Some (just) like it hot: Apolitical politics in the Italian Cabinet

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Abstract

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The current Italian Cabinet was composed in 2018 by two populist parties who had never been a relevant participant in the Government before. Social media play a significant role in the communication of both parties, who use Facebook and Twitter to directly reach the citizens. Members of the parties with relevant positions in the Cabinet are delivering an extremely uncommon and often apolitical online communication, in regards of both the register and the contents of their messages, and this is causing a break with the institutional communication of past cabinets. This thesis aims at finding trends in the social media communication of the current Cabinet, and discussing the implications for the development of political communication in general.

Keyword: populist communication, politics, social media communication, social media strategies, Italy

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1. Introduction

Italy is often taken as an example in talks on the rise of populism in Europe. The two parties that are usually mentioned in these talks are self-proclaimed "anti-party" *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S, "Five Star Movement") and far-right *Lega Nord* ("Northern League", LN). The two, even diverging greatly on almost all policies and electoral base, joined in a coalition to form the government after the elections of 2018, where they respectively obtained roughly the 32% and the 18% of votes (The Guardian, 2018). The coalition was formed as the only practicable combination of political forces that would have obtained a parliamentary majority, after several months of hung-parliament situation. The current government is commonly defined as the *Gialloverde* Government (yellow-green, from the color of the two parties) or as the Conte Cabinet, from the name of the non-political Prime Minister appointed jointly by the two parties, Giuseppe Conte.

Less than one year after the elections, polls are currently showing opposite trends regarding the approval rates for the two parties and their leaders, who are currently serving as co-Deputy Prime Ministers (Livingstone, 2018). M5S, who came out of the elections as the biggest party in Italy, seems to keep losing public support in favor of Lega Nord, whose leader Matteo Salvini has been pointed out as the most influential politician in Italy (Mammone, 2018; Politico, 2018).

1.1. Politicians and social media

All political leaders appear to be active on social media, and in the Italian context Salvini seems to be the most close to a 'Trump-model'. Interactions per day on Facebook and Twitter are in double digits (Stille, 2018) and his media team aims at posting every two hours (Scherer, 2018a). Salvini and his team frequently interact and criticize public figures even outside of the public affairs field - athletes, singers, writers - and the modalities of online communication employed on his media channels have been displayed successfully by not many other politicians.

Drawing from the case at hand, the research area of this thesis is the common ground between political and social media communication. Both the political and the media landscape have greatly changed worldwide in the last half decade, and many scholars have studied the ties between

these two phenomena. On the one hand, so-called populist movements and far-right organizations have gained greater support if compared to the 2000s. On the other hand, a constantly increasing activity on social media channels has shown how internet has become one of the major source of information for political engagement (Cogoni, 2019).

This thesis particularly aims at researching the impoverishment of political communication caused by social networks. By analyzing the personal channels of specific political personalities in office, the paper will expose how their communication is carried out on social media to search and maintain support. Nonetheless, their social media strategies often cause a disconnection between the messages delivered by the politician and his or her public function, activity and claimed ideology. The consequence is that political authorities are often perceived as delivering an *a*political communication.

This paper analyzes the uncommon Italian political landscape, where two populist parties are currently holding office, and their political activity and communication are causing issues in diplomatic relations with other institutions, such as the European Union and other countries. The results can however be relevant for strategic communication in general, because they underline a concerning tendency of communication on social media, that is the emptying of political communication from political meaning.

1.2. Populist communication

If we accept the academically agreed definition of populism as the rhetorical communication that opposes the interests of the common people to those of an elite (Castree, Kitchin & Rogers, 2013), similar trends can be seen in different movements across countries: refusal of the political establishment, demand of re-empowerment for lower social classes (Gerbaudo, 2017). This mode of communication has been deeply researched over the years with different perspectives, both optimistic and skeptical. Albeit types of populism can be found in all political contexts throughout history, the latest transformation of the media landscape has attributed a completely new value and meaning to the exercise of this communication.

As will be further explained, the communication that stands out over the abundance of information on Social Media, is the one capable of provoking a reaction, and bringing the user to re-

share the message - with a re-tweet, a Facebook share, a tag in the comments section and so on. Social Media represent therefore an unprecedented tool for populist communication, in regard to its efficacy: the main goal of populism itself is reaching the greatest possible audience (Bracciale & Martella, 2017). However, using audience reach standards to formulate and evaluate messages is what is causing the disconnection of political communication from politics (Bourdieu, 1996). Simpler and shorter messages, stripped from any political meaning, are preferred because of their capacity to appeal to a wider public.

2. Research Aim & Research Questions

2.1. Research aim: effects of social media on political communication

Considering the higher relevance of the communication style over political content, the study will analyze the communication strategies employed on social media by populists and how can they be understood as changing the landscape of political communication. Starting from an unique case like the Italian one, it will be possible to draw some conclusions on the consequences that specific communication practices on social media might have on political communication.

It might be argued that the analyzed practices are a spontaneous result of the politician's personality, rather than being the development of a planned strategy. Nonetheless, these practices appear to have a strong efficacy on the political discussion online, and might therefore be voluntarily employed by politicians in other contexts, or even by other categories of strategic communicators.

The potential relevance of this research lays in the fact that the impoverishment of political communication, that is emptying political messages from political meaning, could have consequences on the entire democratic system. This because the topics of online discussion are chosen not in regard of their relevance, but of their appeal; this phenomena needs to be acknowledged, especially when considering the expanding role of social networks in information gathering around the world.

Furthermore, personal social media channels are increasingly used by politicians to interact with citizens, and it is understandable how these channels cannot be considered an objective source of information for voters. There is plenty of literature exposing the damages on the democratic process of a lack of freedom of the media - see for example Ardizzoni and Ferrari (2010) for the Italian context. If those in power are first-hand presenting their reality with not even an ostensible filter, this can hardly have any positive outcome on the practice of democracy, if democracy is conceptualized as a system where citizens form their opinion according to unbiased information.

2.2. Research Question

In order to advance academic research in this area, it might be relevant to point out some patterns in populist communication strategies considering the main particularity of the case at hand - that is, the fact that the populist politicians are ruling the Government. The topic to investigate becomes, therefore, the style of communication that populists chose to adopt while representing public institutions at the highest hierarchical level.

RQ1. What are the most relevant stylistic trends in the social media communication of a populist cabinet?

The research question for this thesis has been conceptualized looking at the Italian case, but the results might be considered relevant for other territorial contexts that still have not experienced, or will in short time experience, a similar situation. As mentioned, the academic research gap that the questions aims at filling regards the social media communication by populist politicians in charge of national institutions. Researching this topic might bring the reader to draw an implicit comparison with the findings of previous literature, that is the social media communication stylistic trends of populists who are not administrating a country. As it will be clarified, one of the critical claims of this thesis is that populist parties do *not* change their communication once holding office - and this causes concern with other institutions. It is therefore superfluous to excessively fixate on a before-after comparison.

3. Background

M5S and Lega had conducted an extremely different campaign for the 2018 national elections. The main common point between the two appeared to be the promise of discontinuity with the previous left-wing Cabinet, generally presented as too bound to EU directives - a full-fledged 'pro-establishment' government. In order to understand what brought such politically different parties to join forces, it is relevant to briefly recap their political history.

3.1. M5S: A crisis-based movement

M5S, self-defined as a "Movement of free citizens" (Movimento Cinque Stelle, 2019), was founded by comedian Beppe Grillo in 2009. Using the Internet as the main channel for internal communication, M5S was presented as an anti-establishment political organization aimed at proposing an alternative to Silvio Berlusconi's moderate-right government, since opposition from moderate-left party *Partito Democratico* ("Democratic Party", or PD) was considered scarce if not accommodating. Berlusconi resigned in 2011 after losing public consent, due to Italy's financial crisis after the Great Recession of 2007 and his long-term involvement in multiple scandals (BBC, 2011 a). He was replaced by economist Mario Monti, who formed what in Italian politics is defined *Governo Tecnico*, i.e. a cabinet of non-political technocrats entrusted to solve a political or economical crisis (AP | The Independent, 2012).

