official channel of the Office of the Prime Minister.

*@matteorenzi: I just gave the green light: a plane from the Italian Republic departs for Congo to bring back children detained for months #athome*⁴¹ [26 May 2014]

*@matteorenzi: I just communicated to Giovanna Motka that her son, kidnapped for more than one year, is coming back and will be in Italy tomorrow #athome*⁴² [26 May 2014]

*@Palazzo_Chigi: Greta Ramelli and Vanessa Marzullo are free, they will come back to Italy soon*⁴³ [15 January 2015]

As already underlined in the case of misuses of the platform, these changes in communication may denote an adjustment in the PR strategy of the Office of the PM. In the first two cases it is evident that the use of the singular pronoun "I" seemed to

⁴⁰ @matteorenzi: "Dimanche je serais avec @fhollande a Paris #JeSuisCharlie Non permetteremo alla paura di cambiarci #Europa"

⁴¹ @matteorenzi: "Ho appena dato il via libera: un aereo della Repubblica italiana parte per il Congo per riportare i bambini adottati bloccati da mesi #acasa"

⁴² @matteorenzi: "Ho appena comunicato a Giovanna Motka che suo figlio Federico, sequestrato da oltre un anno, sta rientrando e sarà in Italia domani #acasa"

⁴³ @Palazzo_Chigi: "Greta Ramelli e Vanessa Marzullo sono libere, torneranno presto in Italia"

emphasise the role of the PM as one of the first person responsible for the positive end of negotiations. However; the reactions to the way these cases have been disclosed through pictures and articles were not positive, giving rise to comments about a suspected PR hype. Thus, probably also to prevent backfiring, the subsequent liberation of the two volunteers that happened in January 2015 was made official by a tweet of the Office of the Prime Minister, rather than by Matteo Renzi. It is useful to underline, as well, that the tweet appeared after sources close to Al-Jazeera disclosed the news, thus also in that case speed was essential and made Twitter preferable over a press release.

The immediacy of the platform was also used by Matteo Renzi to refute statements from other politicians and to stop untrue rumours replying directly to accounts of journalists or news media sharing articles with unverified news. Recipients of these tweets seemed to be journalists and not people Renzi pretended to interact with: for example, when Beppe Grillo accused Matteo Renzi of using a state plane to go on vacation with the family, statements of both politicians were written on their Twitter profiles without any direct mention, confirming the idea that political debates are used to gain media coverage (Bentivegna, 2014). It is also interesting to note the difference in tone between this reply and the one about reforms earlier mentioned. While humour was functional for mere verbal political attacks, in this case the accusation was framed according to Grillo's intentions, thus it was necessary to re-establish a favourable frame. Inserting "#rules" as hashtag allowed the PM to reinforce his leadership and restate his moral values to back up his reply.

@wireditalia: Let's try to better understand the education reform of Renzi's Government, among lights and shadows <http://ow.ly/AMxRI> ⁴⁴

@matteorenzi: @wireditalia Surely! But shouldn't you wait until we present the reform? We still didn't present anything. Good luck with your work :-) ⁴⁵ [28 August 2014]

⁴⁴ @wireditalia: "Cerchiamo di capire un po' meglio la riforma della scuola del Governo Renzi, tra luci e ombre"

⁴⁵ @matteorenzi: "@wireditalia volentieri! Ma magari prima aspettate che presentiamo la riforma, no? Ancora non abbiamo presentato nulla. Buon lavoro :-)"

*@matteorenzi: Yesterday they were saying we were kids, now we are a strong power. They fear us because they understood this is #therighttime*⁴⁶ [in reply to an opinion article by the Director of LaRepubblica][3 November 2014]

*@matteorenzi: Travelling by plane, sleeping in barracks, having bodyguards, living at Chigi are not choices, but consequences of security protocols. #rules*⁴⁷ [3 January 2015]

Research shows that journalists are more interested in daily chats than policy stances (Ekman & Widholm, 2015; Frame & Brachotte, 2014; Parmelee, 2014), thus direct interactions with Twitter celebrities and mentions of famous people not active on the platform become ways of attracting media coverage. Examples of the first behaviour may be found in Renzi's replies to a famous journalist, Vittorio Zucconi, trying to instil hope and confidence in his followers, and to an Italian pop singer, J-Ax, showing humour and self-irony. The last, in particular, was not only a way to demonstrate congeniality with contemporary Italian artists, but also a reaffirmation of that pop culture Renzi claims to be a member of (Grandi & Tallei, 2014). On the other hand, in the second instance, politicians often endorse people not active on Twitter to express wishes and show support, such as when Renzi mentioned both the previous and current Presidents of the Italian Republic, and politicians of his own party without letting real interaction happen on the platform.

*@vittoriozucconi: What should I say to a great Italian surgeon living in USA, asking me for advice about an offer to come back and work in Italy? Go? Stay?*⁴⁸

*@matteorenzi: @vittoriozucconi tell him to come back. This is really #therighttime*⁴⁹ [27 January 2015]

*@jaxofficial: Today I'm sorting out the pictures on Facebook. I'm basically spending the afternoon as the assistant of Renzi.*⁵⁰

⁴⁶ @matteorenzi: "Ieri dicevano che eravamo ragazzini, oggi che siamo poteri forti. Facciamo paura, perché hanno capito che questa è #lavoltabuona"

⁴⁷ @matteorenzi: "Gli spostamenti aerei, dormire in caserma, avere la scorta, abitare a Chigi non sono scelte ma frutto di protocolli di sicurezza #regole"

⁴⁸ @vittoriozucconi: "Che devo dire a un grande chirurgo italiano negli Usa, che mi chiede consiglio su un'offerta per tornare a operare Italia? Vai? Stai?"