Monti's reforms and policies of austerity improved Italy's financial situation and reputation in the European context, but started provoking discontent towards the EU, considered the 'great power' steering Monti's actions (Oltermann, 2011). This evolved in a rise of support for M5S, especially in Southern regions. The *Movimento* obtained roughly a fourth of the votes in the successive elections of 2013, becoming the third political force in Italy after PD and Berlusconi's "People of Freedom" (*Popolo delle Libertà*, or PDL) (Hooper, 2013). Refusing to ally with any other political force, M5S stayed in opposition in the Parliament for the successive five years, harshly criticizing the coalition between PD and PDL that supported the two consecutive PD Cabinets.

3.2. Lega: from regionalism to nationalism

Compared to that of M5S, the political history of Lega is rather different and yet extremely interesting - often disconcerting, for anyone who has witnessed it firsthand.

Lega Nord (LN) was born in 1991 as an alliance between many regional parties such as *Lega Lombarda* (from the Lombardy region) or *Liga Veneta* (from Veneto). The scope of the alliance was to form a political force relevant enough to claim a stronger autonomy from Rome's centralism (Edwards, 2018). The belief was that the high degree of corruption in public affairs was squandering taxpayer's money and, since tax avoidance has been typically higher in Southern regions (Scozzari, 2017), this was predominantly burdening northern Italians. LN gathered votes exploiting this grudge towards Rome (a famous motto was "*Roma Ladrona*", "Great robber Rome") and generally towards Southerners. In this regard, LN has a long history of accusations of incitement to racial hatred, embodied by many representatives who frequently use explicitly offensive terminology to address Southerners and foreigners, including political opponents with such heritages (Willey, 2012; Ansa, 2019).

The alliance resulted in a party claiming the independence of the Padania region as a whole, which includes most of the northern and central-northern regions: the official name of the party is still today "Northern League for the Independence of Padania" (Edwards, 2018). Since secessions are unconstitutional according to Italian law, a compromise was found through the concept of federalism, a system of power division that would theoretically assign a higher autonomy to each region in the administration of its own resources.

Having a voter base located still mainly in the northern regions, the party has had fluctuating results in parliamentary elections. LN has been a long time ally of Berlusconi since the beginning of the latter's career in 1994 and, besides some internal conflicts, has represented a relevant component in all of his four cabinets. Under the lead of the founder Umberto Bossi first and, then, of the former President of Lombardy Roberto Maroni, the party never achieved more than roughly the 11% of total votes (Edwards, 2018).

It is with the current leader Salvini that the party obtained the highest-ever result of 17.69% in 2018 (The Guardian, 2018), along with the greatest change in political program, layout and voter base. Despite having been himself involved in controversies regarding racial discrimination towards southern Italians (Kirchgaessner, 2018), Salvini's lead has been aimed at transforming the image of

LN from a regionalist force into a nationalist party. Minor but notable brand adjustments have been made, such as changing the name from "Northern League" to only "League" (*Lega*) and switching the party-color from green, associated with the northern-autonomist symbolism, to blue, the national color (Stille, 2018). For what concerns the political program, greater focus has been given over immigration control and security issues rather than regional administration of resources, and the party has now even a satellite counterpart in the South, *Noi Con Salvini* ("Us With Salvini").

For the first time, in 2018 LN was the biggest party within the right-wing coalition. However, the coalition itself did not have enough seats to obtain a majority in the parliament, and needed therefore to build an alliance with another force. Having constructed the electoral campaign on the demonization of PD and its leader Matteo Renzi, the only other possible party to discuss with was M5S. At the other end, PD's refuse of an alliance forced M5S to re-start negotiations with LN (The Guardian, 2018). In fact, a first attempt of a M5S-LN pact had previously failed because of LN affiliation with Berlusconi (AFP | The Local, 2018) - in opposition to whom M5S had been founded in the first place. The impasse was solved with LN stepping out of the right-wing alliance at the national level, while maintaining it on all local levels (Giuffrida, 2018).

3.3. Relevance of the Italian case

It is necessary to clarify the uniqueness of the Italian case from all other cases of populist movements. The first unique feature is that the two parties are currently in office. There are not many other examples, at the moment, of parties or personalities considered anti-establishment that are actually administrating a democracy - i.e. Donald Trump in the US, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Viktor Orbán in Hungary. It is a central feature for this thesis, because these parties have built their identity as movements opposed to the establishment, and find now themselves in the situation of representing it. Being this a first-time situation, the communication has to be strategically planned in order not to lose the consensus obtained until now.

The second unique feature regards the completely different political and social background of M5S and Lega. The two parties are in office as a coalition, and are forced to maintain the status quo even after having attacked each other so hardly over the years. This has also consequences on

the communication of the two parties, that have to avoid publicly treating any matter of potential disagreement with each other - such as most of their political program.

The parties are also trying to avoid becoming the figures that they have demonized in the past. M5S, for instance, has always portrayed itself as a party for 'normal people', whose representatives with humble jobs are chosen online. Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio, for example, got elected for the Italian Parliament with just 189 votes, while unemployed at twenty-seven years of age (Horowitz, 2018). For this reason, it was a common practice to negatively portray office-holders of previous cabinets as technocrats, pen-pushers, or generally members of the political caste serving the interests of the elites (Bortoluzzi & Semino, 2016; Kirchgaessner, 2016). Salvini has also adopted this approach, and still abundantly uses the term *professoroni* ("smarty-pants professors") to address opponents exposing technical critiques.

In order not to disperse consensus, the two parties have to maintain this communication style when acting as the actual establishment. Even though their representatives are holding public positions, their communication register on social media has to keep being informal in order not to be perceived as incoherent by their voter base, and this has caused a discrepancy with the past of Italian politics. Before the current situation, nobody had ever witnessed such an extreme intimacy and easiness in messages coming from public institutions. Nevertheless, this register works both ways: on the one hand, supporters feel closer to their representatives (Ciaglia & Mazzoni, 2015; Ancu & Cozma, 2009); on the other hand, the disconnection with the seriousness of the context brings the opponents to express their indignation by sharing these messages, reaching an even greater audience.

4. Theoretical Approach

The starting point of this paper can be considered Bourdieu's seminar *On Television* (1996). Bourdieu conceptualizes politics and journalism as *cultural fields*, in which the production of content is being influenced by external pressures. In both fields, the most relevant type of content is communication. Bourdieu's point is that content is not being judged through peer-evaluation criteria anymore, but through market satisfaction criteria. The new mass media are causing this transformation, by permitting the intrusion of audience ratings standards in the process of evaluation of the communication. This happens mostly because of the new power that the media hold over all other fields of cultural production - such as politics: media can give visibility and therefore resources.

Although Bourdieu was specifically addressing television, similar patterns of transformation of communication are detectable when considering the Internet and social media: the new media allow higher diffusion of the communication and higher participation possibility to the users. The approach intended for this paper is to equate Bourdieu's "fast-thinkers" (1996, p. 29) to the new-media communicators - specifically, politicians. Through their own social media channels, they are able to deliver the coverage of themselves and "spare journalists the trouble of looking for people who really have something to say" (p. 30).

In order to better contextualize Bourdieu's thought within the current technological and social landscape, the *mediatization* approach might come in handy, since it helps understanding how is the transformation of the media system influencing the transformation of the modern society. Within communication research, academics define with the term 'mediatization' the increasing presence of media in all human activities, which involved in the last fifty years especially computer-based technologies. According to Krotz (2017), this term is more suitable to describe this process if compared to the more common '*digitalization*', because it displays the intrusion of media in other fields, rather than just pointing out a technological improvement.

This perspective addresses directly the issue of the interference of market standards in other areas: "mediatisation depends on individual activities and demands, on cultural conditions and commercial interests" (Krotz, 2017, p. 108). In other words, mediatization - the intrusion of media

in all human activities - cannot be separated from two other phenomena, which are *commercialization* and *personalization*. Both phenomena are caused by the new media system, and while the term *commercialization* defines the intrusion of media standards in said activities, the term *personalization* refers to the higher focus directed to the individual over the community.

When considering the case at hand, that is the politics area, the combination of these phenomena means that politics have become an individual matter of the politician. Since the attention of the media has moved from the group to the individual (Weiss Yaniv & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2016), political actors adapt their individual communication to the mass media logic (Ciaglia & Mazzoni, 2015), in order to influence political strategies on a broader level - of their parties, or of the whole political system (Meyen, Thieroff & Strenger, 2014).

During the composition of this research, the analysis underlined the need of another specific theory regarding the intrusion of media standards at the expense of peer evaluation, as mentioned by Bourdieu (1996). The chosen approach was the one investigating *anti-intellectualist* attitudes over the last century, and especially the work of Richard Hofstader (1962). This approach aims at understanding and explaining, in communication, the hostility towards individuals with educational training.

It has to be also considered the other side of the communication process, that is the receiver of the message. Within academic research on social media, the *Uses and Gratifications* theory (U&G) has already been employed to study political activity online, for example by Ancu and Cozma (2009). This approach might permit to distinguish and understand the factors influencing the consumption of political communication on social media, whether they are related to a user's need for information, entertainment or interaction.

As the title of their study might suggest, Ancu and Cozma found that the chance to personally connect with the politician was a fundamental reason of choice for political communication consumers. Professional communicators on social media appear to have realized this phenomena. Employing a feature of familiarity, and therefore reducing the distance with the users, seems to be an increasing practice for public figures. In this context, the concept of *intimization* is fundamental for understanding the strategic motivations of this practice. The expression was connected in the first place to journalism (Chandler & Munday, 2016), because exposing the private life of VIPs has typically been a yellow-press exercise. However, with the

advent of new media, it has been recognized an increasing trend of celebrities sharing themselves traits of their personal life online, mostly for self-promotion purposes (Ciaglia & Mazzoni, 2015).

Studies on *intimization of politics* have been conducted in recent years in many countries, but the discussion appears to have been more focused on the coverage of politician's private life carried out by the media, rather than on that carried out by politicians themselves (see for example Weiss Yaniv & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2016; Ciaglia & Mazzoni, 2015). In this regard, the *Audience Reach vis-à-vis Persuasive Impact* model, presented by Ronald D. Smith (2013), will be useful to distinguish the effects and range of political communication according to the channel the communication is delivered through.

The *Information Processing Theory* (IPT) might also be relevant for this discussion, as it represents a perspective to understand on a more general level the motivations that stand behind online behavior. Political information and communication can be conceived as any other commodity available on social media - a source of interest, entertainment and so on. Therefore, the selection behavior of a user might be compared to that of a customer, and for this reason the research on consumer choice - for example by McGuire (1976) - is to be considered.

Almost fifty years ago already, Simon (1971) had exposed the consequences of an overabundance of information: a critical need, for individuals, to "allocate [...] attention efficiently" (p. 41) and therefore the requirement, for information producers, to generate information that would be quick and easy to process. These criteria for evaluation of information, defined by Simon as "*economy of attention*" (1971, p. 53), can also be a cause of the current impoverishment of political communication witnessed on social media, where messages need to be shorter and simpler in order not to disperse the users' interest.

5. Literature Review

Regarding the Italian media background, Ardizzoni and Ferrari (2010) made an excellent compendium of the latest decades, underling the tendency of concentration of power and control over media. Particular attention was obviously given to Berlusconi's media empire. Even though this thesis focuses on Social media (that is, channels owned and controlled directly by those politicians delivering the communication), the current modalities of attack and discredit of political and non-political opponents in Italy are still displaying traits of Berlusconi's era. Di Maio's and Salvini's frequent attacks to judiciary institutions (Scherer, 2018 (a)) not only evoke Bourdieu's (1996) fears[1] but also recall the *Cavaliere*'s communication style (Pullella, 2009).

5.1. Mediatization

Concerning mediatization, already in 1999 a study was released expressing skepticism about the effect on the democratic process of an expanded power of media. Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Winfried Schulz, respectively Italian and German communication scholars, gave voice to those critics worried about the growing influence of mass media on political institutions. Even though evidence was exposed proving the resistance of institutions in maintaining their independence, this study can offer food for thought when researching the current modalities of political communication.

In a more recent study, Splendore and Rega (2017) specifically applied the mediatization approach to the Italian context. Their focus developed around the consequences of the increased weight of the hybrid media system on the relationships between political communication agents, analyzing how much the spreading use of Twitter to gather and report news was influencing the journalistic profession in Italy. The study finally proved the enduring relevance of mediatization as an effective approach for communication research.

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[1] "what would happen to judges [...] if it became widely accepted that [...] they are thoroughly subject, like all other social actors, to constraints such as those placed on them [...] by the pressures of economic necessity or the seduction of media success?" (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 78).

Regarding the personalization aspect of mediatization, Diego Garzia (2017) investigated the effect of the media exposure of the three main political leaders on the Italian General Elections of 2013. The study is interesting but very different from this research on various aspects - first of which is that none of the three leaders where in charge at the time. In addition to this, it is a quantitative research on voting behavior, and does therefore not analyze the communication delivered by these three politicians. Finally, the study exposed a still rather higher relevance of television over the Internet for political engagement, and for this reason results can only partially be considered valid to the present day.

5.2. Political use of social media

Research regarding the strategic use of social media for political purposes is extensive. There are therefore many studies analyzing the modalities with which political communication is delivered on social media.

As mentioned, Ancu and Cozma (2009) applied the Uses and Gratifications theory to explain how social media differ from other platforms of online content sharing (such as online bulletin boards, websites and forums) in regard to what influences the user's choice of media for consuming political information. The study was conducted on MySpace, which at the time was the most popular social network (110 million active users against the 65 of second-place Facebook). Even though the authors expressed the hope for the results of the study to be extended to all social networks in general, the radical change endured by social media in the last ten years - with Facebook surpassing two billions users and MySpace falling in disgrace - highlights the need of this research for an update.

Anders Olof Larsson has produced abundant academic work regarding the political use of social networks. His most relevant findings regard the news sharing practices and the use of social media channels by politicians. Specifically, two comparative studies (Larsson & Moe, 2014; Larsson, 2017) appear to be close to the scope of this thesis. In these two articles it is shown how attention on Social media channels was driven mainly towards those political parties that already had the highest approval rates, even though smaller and more controversial outsiders were more active on those same channels.

This finding could be questioned by simply taking the Donald Trump case - an outsider that, because of media coverage, was able to shift large shares of support towards himself in a relatively short time (Zhang, Wells, Wang and Rohe, 2017). Similarly, this thesis will consider the case of party representatives active on social media whose parties all experienced an exponential increase of approval over the last ten years. It is also to note that most of Larsson's empirical research has been limited to the Scandinavian context (Norway, Sweden and Denmark), and the difference of communication patterns and practices between countries might be a relevant factor in the development of political communication online.

Paolo Gerbaudo (2017) also conducted an extremely interesting research on politics on social media, with a different perspective. In 2014, focusing on cases in the United States, Spain and United Kingdom, Gerbaudo investigated the teams managing the social media activity of digital movements for collective action. The result was a detected discrepancy between claimed values and internal structure, with social media teams exerting a function of top-down direction clashing against the claims of hierarchical equality that are frequent in movements of this kind. The study itself proposes a new approach to the issue of leadership in digital political organizations.

5.3. Populist Communication

It is hard not compare the situation analyzed by Gerbaudo (2017) with the past and present of M5S. In this respect, a slightly diverse approach was taken by Treré and Barassi in 2015, when researching Beppe Grillo's movement. Rather than broadening the discussion on M5S's social media team, the two Italian scholars concentrated their attention on the ideology promoted by the party leaders. With an explicitly critical perspective, Treré and Barassi exposed how the M5S ideology was strategically created and used to portray and maintain - internally - the false perception of values of horizontality and openness.

Considering the research aim of this thesis, it needs to be mentioned a Master's thesis with a similar topic that was released this year, by Federica Cogoni (2019) of the Tallinn University Of Technology. Even though the academic area is different, being hers a research in International Relations, the similarities of aim between this paper and Cogoni's make it necessary to articulate the distinction. Her research was also conducted on both M5S and the Northern League, typically considered the populist parties in Italy, but focused on how the political communication of these

two parties demagogically reflected the voters' concerns, in order to expand their support before the elections. This paper, on the other hand, aims at researching how the two parties are delivering their communication - with different results - while being in office, in order to maintain the support they obtained. Furthermore, while Cogoni's political study quantitatively analyzed the topics of discussion chosen by the parties, this communication study aims at detecting qualitative trends in the modalities with which the parties develop their communication strategies.