⁴⁹ @matteorenzi: "@vittoriozucconi digli di tornare. Questa è davvero #lavoltabuona"

@matteorenzi: @jaxofficial *That would be good! I would need Photoshop more than an assistant. But it is... the beauty of being ugly*⁵¹ [”Il bello di essere brutti” or “The beauty of being ugly” is the title of the last album of J-Ax][16 January 2015]

@matteorenzi: *Nine years of service, authority, responsibility. A President to whom we today can only say #thanksGiorgio #letsputaloureffortsinit*⁵² [31 December 2014]

@matteorenzi: *Good luck with your work, President Mattarella! Long Live Italy!*⁵³ [31 January 2015]

Another important aspect to be considered is the relation between politicians and journalists, which has become faster and more informal, allowing journalists to reach the minister directly without relying on press offices. In this regard, the very first tweet written when Matteo Renzi was having a meeting with the President of the Republic about his next government, marked a change in the institutional communication in Italy. Maggio said: «we associates and all the journalists were waiting outside the office, wondering because it was taking longer than expected, and then Renzi tweeted “I’m coming, I’m coming”. Already with that tweet it was possible to imagine that he would have turned the institutional communication upside down. The PM acted as an accelerator of the transformations currently underway, brought on by the new technological communication tools, changing the institutional communication [also in Italy], so that nowadays the most important thing is speed, and not the official or institutional format.»

@matteorenzi: *I’m coming, I’m coming! #therighttime*⁵⁴ [21 February 2014]

⁵⁰ @jaxofficial: “Oggi rimetto a posto le foto su FB. Praticamente passo il pomeriggio come l’assistente di Renzi.”

⁵¹ @matteorenzi: “@jaxofficial Magari! A me servirebbe Photoshop, più che l’assistente. Ma è... il bello di essere brutti”

⁵² @matteorenzi: “Nove anni di servizio, autorevolezza, responsabilità. Un Presidente cui oggi possiamo solo dire #graziegiorgio #mettiamocelatutta”

⁵³ @matteorenzi: “Buon lavoro, Presidente Mattarella! Viva l’Italia”

⁵⁴ @matteorenzi: “Arrivo, arrivo! #lavoltabuona”

@fbrancoli: #matteorisponde @matteorenzi two hours ago the Pope answered #Lucchini workers in #Piombino. Do you want to say something about their future?⁵⁵

@matteorenzi: @fbrancoli I think that today we sign the agreement protocol about the future of Piombino with ministers and the President of the Region of Tuscany⁵⁶ [23 April 2014]

@sonolucadini: @matteorenzi Only 16 ministers but many undersecretaries, some controversial ones. "All passionately together" or "300"? #twit-intervista⁵⁷

@matteorenzi: @sonolucadini 300, even if it ends badly. But they are only 43, one of the "lightest" governments in Republican history #twitintervista⁵⁸ [4 March 2014]

Finally, the last function media agency tweets appeared to fulfil was to display the leader's agenda. Even though such tweets may be considered to be aimed at again enhancing the idea of a hardworking leader, it is important to bear in mind that the grammar and the structure of Twitter actually require these kind of "location tweets", stimulating users to share them without necessarily consciously thinking about self-promotion (Zappavigna, 2012). However, simple location tweets shared by politicians may be of little use and sometimes also counter-productive, since they do not deepen the image of the leader and do not give rise to interactions with followers (Giansante, 2014). Nevertheless, Matteo Renzi's location tweets also staged personal opinions, evaluation statements or in any case more information than just stating his destinations. This allowed him to fill tweets with political values and enhance the possibilities that they would be shared by his followers and generate more interactions.

⁵⁵ @fbrancoli: "#matteorisponde @matteorenzi due ore fa il Papa ha risposto agli operai #Lucchini di #Piombino. Tu vuoi dire qualcosa sul loro futuro?"

⁵⁶ @matteorenzi: "@fbrancoli Credo che proprio oggi firmiamo il protocollo d'intesa sul futuro di Piombino con ministri e presidente Regione Toscana"

⁵⁷ @sonolucadini: "@matteorenzi Solo 16 ministri ma tanti sottosegretari, qualcuno discusso. "Tutti insieme appassionatamente" o "300"? #twitintervista"

⁵⁸ @matteorenzi: "@sonolucadini 300, anche se va a finire male. Ma sono solo 43, uno dei governo più light della storia repubblicana #twitintervista"

*@matteorenzi: This morning meetings about Stability, post offices, decrees. Then departure for Ankara and Istanbul. Priority for our companies and situation Libya #goodmorning*⁵⁹ [11 December 2014]

*@matteorenzi: Italy has many problems, but also many beautiful stories. I don't close myself up in palaces, but I go to listen to them, as usual #south*⁶⁰ [28 November 2014]

5.2.2 Delivery

Tweets communicating delivery accounted for 15% of the total and their purpose seemed to be twofold. On the one hand, as self-promotion tweets they reinforced the idea of a competent and hardworking leader, while at the same time differentiating him from other previous politicians (Grandi & Tallei, 2014; Barile, 2014a). On the other hand, Matteo Renzi being a non-elected representative needing citizen legitimisation, they kept the constituency updated on political affairs by showing in a simplified manner what has been accomplished in Parliament. The pictures used in these tweets rarely showed Renzi from an observer perspective, while usually focusing on documents and paperwork, appearing as regular pictures that any social media user could take. They helped reinforce the image of Matteo Renzi as “one of us”, as well as ingratiation tweets. Such elements of the communication are part of the low-fidelity language, which is focused on giving authenticity to political discourse by showing the most common and imperfect aspects of political affairs (Barile, 2014a).