The same distinction might be applied to the 2017 article by Bracciale and Martella, who also researched populist communication styles in Italy. In that case, four political leaders were considered - Salvini, Grillo, Renzi and far-right FdI (*Fratelli d'Italia*, "Brothers of Italy") leader Giorgia Meloni. The research proposed four different categories to classify populist political communication: 'Engaging', 'Intimate', 'Champion of the people' and 'Man of the street'. The interesting finding was that these categories are weakly related with the political affiliation of the politician, and more with his or her individual communication style. This result might be used as a starting point to support the argument of the impoverishment of political communication caused by social media. Moreover, even though just two years passed, both the political landscape and especially the social media activity of said politicians have greatly changed (for instance, Salvini's Twitter followers have multiplied by four), and this fact might help this thesis in updating Bracciale and Martella's study.

Zulianello, Albertini and Ceccobelli (2018) also studied populist communication strategies on Facebook, focusing on various Western and South American countries - Italy included. The study has been extremely relevant for understanding the common traits of populist communication across countries, but does not deepen the individual strategies of populist-considered politicians - for some reason, Salvini and the Northern League are not even mentioned in the paper. Some of the analyzed politicians could even be considered *anti*-populist, as in the case of Mario Monti (the populist-communication indexes, in his case, were rather low indeed).

5.4. Intimization

Bracciale and Martella's (2017) 'Intimate style' category explicitly recalls another of the theoretical approaches that was chosen for this paper, *intimization*. In this respect, academic literature appears to be still underdeveloped. However, one study on intimization of politics has

actually been conducted by considering an Italian case. In 2015, Ciaglia and Mazzoni analyzed PD leader Matteo Renzi's communication style, as covered by the famous Italian tabloid *Chi*, and compared this coverage to that received by three of his fellow party-members. The study was developed when Renzi was Prime Minister, and both his and his party's approval rates were still high. The paper presents intimization as a successful political communication strategy, for obtaining and maintaining the leadership of a party and a country by seeking legitimacy 'from the ground'. However, the study discusses the politicians' openness to public scrutiny, rather than a proactive strategy of disclosure of their personal life. Most importantly, the research does not even mention the use of social media for this purpose.

Weiss Yaniv and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016) researched instead the use of intimacy specifically on social media, in the case of Israeli and US politicians. The two authors exposed how, in the new media system, the discussion of issues of public interest is frequently associated with the public figure's personal life. The study analyzes both news media and Facebook personal pages, but did not find the disconnection of the communication from political content that is argued in this paper - it is instead showed how, in many cases, intimization is used purposely to discuss public issues, for instance through storytelling. Furthermore, their research is focused on a quantitative approach, and aims more at proving the frequent use of this strategy, than at understanding the potential democratic issues related to it.

5.5. Attention Economy

The last academic area to consider is the research studying the management of attention in the new media system, and the consequences that this practice has on the democratic process. Two studies on Donald Trump's political communication during the campaign for the 2016 US Presidential Elections directly connected this phenomenon to politics. Zhang, Wells, Wang and Rohe (2017) studied the relationship between the hybrid media system and the Attention Economy, and the consequences that this relation has on journalism. By considering the unprecedented coverage of a presidential candidate given to Trump, mostly because of his communication style, the authors expressed concern regarding the risks for the democratic process of the intrusion of market standards in the evaluation of news. Nevertheless, the "process of amplification" (p. 3161)

of controversial figures carried out by the media can also have an effect in the opposite direction, for example by fueling citizen action movements.

Finally, last year Bennett and Livingston (2018) also analyzed the political communication of Trump and his team during the campaign. The article focused on the use of disinformation for political purposes, and argued that misleading and sensationalist information is employed because its characteristics satisfy the economy of attention that dominates social media: it provokes the users' reaction by entertaining or angering them, and therefore it spreads easily, giving visibility to whoever delivers this type of communication.

5.6. Two relevant results

Many preoccupying trends have been noted and studied by communication and new media scholars. These trends regard the new patterns of communication that are typical of the new media landscape. Of the above-mentioned studies, two relevant results need specific consideration for the purposes of this thesis.

The first result to consider is the difference of importance that is given on social media to the channel of the communication - that is, the modality of delivery of the message - if compared to the content of the message itself. A relevant agreement from different academic areas, is that messages are being increasingly judged more on their audience reach capacity, rather than on the quality of their content (McGuire, 1976; Bourdieu, 1999; Tassi, 2018). Consequently, in the new media the communicator's worth lies less in his or her ability to deliver a meaningful message, and more on his or her skill in attracting the attention of the highest possible number of listeners (Zhang, Wells, Wang & Rohe, 2017). If we consider politicians as a category of communicators, the first result can be formulated in this way:

> *(1) On social media, the register of a politician's communication is more relevant than the content of his or her messages.*

Because of the new patterns of communication on social media, politicians attract support first through their communication style, and only in the second place through the political content of their message.

The second aspect to consider regards the communication style that a politician chooses to adopt. As far as social media are concerned, it is a still-underdeveloped research area, but relevant findings have been exposed in the last decade. As explained in Chapter 4, the intrusion of audience criteria in politics has brought each single politician to adapt his or her individual communication to the new media logic (Krotz, 2017; Meyen, Thieroff & Strenger, 2014). The consequence, which can be connected to the first result as well, is that the politician's communication style is personal, and often poorly related to his or her political affiliation (Bracciale & Martella, 2017). Hence:

(2) The politician's individual communication style is related more to his or her personality, than to his or her ideology.

This result proves another trend, that is the independence of the politician's communication style from his or her ideological affiliation. To some extent, this means that the communication depends more on the politician's personality, than on the beliefs behind his or her activity. This thesis will expose some relevant results in this research area, because the two analyzed parties in Italy have similar communication register and styles, but have different ideologies and present themselves in an opposite manner: Lega is personified in the figure of its leader, Salvini, while M5S portrays itself as an 'impersonal party'.

6. Methodology & Empirical Material

6.1. Methodology

This study is intended to use the research modalities of a *netnography*, a specific approach presented by Kozinets (2002). This approach adapts fittingly to this paper's research, since it describes a study that is conducted unobtrusively on an online community. It was created in the first place for market research, but the description of the typical research subjects can also be applied to the topic of this thesis: "naturally occurring behaviors, such as *searches for information* by, and communal word-of-mouth discussions between, *consumers*"[2] (p. 63). As mentioned while discussing the Information Processing Theory approach, the consumer's search for information for the consumption can be equated with the voter's collection of information for political engagement.

For the purposes of this research, it is also significant an assumption made by Kozinets (2002) and pointed out also by Postill and Pink (2012): every online community is most of the times a reflection of a respective offline community. In this paper's case, those who interact with a politician's personal social medium are a reflection of the politically-engaged citizens' community. It has to be noted that social media have extended the width of this community, because they confer the engaging possibility to a wider public (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2016). However, Kozinets's work appears to be still extremely relevant for digital ethnography. In this respect, Postill and Pink's study on social media (2012) represents a good update to Kozinets's approach.

The research will be included in the qualitative studies area. Despite being the number of interactions a meaningful statistic, what is of interest here is the register used for the political communication, in comparison to its content. Therefore, rather than a quantitative estimate of the online interactivity of the party representatives, for the purpose of this research it is preferable to qualitatively analyze their messages, and to study the modalities of delivery when considering the context - political situation, status of the communicator and so on.

Finally, for this thesis, a qualitative approach is preferred considering the positioning of the researcher - Italian, and interested in political communication. Some critical judgment of the

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[2] [italics are mine]

material is justifiable for the purpose of the study, and especially in this case it is not reasonable to assume a complete estrangement of the researcher. In this context, it is very useful to consider the *reflexivity* approach, exposed for example by Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000): within qualitative research, it is impossible to expect social science researchers to act as positivist and objectivist observers, and to be entirely removed from the situation they are analyzing. The researcher has to acknowledge his or her position in the studied reality, and what does this position mean for the development of the research. A certain degree of personal interpretation is always required in order, for both the researcher and the reader, to have a better understanding of the social context and of the empirical material that is collected in this context.

As will become clearer, a qualitative approach is necessary in order to thematize the empirical material, considering that the goal of the communication strategy that is being analyzed is to provoke emotional reactions in the audience. For this same reason, visual methodologies will be employed, as explained by Rose (2007), because a great use of imagery is made by both parties. Rose's most relevant perspective for this thesis is surely her exposure of Foucault's *intertextuality*: "meanings of any one discursive image or text depend [...] also on the meanings carried out by other images and texts" (p. 142), which can be directly related to the use of a certain non-political repetitive imagery within a political narrative. Her general approach to content and discourse analysis is relevant for the scope of this research, especially considering the conceptualization of the repetitive use of specific words and images as a *coding process* (p. 65).