*@matteorenzi: Constitution, electoral law, treasury, civil justice, public administration, culture-school-Rai, GreenAct, jobs. We are serious about it, it will be a #Happy2015*⁶¹ [2 January 2015]

@matteorenzi: Working on the third sector, ILVA, administrative simplification, one thousand days #PalazzoChigi #therighttime (See Figure 5.9) [8 July 2014]

⁵⁹ @matteorenzi: “Stamani riunioni su Stabilità, poste, decreti. Poi partenza per Ankara e Istanbul. Priorità a nostre aziende e situazione Libia #buongiorno”

⁶⁰ @matteorenzi: “Italia ha tanti problemi, ma anche tante storie bellissime. Non mi faccio chiudere nei palazzi e vado ad ascoltarle, come sempre #sud”

⁶¹ @matteorenzi: “Costituzione, legge elettorale, fisco, giustizia civile, PA, cultura-scuola-Rai, GreenAct, lavoro. Facciamo sul serio, sarà un #Buon2015”



Figure 5.9: Matteo Renzi's tweet on 8 July 2014

@matteorenzi: I am back at #palazzochigi. We started to sort the 5.000 letters from Mayors about schools #therightturningpoint <http://t.co/KmI0iQIJ4h> (See Figure 5.10) [21 March 2014]

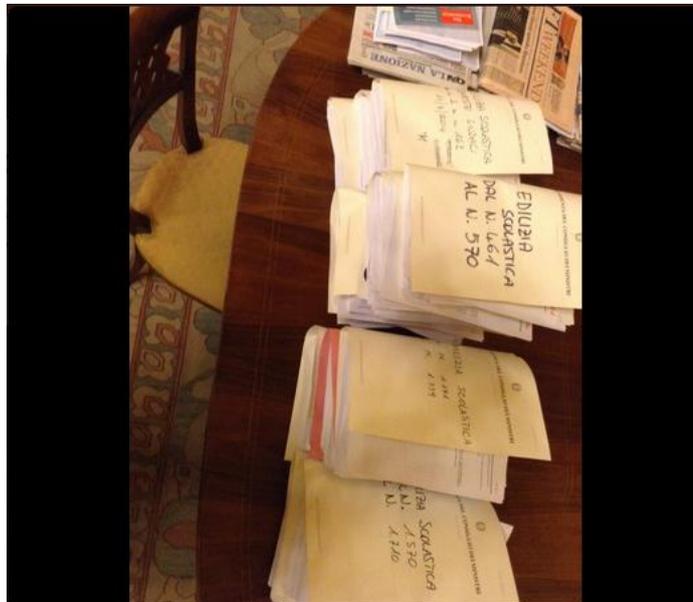


Figure 5.10: Matteo Renzi's tweet on 21 March 2014

However, the majority of delivery tweets, and also the more interesting, were those keeping the rhythm of the progresses of several acts of Parliament and displaying moments in which the PM's signature gave validity to the laws approved. Introduced during his Mayor period, when he was keeping citizenry updated with practical accomplishments of his town council, from a rhetorical perspective this kind of tweets accounted for the *logos*, the logical reasoning able to influence audience through facts and actions (Di Pietro, 2010). Such an approach to the communication of delivery may represent a positive practice in political public relations. In fact, digital technologies may be used to shorten the distance between politicians and citizens not only displaying personal details giving aid to the personalisation of politics, but also assessing functionality and rationality behind political decisions (Johnson, 2012). In addition, those tweets simulate proximity allowing the common constituent to enter the "halls of power" from a privileged point of view (Parapini, 2014).

@matteorenzi: At Palazzo Chigi the signature of the agreement Fincantieri MSC. More than 2.3 billion euros in jobs #Italyrestarts <http://t.co/dSqEsxH9rI>
(See Figure 5.11) [22 May 2014]



Figure 5.11: Matteo Renzi's tweet on 22 May 2014

@matteorenzi: Furthermore, the electoral law has been approved by the Senate too. Courage pays off, the reforms go on. #therighttime ⁶² [27 January 2015]

@matteorenzi: The signing of an essential law, postponed for years, but now reality #jobsact <http://t.co/BQrh4EHHDG> (See Figure 5.12) [4 December 2014]

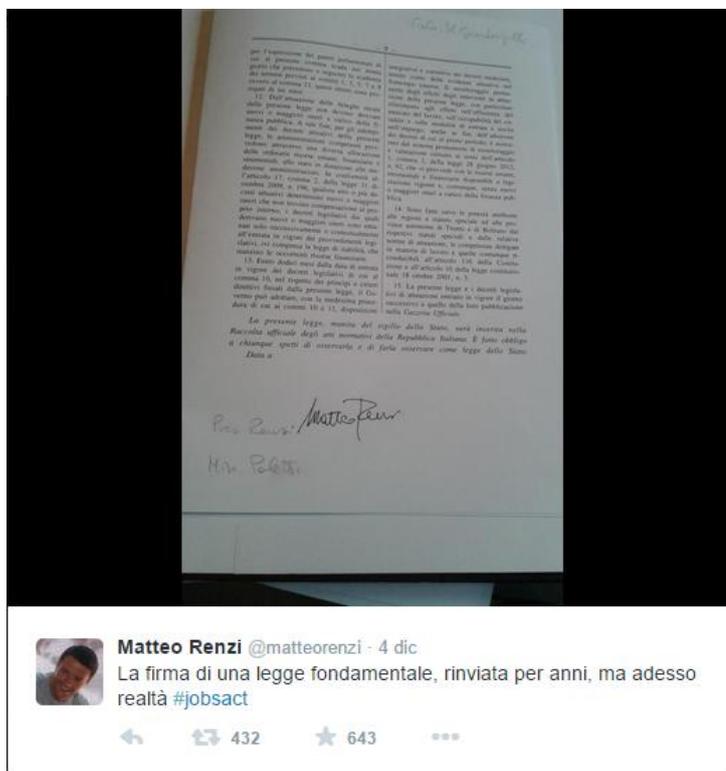


Figure 5.12: Matteo Renzi's tweet on 4 December 2014

5.2.3 Positioning

14% of Matteo Renzi's tweets were position-taking on policy or political issues: they mainly justified his political activity and explained his individual political stances besides also promoting the party line. Policy position taking tweets were more likely to state practical information and data to justify policies than political tweets, but only 1 out of 55 actually included an outward link. Therefore, Renzi's will to maintain his profile less informative than the official channel did not let him take advantage of the opportunities of the platform to reinforce his discourse with more details (Johnson, 2012). On the other hand, despite being easily replicated by traditional

⁶² @matteorenzi: "E due. Legge elettorale approvata anche al Senato. Il coraggio paga, le riforme vanno avanti. #lavoltabuona"

mass media, tweets referring to political stances were distinguished from media agency tweets because of their use of rhetorical language, addressing citizens rather than journalists. Thus, in this case too, humorous tweets and the already discussed juxtaposition of “we” and “they” in agonism aimed at highlighting the ethical values of the PM, portraying him as focused on “getting things done” rather than debating political issues with the opposition.

*@matteorenzi: The unemployment is at 12,9%. Unbelievable data, the highest in 35 years. This is why the first action will be JobsAct #therighttime*⁶³ [28 February 2014]

*@matteorenzi: Out of 50 thousand people in jail, only 257 are there for corruption. This is not serious. Outrage is not enough: harder rules tomorrow in council of ministers. #goodmorning*⁶⁴ [11 December 2014]

*@matteorenzi: It's been years since politicians made any reform. We listen to everyone, but do not let anyone blackmail us. Let's go on! This is #therighttime*⁶⁵ [13 February 2015]

5.2.4 Institutional Affairs

A minor part of tweets (4%) were statements about institutional occasions, such as remembrance days and national anniversaries, and about national or international tragedies. Contrary to the humanitarian cases previously analysed, in these situations his elevated role as representative of the State required his intervention, thus the channel preferred for these statements was his personal account rather than the more official but featureless channel of the Office of the Prime Minister. It was in these cases, as well as in a number of video messages spread during the year, that his storyteller capacities came to play, as Bellacci confirmed. The language used on these occasions was solemn and aimed at generating solidarity. For example, as on other occasions, the use of first names to directly address victims was not only a way to

⁶³ @matteorenzi: “La disoccupazione è al 12,9%. Cifra allucinante, la più alta da 35 anni. Ecco perché il primo provvedimento sarà il JobsAct #lavoltabuona”

⁶⁴ @matteorenzi: “Su 50mila carcerati, solo 257 per corruzione. Non è serio. Non basta lo sdegno: regole più dure domani in consiglio ministri #buongiorno”

⁶⁵ @matteorenzi: “Da anni la politica non fa le riforme. Noi Ascoltiamo tutti, ma non ci facciamo ricattare da nessuno. Avanti. Questa è #lavoltabuona”

narrate the story behind those anniversaries, but also to emphasize the proximity of the Prime Minister to the sorrow of the relatives and the people involved (Sorning, 1989; Barile, 2014a).

@matteorenzi: #23May thinking about Vito, Rocco, Antonio. About Francesca. About him, Giovanni, who taught us students to fight the Mafia. #Idontforget⁶⁶
[23 May 2014]

@matteorenzi: Marco, son of a gold medal Alpine, Luca, veteran and future husband. Cristiano, who went to Russia. Hope and pride: the Italy of Alpine troopers is beautiful.⁶⁷ [11 May 2014]

5.2.5 Interaction with citizens

As already outlined at the beginning of the chapter, the level of interaction with citizens in Matteo Renzi's profile, accounting for 21% of total tweets, has been found to be particularly high compared to some previous research on politicians (Goldbeck et al., 2010; Antenore, 2012; Bentivegna, 2014). In the majority of these tweets, Matteo Renzi explained politics and his stances on them, basically enlarging the function already fulfilled by positioning tweets. However; these kinds of tweets have been more easily found in the group of interactions that happened during #matteorisponde, where they have also been integrated with a detailed speech given at the same time streaming on YouTube. This may lead to the conclusion that such discourses about policies are too complex to be dealt with on Twitter, in the short space of 140 characters (Grandi & Tallei, 2014). In fact, some tweets during #matteorisponde simply suggested to watch the stream for the reply, instead of answering the questions of his followers directly on Twitter.

@user1: What about black rents at unreasonable prices? #matteorisponde
@matteorenzi⁶⁸
@matteorenzi: @user1 I made examples by word of mouth to show how technological innovation could help fight tax evasion⁶⁹ [23 April 2014]

⁶⁶ @matteorenzi: “#23maggio pensando a Vito, Rocco, Antonio. A Francesca. A lui, Giovanni, che educava noi studenti a combattere la mafia. #ionondimentico”

⁶⁷ @matteorenzi: “Marco figlio di medaglia d'oro. Luca reduce e futuro sposo. Cristiano, che fece la Russia. Speranza e orgoglio: bella l'Italia degli alpini.”