6.2. Empirical Material

The matter of study is the online communication carried out by the politicians chosen for the research. In the case of Lega, the focus will be on its leader Matteo Salvini, considering the identification of the party in his persona. As for M5S, both the official social media channels of the party and the personal channels of its main representatives will need to be analyzed. This due to the claimed values of horizontality of the movement, that aims at giving equal importance to its many internal voices.

The empirical material will be collected by analyzing the politicians' personal Facebook and Twitter accounts. The data for the analysis will therefore be Facebook posts and and Tweets, which can be formed by texts, images, videos and links to external websites. These social media have been

chosen for their diffusion on the Italian territory: there are more than 21 million Facebook users and around 8 million Twitter unique accounts in Italy (Statista, 2019 a; Statista, 2019 b). Furthermore, the choice has been made also considering the fact that previous research has focused on these same two platforms (see for example Larsson, 2017; Larsson & Moe, 2014; Cogoni, 2019; Bracciale & Martella, 2017). Having a similar set of data will allow a potential comparison of the results.

The scope of the research is the whole duration of the current Cabinet, in order to comprehend all the institutional communication carried out by LN and M5S while in office. The time period to analyze will therefore start from June 1st 2018.

Considering the great online interactivity of the chosen politicians, the search and choice of the empirical material will be focused around specific relevant political events, which often stimulate public authorities in delivering messages. Even though the chosen events all happened before the beginning of the analysis process (March 22nd 2019), some specific messages released simultaneously with the development of the analysis will also be considered.

The relevant events - from 1) to 16), see table 1 and 2 of the appendix - were chosen and chronologically listed before the analysis process, and the data has been collected following this temporal order. This approach was chosen in order for the researcher to obtain an understanding of the progress of the communication strategy of the Cabinet and its members. The chosen events display both political and social circumstances. The events have been chosen for their relevance in the Italian context and the media coverage that they have received, which has resulted most of the times in an heated online discussion.

Out the 16 chosen events, or cases, the data from five was not presented in the analysis chapter. The reasons for this choice were either a lack of relevant data - e.g. in case number 6) - or the fact that the topic is treated similarly in another case - e.g. the information in case 11) is similar to that in cases 4) and 8). Throughout the analysis chapter, the data for each event will be exposed according to the results that were found, which regard the communication style that was adopted to communicate during or after the event.

6.3. Data Collection Criteria

The whole set of data to consider for each politician is therefore his or her social media communication shared in the context of a certain political event. The sample, that is to say the subgroup of data selected for the in-depth analysis, are the post, videos and tweets that are relevant for the research aim: the communication lacking specific political meaning.

Being this research a *multiple case study*, the main issue is to expose "the underlying logic of replication" (Schreirer, 2018, p. 94), which means justifying the selection of the pieces of data by proving their interrelation. The events, or 'cases', have been chosen - out of the entire political history of the Conte Cabinet - through *purposive sampling*, which aims at "select[ing] instances that are information rich with a view to answering the research question" (Schreirer, 2018, p. 88). This perspective is considered the most appropriate due to the emergent qualities of the data: the trends and practices in the communication are meant to be found during and after the analysis - it is therefore needed an approach that would allow the researcher to go back and repeat the analysis for specific data.

Within purposive sampling, the strategy that will be adopted is a combination of *theoretical* and *criterion* sampling, as explained by Schreirer (ibid.). A *criterion sampling* strategy, on the one hand, aims at obtaining a sample that displays the different traits of the phenomenon under scrutiny, allowing the researcher to examine it in depth. The strategy involves the choice of a small number of characteristics that, if attributed to the instance, would "match a predefined profile" (p. 93). On the one hand, *theoretical sampling* describes the research process that involves a continuous connection between the collection and the analysis of the data, both of which develop along with the research. This approach is particularly useful with qualitative analysis of big set of data, because it allows the researcher to include in the sample instances which relevance is emergent.

Random sampling was rejected in the first place for various reasons. First of all, being this a qualitative research, a casual selection of messages aimed at statistical generalization was not considered the appropriate approach. The aim of this thesis is to expose certain communication practices, and not to draw statistical correlations between these practices and other phenomena. Secondly, it has been argued that random sampling is not necessarily more representative for certain sets of data, and some authors have argued how the information richness of the sample might be

seen as primarily relevant for answering the research question (Schreier, 2018). Nonetheless, generalization of results can still be taken in consideration, if intended as *theoretical* generalization: the goal is not to generalize the results of some cases to others, but instead "to build a theory or to identify a causal mechanism" (Schreier, 2018, p. 87).

6.4. Overall picture of the collected data

This sub-chapter has been composed at the end of the data collection process, and aims at giving the reader a rough idea of the amount of data that was considered for the analysis. Some general numbers will be presented here, but the reader can refer to Table 1 and Table 2 in the appendix chapter for any more specific information.

As for Twitter, two collection methods have been simultaneously employed:

a. Considering all the tweets shared on the politician's account, in the week before and in the week after one of 16 chosen events (i.e. a fourteen days window);

b. Considering all the tweets that contained an hashtag related to the case at hand shared by the politician's profile since June 1st 2018.

In the case of Facebook, since an advanced research tool is still not available, the posts and videos that were analyzed were those expressly mentioned by one of the considered tweets, or that were reported by the news media - e.g. as in case 10).

A first analysis of this initial set of data allowed the researcher to create the sample mentioned in 6.3.: all the messages that lacked a specific reference to a political ideology. This subgroup contains 163 messages in total, of which 130 were shared on Twitter and 33 on Facebook. Of the 130 analyzed Tweets, 102 were shared by Salvini, and 28 by M5S representatives; of the 33 analyzed Facebook posts, 22 were shared by Salvini, and 11 by M5S representatives. Table 1 of the appendix contains the specific information for each case.

6.5. Translation disclaimer

Being it the communication of the Italian governmental Cabinet, the entire set of data - Facebook posts, videos and Tweets - is in Italian. In some cases, the research will also expose relevant information taken from other sources, such as online newspapers, which will frequently be in Italian as well, for the specific nature of many cases was not reported by international sources.

For this reasons, the reader will have to rely on the researcher's personal translation of such pieces of information, which will be always presented in combination with the Italian original and a link to the original source. In certain circumstances, considering the tone, the informal jargon and the Italian typical expressions used in the messages, the researcher's interpretation will be fundamental for understanding the case. The researcher assumes full responsibility for all translations.

7. Analysis

After the collection, data has been qualitatively categorized by identifying key themes connected to key words and images (Rose, 2007) in order to answer the research question. While analyzing the data, three communication trends have been found to involve most of the collected messages. All these trends involve a lack of reference to political ideology in the communication, but they differ in the register, considering the reaction that they aim at provoking in the audience.

The trends will be referred to as *strategies*. The researcher cannot prove that the analyzed politicians have purposefully adopted these communication styles in their messages in order to obtain a specific goal. Nonetheless, considering the frequency with which these trends have been noted, and considering the online interactivity that they have provoked, it can be argued that analyzing these communication styles might be relevant for political communication research on a general level.

7.1. Categorizing the data: Strategies

The three main sub-strategies that have been noted while analyzing the empirical material relate to each other. They are here all presented as political communication strategies, but the mentioned previous literature has proven their use in other communication areas.

1) *Intimization*: this communication strategy aims at moving the focus from the political activity of the individual to traits of his or her personal life. It involves adopting a colloquial register (Bracciale & Martella, 2017) or referring to personal facts that are not related to the political action of the subject (Ciaglia & Mazzoni, 2015).

2) *Personalization*: this communication strategy aims at overlapping the political activity of an individual with his or her persona (Ciaglia & Mazzoni, 2015). This perspective might be used for attacking opponents, or for defending one's own political action from the opponents' accusations.

3) *Anti-intellectualism*: this communication strategy aims at discrediting critiques by disregarding the claimed expertise of the opponents. It often involves a 'simplification' (Bracciale &

Martella, 2017) of real political issues in the online narrative, and almost always displays some degree of skepticism (Hofstader, 1962) towards expertise requirements for a certain public activity.