⁶⁸ @user1: “Gli Affitti in Nero a prezzi assurdi? #matteorisponde @matteorenzi”

@user2: #matteorisponde Hi. I did not understand if the provinces will also be suppressed physically in regards to local boundaries. Thanks⁷⁰

@matteorenzi: @user2 No. We've suppressed politicians from provinces, for now. Then we'll deal with the peripheral offices. I gave an example on SAD [State Accounts Department]⁷¹ [23 April 2014]

@user3: @matteorenzi can you tell me two things you will do to fight the Mafia? #matteorisponde⁷²

@matteorenzi: @user3 We already started with the approval of 416/ter. But the question is bigger: it concerns a culture of legality. I point out the nominee of Cantone.⁷³

@user3: @matteorenzi I am confident. Fighting the Mafia should be the first element in every political programme #matteorisponde⁷⁴ [23 April 2014]

Along with explaining policies, tweets communicating delivery and specifying government resolutions were the majority of interaction tweets, and their presence was the answer of the PM to citizen need for more political participation (Sweetser, 2011). Apart from giving simpler explanations on reforms and legislative decrees, Renzi did not hesitate to display insider news about political activities, specifying timing and schedules for particular issues. Humour has also been used to interact with followers, answering both ironical and sometimes also deliberately provocative questions. Considering the high number of attacks which politicians on social media are exposed to, irony and humour are considered the best solution in order to discourage this kind of *trolls* or to cool down angry constituents without giving way to negative escalations easily traceable by mass media, which could damage the reputation of the politician (Frame & Brachotte, 2014; Giansante, 2014). These re-

⁶⁹ @matteorenzi: “@user1 Ho fatto a voce degli esempi per mostrare come l'innovazione tecnologica possa aiutare la lotta all'evasione”

⁷⁰ @user2: “#matteorisponde Salve. Non ho capito se le province saranno abolite anche fisicamente a livello di confini territoriali. Grazie”

⁷¹ @matteorenzi: “@user2 No. Abbiamo eliminato i politici dalle province, intanto. Poi andremo sugli uffici periferici. Ho fatto esempio sulla RGS”

⁷² @user3: “@matteorenzi mi dici due cose che farai per la lotta alla mafia? #matteorisponde”

⁷³ @matteorenzi: “@user3 Siamo già partiti con l'approvazione del 416/ter. Ma il punto è più ampio: riguarda cultura della legalità. Segnalo nomina Cantone”

⁷⁴ @user3: “@matteorenzi sono fiducioso. La lotta alla mafia deve essere il primo punto di ogni programma politico #matteorisponde”

plies were helpful in order to shorten the distance between the leader and his constituency and increase his likeability, as shown by the positive reactions of citizens.

*@user4: @matteorenzi what about the public administration? Difficult to change!!! Happy Friday dear Matteo*⁷⁵

*@matteorenzi: @user4 I would not say that. We already started. Did you follow the Madia law decree? Now it goes to the Parliament, starting in the Senate.*⁷⁶[29 August 2014]

*@user5: I have to acknowledge your great dynamism, new and unexpected speed in politics. You beat off your opponents. How long will you last? #matteorisponde*⁷⁷

*@matteorenzi: @user4 What do you do, Mario? Bringing bad luck... We will last, we will last...*⁷⁸

@user5: @matteorenzi :D [23 April 2014]

*@user6: @matteorenzi President, but didn't you study at the university?*⁷⁹

*@matteorenzi: @user6 I attended the university as a working student. Thus I attended (and studied) less :-)*⁸⁰

@user6: @matteorenzi Good luck with your job President! :D #therighttime [15 April 2014]⁸¹

Sometimes interaction with citizens may be strategically used to display political tactics in an implicit way. For example, after being officially appointed PM, Matteo Renzi answered a series of questions from followers about the priorities of his government, fulfilling both citizen need for replies and his desire of stating his political agenda. In another case, the PM announced, in an interaction on Twitter, his subsequent provocative reply to the attack from The Economist in August 2014, which showed Matteo Renzi on its cover with an ice-cream on the sinking boat of Eurozone

⁷⁵ @user4: “@matteorenzi È la pubblica amministrazione? Difficile da toccare!!!! Buon venerdì caro Matteo”

⁷⁶ @matteorenzi: “@user4 non direi. Abbiamo già iniziato. Hai seguito il DL madia? Adesso la delega va in aula, partendo dal senato”

⁷⁷ @user5: “Le devo riconoscere grande dinamicità, velocità inattesa e nuova nella politica. Spiazza gli avversari. Quanto può reggere? #matteorisponde”

⁷⁸ @matteorenzi: “@user5 Che fa, Mario? Porta jella... Reggiamo, reggiamo...”

⁷⁹ @user6: “@matteorenzi Presidente, ma allora all'università non studiava?”

⁸⁰ @matteorenzi: “@user6 è che io l'università l'ho fatta da studente lavoratore. Per cui ho frequentato (e studiato) meno :-)”

⁸¹ @user6: “@matteorenzi Buon lavoro Presidente!:D #lavoltabuona”

together with Hollande, Merkel and Draghi (Barile, 2014a). In fact, in an attempt to show a lack of worry about the economic situation of Europe, Matteo Renzi invited journalists to the courtyard of Palazzo Chigi and went out to get a homemade ice-cream from a cart selling them, reminding «our friends at The Economist» that «the real Italian ice-cream is homemade, not pre-packaged» (Carbone, 30/09/2014).

@user7: @matteorenzi the emphasis on method is good. First point: stop omnibus decrees and faster enforcement of decisions?⁸²

@matteorenzi: @user7 I don't know if it's the first, Carlo. But yes, sure. Then everything goes together: parliamentary regulations, constitutional reforms, transparency⁸³ [23 February 2014]

@user8: @matteorenzi and what flavour the ice-cream is it? ⁸⁴

@matteorenzi: @user8 I saw in the picture that it is a pre-packaged one. Which is good, for Heaven's sake! But I prefer the homemade one: cream and lime, thanks⁸⁵ [29 August 2014]

Despite interactions staying frequent, during the year of analysis the practice of #matteorisponde happened only once in April, marking a decrease in the online presence of the PM. An attempt to recover was made when Matteo Renzi announced “five tweets about the most discussed news of the week” instead of a session of #matteorisponde, altering its initial purpose by tweeting statements directed at journalists rather than citizens. As explained by Bellacci, «sometimes when he tweets there are a multitude of replies, (...) but since the PM wishes to answer personally, many people are disappointed or many questions do not receive an answer». The evolution – or better devolution – of such a promising tendency with the increase in political importance of Matteo Renzi can give insights about human and political obstacles to an actual one-to-one interaction with thousands of people so efficiently made possible by social media. After all, the PM also underlined on other occasions

⁸² @user7: ”@matteorenzi bene enfasi sul metodo. Primo punto: stop decreti omnibus e enforcement rapido delle decisioni?”

⁸³ @matteorenzi: ”@user7 non so se è il primo, Carlo. Ma certo sì. Poi tutto si tiene: reg parlamentari, rif cost, trasparenza”

⁸⁴ @user8: “@matteorenzi e il gelato a che gusto?”

⁸⁵ @matteorenzi: “@user8 ho visto che nella foto è confezionato. Che è buono, per carità. Ma io preferisco quello artigianale: crema e limone grazie”

his regret for these shortcomings not only in direct constituency interaction, but also in email correspondence.

*@matteorenzi: Busy day, I can't make a #matteorisponde. But I will write five quick tweets on the five most debated news of the week*⁸⁶ [12 September 2014]

*@matteorenzi: @marcotacci yes, but I am late with the replies. I received 65 thousand emails from 22th February. Quite a lot...*⁸⁷ [15 April 2014]

*@matteorenzi: I am here, I am here. I have been tweeting a bit less these days, but I am here. Now working at #palazzochigi*⁸⁸ [18 March 2014]

⁸⁶ @matteorenzi: “Giornata impegnativa, non riesco a fare un #matteorisponde Ma faccio cinque tweet al volo sulle cinque news più discusse in settimana.”

⁸⁷ @matteorenzi: “@marcotacci si, ma sono indietro sulle risposte. Ho ricevuto 65mila email dal 22 febbraio. Un po' tantine...”

⁸⁸ @matteorenzi: “Ci sono, ci sono. Ho twittato un po' meno in questi giorni, ma ci sono. Ora al lavoro a #palazzochigi”

6 Discussion and practical implications

The aim of this research was to explore the political PR strategy employed by Matteo Renzi on Twitter during his first year as Italian Prime Minister, in order to give practical examples to politicians and public relations practitioners on how to exploit the rhetorical opportunities of this platform. The previous chapter dealt with the analysis of tweets, exploring Renzi's general strategy on two main levels, impression management techniques and political purposes, and interrelating them with rhetorical behaviours according to the subquestions of the research. In this chapter, general findings and practical implications of the research will be outlined, following the four main political PR purposes fulfilled by Matteo Renzi's profile on Twitter: branding, communicating delivery, interaction with citizens and media agency. However, it is essential to state here that every PR strategy has to be tailored to the politician, thus the tasks outlined here are not the only ones that are possible on Twitter. Besides, these specific tactics are suitable during incumbency, while slight changes may occur during election campaigns.

During interviews, a redefinition of the term *strategy* was developed together with participants. Considering the importance given to transparency and authenticity within the platform (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014), it is not surprising that Renzi's collaborators underlined the lack of manipulation and strategic thinking behind the PM's actions, distrusting the existence of «tweets carefully-crafted condensed sound-bites of political wit and genius» (Frame & Brachotte, 2014, p.4). Therefore, *strategy* needs to be understood as a more general idea about PR objectives, target and tone in the mind of politician, according to which he spontaneously tweets. In fact, if the definition of *strategy* is broadened to embrace a series of “dos and don'ts”, successful patterns and mistakes to learn from, it is possible to identify in Renzi's profile gradual improvements which began on 29th September 2013, when he first started tweeting, and led him to a mature use of the platform today (Grandi & Tallei, 2014). From his practical experience it is possible to deduct some insights which may guide strategic public relations in the political Twittersphere.

6.1 Branding on Twitter

The results of this analysis confirmed Twitter as a powerful personal branding tool for politicians. While thought to be more frequent during electoral campaigns (White & de Chernatony, 2002), Matteo Renzi's case proved that impression management tactics may still be employed during incumbency to reinforce previous brand associations. Such an approach suggests not only that branding does not end with the results of the elections, but also that its objectives change after the designation. Since citizens hold diverse expectations from an incumbent compared to a candidate, during incumbency there is a need to soften hard selling techniques and focus on post-purchase reassurance (Ledingham, 2011). Due to the limit of 140 characters, recalling the 30-seconds-spot messages of television advertising, good mastery of rhetoric is essential to make a difference between an engaging and potentially viral tweet and a simple sound bite. In addition, since different messages need to be conveyed, introducing new hashtags and keywords is also important to differentiate the information flow between elections and incumbency.

Despite the high amount of self-promotion on Renzi's profile, tweets promoting his personal life or interests were rare and almost absent, contrary to findings of other research (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009). Even though this lack could easily be related to the particularity of Renzi's brand, the presence of such tweets on his profile in periods preceding the current research gives rise to some other speculations (Grandi & Tallei, 2014). It may be possible that the decrease in personal details in Renzi's profile represented both an adjustment to the grammar and structure of the social media and a response to citizen being tired of politicians-celebrities, asking for renewal in political communication (Di Fraia & Missaglia, 2014). Considering that other academics also identified changes in this direction (Frame & Brachotte, 2014), further research in different national contexts might investigate how politicians try to engage and empathise with citizens adapting personalisation tendencies developed from television to new media standards and logic.