The three stylistic trends all display common features. As shown by Bracciale and Martella (2017), most of these features are common in all populist communication:

- *Informality*, *vulgarism* and *taboo breaking*: using an informal and non-institutional register in order to reach ordinary people and challenging politically correctness in order to break with the communication of the establishment;

- *Emotionalization*: employing a communication aimed at moving the listener through feelings of closeness, also by sharing insights in the politician's activity with the listener (for example through live video streaming);

- *Negative affect*: employing a communication aimed at moving the listener through feelings of anger, anxiety or suspicion towards specific actors;

- *Simplification*: reducing a complex of ideas into a simple concept (for example a political stance into a personality, as it happens with active personalization strategies) or presenting simplistic solutions to critical political issues.

These traits contribute to an *anti-elitist* communication, by breaking with the formality of the past institutional communication (Zulianello, Albertini & Ceccobelli, 2018) through intimization strategies in order to "distinguish oneself from the elite" (Bracciale and Martella, 2017, p. 1314), and by explicitly attacking institutional authorities through personalization and anti-intellectualism. The fact that these communication traits are also frequent among populists who are not in a governmental position can prove how the communication of a populist politician appears not to endure major changes when he or she assumes a public role.

Table 2, in the appendix, clarifies the combination of strategies that was found during the analysis for each case. In this table, the second and third column from the left, display the characteristics selected in advance for the criterion sampling, mentioned in sub-chapter 6.3. All the events have been chosen because they represent a break with the past institutional communication - either in the way the Cabinet responded to a crisis (second column) or in the way the Cabinet attacked a relevant authority (third column).

This chapter will expose the analyzed messages according to the communication strategy or combination of strategies that each message displays. The events, or cases, will be used as explanatory examples, showing the circumstances in which the use of each strategy is preferred.

7.2. Informality and Emotionalization: the Intimization strategy

Intimization happens in communication whenever elements of a discourse that are considered personal - 'intimate' - are shared as a part of a communication process that does not usually involve such elements (Ciaglia & Mazzoni, 2015). In the case of political communication, intimization can be found when traits of a politician's privacy are shared out of context, and included in a message that can be considered political in relation to the circumstances and to the audience. This communication strategy, is often motivated by an audience-based criteria, that is for the politician to look more accessible, and therefore more relatable, to his or her voter base (ibid.).

The innovation brought by social media is the absence of an 'online' and 'offline' distinction, when it comes to a politician's personal channel. It is not possible, for a civil servant in office, to briefly stop holding his or her public position and then picking it back up; any communication delivered by this individual, when analyzed, has to be understood considering his or her public role. Therefore, any message delivered on social media by a politician is prone to be considered as part of his or her political communication (Weiss Yaniv & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2016).

For this reason, most politicians avoid sharing extremely private aspects of their life on social media, fearing to lose credibility or authority in front of their audiences. Others, on the other hand, see social media as an opportunity to reduce the distance with these same audiences.

Intimization strategies can however impoverish political communication, because attention is driven away from the political activity of the individual. Moreover, the need to maintain a simpler and informal register automatically brings politicians to avoid discussing complex technical matters, or to treat them poorly in order not to lose the grasp on the user's attention. Certain political issues of general interest are left out of the discussion, and users will have harder time in finding relevant information.

7.2.1. Using Intimization to tackle accountability during crises

The next two images show an intimate register can be used on social media by an individual with a public status to narrow the distance with his audience, while, at the same time, addressing a political situation.

"*I usually don't jog, I don't have the body for it...but with a morning like this, I wore shoes and t-shirt, and went with it! [jogging emoji]*"
IMG1. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, Sep 11th 2018

"*Light lunch at La Maddalena*[3]: *Sardinian gnocchetti with mushrooms, saffron, sausage, I'm adding pecorino!*
Would you love me even if I put on weight??"
IMG2. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, Feb 17th 2019

In the case on the left, the complicity with the user (Ancu & Cozma, 2009) is sought by displaying positivity while mentioning a personal and really common flaw: the lack of fitness ("I don't have the body for it"). The case on the right is an example of an almost daily practice of Matteo Salvini, which is sharing pictures of his meals. There is a positive take on a common personal issue ("Would you love me even if I put on weight?"). The peculiarity of the tweet on the right is that the search for closeness can be directly connected to the political circumstance: both

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[3] Town in Sardinia.

gnocchetti and *pecorino* are typical Sardinian products, and in those days Salvini was in Sardinia for the regional elections, which Lega won as the leader of the right-wing coalition (Speak, 2019).

Both tweets were encountered while analyzing the politician's communication in the days around other events: on September 7th of 2018, Salvini received notification from the Palermo court of being investigated for kidnapping for the Diciotti Case (Case 2). On February 18th of 2019, the Senate voted for allowing the Catania tribunal to put Salvini on trial for the same Diciotti Case (Case 13). Claiming that the two tweets were shared in order to shift attention from these controversial cases might be hasty. Nonetheless, it can be argued that in both cases the tweets were meant to show how, despite the serious allegations faced by the Vice Minister, his daily routine was proceeding as usual.

This specific use of the Intimization strategy during crises was also found during the analysis of Case 9), where Salvini was criticized for posting a picture of his breakfast shortly after an earthquake hit the town of Catania (Horowitz, 2019). Case 1) has however a greater explanatory capacity.

The collapse of the Morandi Bridge in Genoa was the first crisis faced by the yellow-green Cabinet. The viaduct, situated in the north-western Liguria region, collapsed last August 14th due to a internal corrosion in the cable stays. More than 40 people died as a consequence of the disaster (Fountain, 2018). The Cabinet, who at the time had been in office for less than a month and a half, was called to respond to the crisis. Great pressure and media exposure was given to Danilo Toninelli, M5S's Minister of Infrastructures and Transports, who was entrusted with overseeing the investigation, along with assigning the tender of rebuilding the bridge.

Being it a young party with representatives chosen online by other members, the most common accusations faced by M5S's public officers usually involve a low degree of experience or expertise in their area of interest, as happened with Virginia Raggi's management of Rome (Kaschel, 2017). In the case of the Morandi Bridge, the accusations regarded an alleged lack of tact in handling the disaster on the media. Just a week after the disaster, Toninelli was criticized for posting on Instagram a selfie on the beach. Shortly afterwards, he used his Twitter channel to defend himself.

> "*Whoever accuses me of being on the beach with my family makes me laugh. I'm stuck on the phone and I'm following everything regarding the @mitgov* [Ministry of Infrastructures and Transports]. *And I'm happy to do it while being close to whom I love the most and whom I am almost always far away from. It's called love, but maybe for some people it's just an utopia*"

IMG3. Danilo Toninelli's Twitter account, August 21st 2018

In this case, the politician was accused of poorly choosing the appropriate moment for sharing traits of his private life. He responded to the allegations by sharing even more: his point was that not only it should be acceptable for a public officer to have and share his privacy, but he is indeed entitled to it, considering how much less personal time is allowed to him.

The use of this light register caused Toninelli some further critiques, for example when he said, regarding the new to-be-built bridge, "It will be a place to play and eat on" (Macor, 2018), or when the picture of him smiling on a talk show next to the scale model of one of the projects for the new bridge went viral on social media.

"I have suffered and I am suffering every day for Genoa and its people. Since the 14th of August I have been incessantly working in order to give dignity back to both. The proof is evident in the Genova Decree[4]. Whoever uses an innocent picture with Vespa[5]'s scale model in order to try to convince people of the opposite, is just a puppet paid by whoever finances that press. Those people indeed, the financers, whose names, for a specific legal obligation that we will introduce, will have to be clearly specified on the mastheads. So it will be even clearer why they publish stupid things and not the names and the faces of whoever got rich cannibalizing what is public."
IMG4. Danilo Toninelli's Facebook account, September 14th 2018

The use of an intimate register, here aimed at provoking an empathetic reaction ("*I am suffering every day*" - Ancu & Cozma, 2009), darkens the separation between personal and political sphere: a public issue, the disaster, is affecting both the personal and the public life of the politician. He complains not having much time to spend with his family, driving the attention to those political opponents taking advantage of his situation.

This last message also displays a communication trend that has been frequently noted during the political life of the Movimento, involved many times in controversies regarding attacks to the press (Kington, 2018). It is understandable, by the analysis of this message, how an intimate register can be adopted by a public figure to reduce the distance with the social media user, while at the same time underlining the distance between himself and the political opponents - in this case, the hostile press. The citizen is brought to share positive empathic emotions with the politician (Ancu & Cozma, 2009), either when the latter is being troubled by everyday issues - such as missing family time (IMG3) or struggling to lose weight (IMG1) - or indulging in common gratifications - a tasty meal (IMG2), a day with the family (IMG3).

Intimization can therefore be used to offer affiliation gratifications (McGuire, 1976; Ancu & Cozma, 2009), through which the user seeks gratification "actively" and "affectively" according to the Consumer Choice Theory (McGuire, 1976, pp. 315-516), if conceptualizing the choice of information for political engagement on social media as a consumer choice. A simpler register, characterized by informal jargon, shorter messages and vivid images contributes to the goal of reducing information complexity, which helps the user in allocating his attention (Simon, 1971). A shorter Tweet, maybe combined with an stunning picture, has more chance of standing out on one's home page, than a long Tweet discussing technicalities.

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[4] i.e. the decree containing the decisions for the reconstruction process.
[5] i.e. Bruno Vespa, the talk show host.

7.3. You are what you do and you do what you are: the Personalization strategy

The second combination of register and messages that was most commonly found in the analysis has been here defined *personalization*. In the political sphere, it regards the frequent practice of projecting the personality of an individual on his or her political activity, and seeing both as a consequence of each other. It involves, for example, personifying a law with the politician promoting it. This, in turn, results in a higher weight of individual's political action at the expense of his or her group (Garzia, 2017). As also noted by Krotz (2017), mediatization has intensified personalization practices because an expanded media coverage of a politician underlines his or her individual activity over the ideology promoted by the party.

M5S came across this issue a couple of months ago, when its members were called to express an opinion on a critical matter. Coalition ally Salvini was under investigation[6] for the Diciotti Boat case, which for the analysis was named Case 2 (the first part) and Case 13 (the second part). The Catania tribunal asked permission to the Senate to proceed with the trial, because by Italian law the activity of a Minister can be protected by the Parliament, if conducted under the interest of the Italian people (Euractiv & AFP, 2019). As had happened with other relevant decisions for the future of the party, M5S held a poll on its website in order to give M5S Senators a voting direction. The situation was critical because, if on one hand Salvini has never held a good reputation among M5S voters (who are located mostly in Southern Italy), the prosecution could have compromised the Government alliance.

Movimento 5 Stelle ✔ @Mov5Stelle · 17 feb
Non si tratta di decidere se "mandare a processo il ministro dell'Interno" ma di valutare se la decisione di trattenere i migranti qualche giorno a bordo della nave **#Diciotti** è stata presa sulla base di un interesse dello Stato o no.

"It is not a matter of "holding the Minister of Interiors for trial" but instead of evaluating whether the decision of holding migrants a few days on board on the #Diciotti ship was taken on the basis of an interest of the State or not"
IMG5. M5S's Twitter Account, February 17th 2019

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[6] The circumstances that brought to the investigation of the Deputy Prime Minister will be explained later in the paper.

In this case, M5S needed to maintain Salvini's persona and his political activity separated for the sake of the alliance. The fact that the distinction needed to be made clear, shows how blurry it usually is. The spread of this phenomenon has allowed personalization to be used strategically in political communication. In general, personalization can be used to synthesize an entire political thought or stance on a specific topic with the personality of an individual. This practice can impoverish political communication because it allows the political stance to be delegitimized on the basis of issues or controversies involving individuals that promote it, with less regard to the meanings of the political stance itself.

For the analysis, a sub-distinction regarding personalization strategies has been made. Firstly, personalization can be actively used to attack political opponents, and discredit the stance of an entire group by discrediting certain specific supporters ('look at what kind of people support this stance'). This first strategy will be here called *active personalization*. Secondly, one can use personalization strategies in order to defend his position: in short, one can claim to be under attack of active personalization ('they are not attacking my stance, they are attacking me'). This practice will be here referred to as *passive personalization*.

As for intimization, a *passive* personalization strategy also seeks the user's empathy, by portraying the politician as victim of unfair attacks from the media or from biased political adversaries. This strategy has a still vivid past in Italy, since it was widely employed by Berlusconi as a way to delegitimize opponents (Pullella, 2009). Affiliation is therefore the consumer's motive (McGuire, 1976) that is aimed for in this case as well. An *active* personalization strategy, on the other hand, relies on provoking opposite emotions. The affective gratification which moves the consumer, in this case, is negative (Bracciale & Martella, 2017: "mobilise people on negative feelings", p. 1314): a political stance is personified in the identity of a public figure who is already despised by the audience of the social media channel. According to the pre-existent feelings of the user towards this public figure, it is easier and quicker for the user to express a reaction. As for intimization, visual aids might be used in the messages in order to empower the communication, for example by choosing a picture where the political opponent is angry (see next IMG7).

7.3.1. Demonizing opponents through Active Personalization

Relevant examples of active personalization strategies were found in case 7), where Salvini addressed Spataro, the public prosecutor of Turin who condemned the Lega leader's interference with the investigations on the Nigerian mafia, or in case 11), where the long-time dispute between Salvini and writer Roberto Saviano was analyzed. The most explanatory example was however introduced by the analysis of case 8).

Last December 8th was meant to be a relevant day for Salvini's Lega. The party planned a rally in Rome to celebrate the first six months of being in the government, and the event was massively marketed on social media (Latza Nadeau, Borghese & Picheta, 2018). Salvini's social media team saw the occasion as an opportunity to call out some specific personalities considered hostile to the Government.

"*He won't be there on Saturday, he has already done enough! [smiling emoji] And you? [Information for the bus: (link)] #italiansfirst #fromwordstofacts*"
IMG6. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, Dec 6th 2018

"*Tomorrow at 11am in Rome in Piazza del Popolo, he won't be there! [praying hands emoji] And you? #italiansfirst #fromwordstofacts [Information for the bus: (link)]*"
IMG7. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, Dec 7th 2018

These two tweets are part of what has been called the "He/She Won't Be There Campaign" - *Campagna lui/lei non ci sarà* (Carugati, 2018). Pictures of former Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni (IMG6) and current President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron (IMG7) are used for what look like two flyers for a sponsored event: slogan on top ("he won't be there") and information regarding place, date and time on the bottom. In these two messages, the personalization of the hostile political stance regards two political opponents, but the campaign caught media attention mainly for the attacks on show business celebrities.

"*He won't be there. And you? [Next Saturday, Piazza del Popolo, 11am!] #italiansfirst #fromwordstofacts*"
IMG8. Matteo Salvini's Facebook account, Dec 1st 2018

"*#PamelaAnderson: "Salvini is not the solution, the current trends in Italy remind me the '30s".[screaming emoji] Alas, with pain, as a devoted viewer and fan of **#Baywatch**, this Saturday in Rome she won't be there. [sad emoji] #italiansfirst #fromwordstofacts*"
IMG9. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, Dec 6th 2018

The image on the left portrays Italian singer Gemitaiz, while the one on the right displays American TV star Pamela Anderson, in the guise of the character from the series that made her famous in the '80s. The campaign involved other media personalities from all areas, such as talk-show hosts, writers and many more.

Besides the quote from Pamela Anderson, in none of the messages is expressed the reason for portraying the specific personality, and in most cases the VIP's name is not even mentioned. Therefore, the messages rely on the ability of the user to recognize the personality and automatically associate him or her to their hostile political stance, even though such personalities have expressed different critiques on different issues and with different modalities,. This is a clear use, in the practice, of *negative affect* (Bracciale & Martella, 2017), one of the common traits of populist communication mentioned in sub-chapter 7.1.

7.4. Honesty and common sense: the Anti-Intellectualism strategy

The last trend that was noted while analyzing the Conte Cabinet social media communication was the hostility towards technical critiques. In this thesis, the academic research on *anti-intellectualism* has been used to analyze the communication strategies displaying this hostility. Anti-intellectualism could generally be defined as a combination of skepticism, repulsion and aversion towards individuals with high levels of education or experience in their area of interest, in favor of values that are claimed to be more ground-level or innate - such as 'common sense', loyalty or good will (Hofstader, 1962).