6.2 Communicating Delivery

Strictly intertwined with self-promotion tweets were tweets communicating delivery, both aimed at presenting the hard work and strong commitment of the Prime Minister. As already stated in the literature review, *ethos* and *pathos* are important during

elections, but during incumbency *logos* and reasoning should be assessed, backed up by practical facts (White & de Chernatony, 2002). In fact, in a relationship management approach, success or failure of the relationship may be measured to the extent politicians' actions fulfil citizens' expectations in respect to policies proposed during campaign and applied during office-holding (Ledingham, 2011). However, at the same time, simple statements of facts in a professional language difficult to understand by the average voter, addressing neither values of the politician (*ethos*) nor emotional bonds with the constituency (*pathos*) are not enough (Di Pietro, 2010). Rhetoric, storytelling, frames and metaphors are elements which may assist the politician in stating facts and explaining policies so as to engage the audience of the platform, preventing in part the failures of previous approaches (Needham, 2006).

As it could already be inferred when McLuhan (1964) stated that "the medium is the message", changes in communication technologies lead to changes in the format of the communication itself. Following the simplification already introduced by television, which also emphasised dramatization, storytelling and the use of metaphors, social media created new standards both in writing and speech, pushing political communication towards a simpler and more informal language close to the people. The use of Twitter in political discourse is not without consequences, especially because its structure encourages informal interactions and because humour and irony turned out to be its intrinsic characteristics. In the wake of all these changes in political communication and media system, Matteo Renzi's public relations team also confirmed the necessity for a communication which takes into consideration the role, the audience and the tone of the social media account, rather than the formality of traditional institutional communication. In substance, social media again made citizens the core recipients of political messages, decreasing the importance of media logic and format in political communication.

6.3 Interactions with Citizens

The high level of interactions compared to other Italian politicians shows a positive trend in the adoption of social media tools for political communication. In this sense, mass-mediatisation of Twitter happens only according to the familiarity of individual politicians with social media. However, interactions decreased during incumbency compared to the election period, adding to the list of obstacles to direct interaction

with the constituents the responsibilities and duties of the politician's position. Even though there would be a need for comparative research on politicians addressing the differences in interaction according to the increase in the duties of politicians, such context gives rise to concerns about the management of social media profiles. In fact, if the profile is administered only by the politician himself, the lack of reply to many citizens risks generating dissatisfaction or frustration. These findings appear to suggest that the best way to exploit SNS interaction opportunities is a combined management of social media profiles, with a team of public relations practitioners backing up the leader.

Despite the fact that the Prime Minister often interacted with his constituency, as seen in the analysis, these interactions were not about asking citizens' view on policies, as a "good constituency man" would be supposed to do (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009), but rather about giving them information and improving the leader's brand. Governmental initiatives of citizens' collaboration promoted on the profile of the PM notwithstanding, Twitter was not directly used to a large extent to seek constituents' feedback, confirming the idea that a one-way promotional approach prevails on the platform (Jackson & Lilleker, 2009; Page, 2012; Bentivegna, 2013). Many optimists about the adoption of digital tools in politics may remain disappointed in their desires for democratic improvement. In fact, despite the opportunities given by SNS to citizens to actively participate in the political discourse, their influence appears to be minority. Politicians still seem to hold more power in the political media system, and for now prefer to reproduce traditional mass media dynamics on social media (Epifani et al., 2011).

Twitter has been shown to be a perfect tool for punch lines during campaigning, when constituents look more for expression of directions and short themes rather than detailed programmes of complex legislation (Gainour & Wagner, 2013). However, in this research the majority of questions received by Matteo Renzi, especially during #matteorisponde, were about clarification of politics and specific policies and reforms, suggesting diverse needs during incumbency. Twitter stimulates the constituency to take an active role in monitoring political activity, while at the same time lowering the level of detail and complexity of political discourses. Matteo Renzi compensated for this flaw by integrating a live streaming video to the question time, where he would answer questions from Twitter in a deeper way. This practice emphasised how Twitter, considered by itself, may appear as a limited tool for political

communication, but if properly integrated with other channels in a broader strategy, may become suitable to also explain complex policies in simple language.

6.4 Media Agency

As a consequence of the election, the individual channel of the politician becomes part of the official communication of his office, making it suitable to frame media coverage by exploiting characteristics not accessible to institutional channels. For example, evaluative hashtags are a powerful element to add layers of meaning to issues, spreading the point of view of the politician and connecting him to specific communities on Twitter, such as his party or his supporters. Because of the slow and uneven adoption of internal codes of rules for social media in official administrations (Frame & Brachotte, 2014), it is essential to establish internally, at the beginning of taking office, which channel will convey the majority of institutional and informative communication, mainly addressing journalists, and be consistent with it for the duration of the role. However, an ideal situation would be to create, as part of the digital agenda of politicians, internal regulations for social media use in governmental offices, clearly assessing issues such as media relations, transparency and confidentiality.

7 Conclusions

To conclude, there are different ways to apply political public relations on Twitter exploiting the opportunities of the platform. During his first year as Italian Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi has mainly relied on a one-way approach to the platform, with evidence of impression management techniques, even though the level of interactions with citizens was higher compared to his national and international colleagues. Details about his personal life were almost absent, while the majority of tweets were fulfilling media agency and political positioning functions. Communication of delivery was a rather novel aspect: its underestimation during incumbency could have caused the failure of previous PR approaches. Consequently, the use of rhetoric confirmed its importance on Twitter in conveying messages directed either at enhancing credibility (*ethos*), emotional bonds (*pathos*) or logical reasoning (*logos*). The research showed that, assimilating writing to speech, boosting informality and shortening statements in 140 characters, Twitter caused a series of changes in political communication, which moved beyond “political advertising” towards a new era of *lo-fi* language and framing hashtags. Some elements of the “old” televised political language are still valid nowadays, nevertheless other elements are specific to the platform and require different skills.

Matteo Renzi’s case was an example of the use of Twitter as a PR tool based on deep knowledge of the platform and its population, thus tailored to the channel and the target, which were particularly close to his core brand associations. Politicians wanting to succeed on Twitter may exploit its branding, media agency and delivery opportunities, balancing these aspects with a high level of interaction with constituents. However; the success of communication on social media is related to the extent the characteristics of the platform match those of the politician. Considering the increasing importance of transparency and authenticity on SNS, communication need to be consistent not only with the brand, but also with the identity of the politician himself. Twitter has been shown to suit community-minded, informative and ironic politicians, while other social media may be appropriate for different kind

of leaders. Thus, the choice of the main social media channel through which the politician communicate needs to be tailored to the politician himself and to his strengths, aiming at mastering the characteristics of the platform which will foster consistency between the brand, the identity and the person himself.

Findings from this study mainly confirmed previous research about politicians on Twitter, underlining the self-promotion function even behind two-way approach attempts. It might be the case that Twitter is not the right social media to fulfil democratic expectations, considering that power exchanges between politicians and citizens are not equal both because of the tendency of politicians to reproduce mass media logics and for the asymmetry intrinsic to the platform. However, incentives to develop significant political discourse between the two actors on Twitter exist and need to be further investigated in relation to the obstacles to effective interaction, regarding the practical impossibility of dealing with thousands of people, or in relation to the duties of the office. Furthermore, political public relations theory might benefit also from additional research about personalisation of politics on social media, since this study revealed a focus on daily political activities at the expenses of the politician's personal life. However, more comparative research in different national contexts is needed in order to find out if the personalisation of politics will disappear gradually or if it will adapt to the new media system undergoing further modifications.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Summary of Interviews protocol

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Interviewer:
Alba Chiara Di Bari

Interviewees:
Franco Bellacci
Roberta Maggio

Date: ... 17 February 2015
Place: ... Palazzo Chigi

Interviews Protocol Form

First of all, I would like to thank you for your time and your participation. I believe your answers will be valuable to this research and to help improving the practice of public relations.

- Confidentiality of responses is guaranteed (Factsheet and Informed Consent)
- Ask permission to record the interview

Approximate length of interview: 45 minutes

- Purpose of research:

RQ: What was the political PR strategy used by Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi on Twitter during his first year of office-holding?

SQ1: What impression management strategy did he use?

SQ2: What political function had his tweets?

SQ3: What rhetorical behaviours did he employ?

Ice-breaker question

- Working duties of the interviewee at the Office of the Prime Minister

Communication strategy during incumbency:

- Evaluation after the first year of Matteo Renzi as PM
 - What was the worst crisis your team went through?
 - Was there any mistake in the management of the Twitter account? How did you solve it?
 - Was there any tactic that you find particularly successful to convey politics on Twitter?
- Political communication on Twitter
 - How is Twitter considered in relation to other communication channels within your PR strategy? What accounts are used for official communication and what is their role?
 - What does your team publish? (Editorial diaries)
 - How are hashtags used both in the official and personal accounts of the PM chosen?
 - How does your team manage media relations?
 - How does your team manage interaction with citizens?
 - How is managed leader brand in relation to his party brand?

Closure

- Thank you to interviewee
- Reassure confidentiality
- Follow-up and results (June 2015)

Appendix B – Factsheet and Informed Consent for Interviewees

Qualitative Study about Political PR on Twitter Final Dissertation - Msc in Strategic Public Relations

Alba Chiara Di Bari

albachiaradiari@gmail.com

FACTSHEET

The qualitative study deals with the **strategic use of Social Media** in **political public relations**, and it aims to describe with a case study the paths walked by Matteo Renzi's online communication team during the first year after the nominee as Italian Prime Minister.

The descriptive research about Matteo Renzi's political communication, among the more active Italian politicians on Social Networks, especially on Twitter, will generate useful insights both for political public relations practitioners and academics. For this reason, your participation in this qualitative interview is greatly appreciated.

Your adherence is completely voluntary. You can withdraw your consent to participate at every moment of the study.

The interview will be recorded with your consent. Records and transcripts will be archived securely for five years, according to Lund University rules and Italian law (DL N° 196/03, Art. 7 and 13). Your working function and/or your name may be published whether relevant to reader's understanding of the overall research. The student reserves the right to publish, broadcast or post online records and transcripts of the interview and/or part of them, for academic purposes.

Signing you agree to the treatment of data recollected during the interview, exclusively for academic purposes.

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INFORMED CONSENT

I, the undersigned, FRANCO BELLACCI, hereby

STATE

That I have received from the interviewer, **Alba Chiara Di Bari**, complete explanations regarding the request of my participation in the study described above. A copy of this factsheet has been given to me.

I accept deliberately to participate in the study, having understood perfectly all the information written above.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any moment.

In addition, I am aware that data recollected during this interview will be used for academic purposes and archived according to the law.

Date 17/02/2015

Interviewer



Interviewee



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INFORMED CONSENT

I, the undersigned,ROBERTA MAGGIO....., hereby

STATE

That I have received from the interviewer, **Alba Chiara Di Bari**, complete explanations regarding the request of my participation in the study described above. A copy of this factsheet has been given to me.

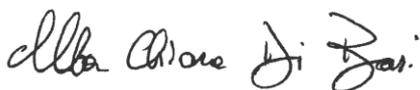
I accept deliberately to participate in the study, having understood perfectly all the information written above.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any moment.

In addition, I am aware that data recollected during this interview will be used for academic purposes and archived according to the law.

Date 17/02/2015

Interviewer



Interviewee