Anti-intellectualism impoverishes political communication because it disregards critiques by challenging or mocking the criticizer's expertise. Being an expert is portrayed as not being a necessary requirement for discussing a certain topic, but it is even used as source to create skepticism. The anti-intellectualist communication is commonly combined with a non-technical register (Hofstader, 1962), which, as for intimization, causes certain technical issues to be left out of the political discussion.

Anti-intellectualism in politics dates decades back in time. Nonetheless, a comparison between the mentioned work by Hofstader (1962), which regards the political situation of the United States halfway through the last century, and the rise in populist movements in the last years, shows how this approach can still be useful to understand the current political landscape.

> *"The right-wing crusade of the 1950's was full of heated rhetoric about 'Harvard professors, twisted-thinking intellectuals [...] in the state department'; those who are 'burdened with Phi Beta Kappa keys and academic honors' but not 'equally loaded with* honesty *and* common sense*'"*

<div align="center">

Hofstader, 1962, p. 12. The quote is from Immanuel Wallerstein's unpublished M.A. essay: "McCarthyism and the Conservative", Columbia University,1954, p. 46. Non-italics, used for emphasis, are mine.

</div>

Both M5S and Lega have adopted in the past a particular terminology that directly recalls the attitudes towards intellectuals described by Hofstader, as can be seen in the following examples.

"LET'S BRING HONESTY TO THE GOVERNMENT OF OUR CITIES! Every day, they have someone arrested or condemned. The situation is unbearable! On June 5th let's take our towns back!"
IMG10. M5S's Facebook account, May 6th 2016

"ITALIANS FIRST! The Common sense in the Government. #fromwordstofacts"
'About' section on Matteo Salvini's Facebook account, **IMG11**. March 30th 2019

As mentioned in the Background Chapter, Northern League and M5S representatives shared the habit of portraying officers of previous governments as technocrats. This and similar terms were frequently used with a derogatory perspective, whenever said officers were acting, in their opinion, in the interest of elites and not of the Italian people. What is interesting is that this approach is still frequently found in their communication. If, on the one hand, it is still possible for both parties to maintain the hostility towards members of European Union bodies that they always displayed, winning the 2018 elections has brought Lega and M5S to address new institutional figures in Italy.

As will be clarified by the explanatory examples, populism and anti-intellectualism frequently overlap. The argument is that both populism and anti-intellectualism are perspectives characterized by animosity towards an elite considered powerful - the political establishment for the former (Zulianello, Albertini & Ceccobelli, 2018), the influential experts for the latter (Hofstader, 1962). It is understandable how the two perspective can be combined when addressing a government of experts from the opposition, as happened with the Monti Cabinet, but it is relevant to underline how they might also be adopted by the government itself.

7.4.1. Anti-intellectualism in technical debates

Within the interest of this topic there were two media cases involving a M5S representative. Case 5) and Case 14) were considered relevant for two reasons. First, they displayed clearly how the anti-intellectual attitude - here intended as hostility towards influential experts - of the *Movimento* has not changed since taking office. The second reason is that the cases created a heated discussion on social media. However, the M5S representative concerned by Case 14), Minister of Justice Alfonso Bonafede, did not address the issue on his channels, and data was therefore not found.

Case 5) regards instead the argument, happened last November 21st on the talk-show *Porta a Porta*, between M5S Undersecretary to the Ministry of Economy and Finance Laura Castelli, and former PD Minister, of the same Ministry, Pier Carlo Padoan. The discussion is available in its entirety on Castelli's Facebook account[7]. There was a technical matter at hand, specifically the connection between the *spread* value[8] and the interest rates on loans for families and companies. In short, Padoan was arguing that M5S's economical policies, by influencing the spread value, were burdening on the citizens. Castelli interrupted by specifying that the two values - spread and interest rates on loans - are not correlated, and that Padoan was intentionally misrepresenting the truth[9]. Padoan argued his response with a technical explanation, while Castelli responded "That is Your

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[7] https://www.facebook.com/LauraCastelliPortavoce/videos/335591980570362/
[8] The term *spread*, in the Italian political and economical jargon, refers to a measure of the value of the Italian Government Bond, compared to that of the German one.
[9] (min. 20:05) "*Guardi, se lei, in televisione, racconta che i tassi dei mutui dei cittadini dipendono dallo spread, lo sa anche lei che è falso. Lo sa anche lei che è falso, non lo dica perché non è vero*" ("See, if You, on television, say that the interest rate on loans for citizens depends on the spread value, You know even Yourself that's false. Even You know it's false, don't say that because it's not true")

opinion" ("*Questo lo dice lei*", min. 20:28) and showed a diagram, taken from an article of a renowned business newspaper (*Il Sole 24 Ore*) in support of her argumentation.

The discussion on social media evolved mostly around Castelli's phrase "This is Your Opinion", considering the difference of authority and expertise between the Undersecretary - who is thirty-two years old and has a Bachelor's Degree in Business Economics - and Padoan, who has had relevant roles in international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the OECD (Bloomberg, 2019). Castelli addressed the critiques on her Facebook personal account.

Laura Castelli
24 novembre 2018 · 🌐

Mi piace e rispetto la satira politica.
La mia frase in risposta a Padoan "Questo lo dice lei!" è diventata virale e sfoglio con curiosità le tante vignette satiriche che mi sono rivolte. Però il punto del discorso molto serio e purtroppo non satirico è un altro. Non c'è correlazione tra il tasso dei mutui e l'andamento dello spread e Padoan lo sa bene. L'ex Ministro dell'Economia lo sa bene! E non dovete credere a Laura Castelli, leggete i dati del Sole 24 e della Banca d'Italia che nei loro report includono anche i dati dei nuovi mutui.
I tassi dei mutui, che sono un dato importante per tutte le famiglie che hanno comprato o stanno per comprare la propria casa, sono sostanzialmente fermi perché sono ancorati all'euribor che è un tasso di riferimento UGUALE in tutta Europa.
Ps: A Gramellini che ringrazio della sua attenzione, ricordo che non sempre i professori con titoli accademici in politica dicono la verità, anzi!
Ringrazio sempre chi fa satira in maniera acuta, intelligente, senza offese gratuite che strappano un sincero sorriso in giornate piene di lavoro.
http://amp.ilsole24ore.com/pagina/AEfOVgGG
MoVimento 5 Stelle

"*I like and I respect political satire. My words in response to Padoan "This is Your opinion" became viral and I leaf with curiosity through all the satirical comic strips directed to me. But the point of the discussion, serious and unfortunately not satirical, is another one. There is no correlation between rates on loans and the trend of the spread and Padoan knows this well. The former Minister of Economy knows this well! And you don't have to believe Laura Castelli, just read the data from Il Sole 24 Ore and the Italian National Bank* [Banca d'Italia]*, which in their reports also include data regarding the new loans*. [...]
P.S.: to Gramellini[10]*, whom I thank for his attention, I remind that, in politics, professors with academic qualifications are not always saying the truth, on the contrary!*
I always thank who does sharp, intelligent satire, without cheap insults that give [sic] *a true smile in days full of work.*
[Link to the article of Il Sole 24 Ore]
[Link to the Facebook account of M5S]"
IMG12. Laura Castelli's Facebook Account, November 24th 2018

The most relevant part of the message is the juxtaposition of academic authority on one side and truth on the other, which directly recall Wallerstein's words as mentioned by Hofstader (1962, "academic honors" and "honesty", p. 12). A slight intimate register aimed at obtaining the reader's

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[10] Most probably Massimo Gramellini, journalist from *Il Corriere Della Sera*.

empathy is also detectable ("a true smile in days full of work") - the same reaction sought by Toninelli in the Morandi Bridge case (Ancu & Cozma, 2009).

The following day, *Il Corriere Della Sera*, the most read newspaper in Italy (Ardizzoni & Ferrari, 2010), released two short separate interviews with Padoan and Castelli (Roncone, 2018). While the former expressed his frustration[11], Castelli explicitly mentioned her Facebook post[12], remarking her argument regarding academic qualifications: "Just because someone has studied more than someone else, this doesn't mean that the one who studied is necessarily right"[13].

Besides maintaining the narrative that portrays academic training and truth/honesty as two opposite sides of a coin, this perspective also aims at generally lowering the bar for discussing technicalities. This viewpoint, specifically on economics, could be compared to that of the amateur economist Frank Chodorov (1958). In the passage reported by Hofstader (1962), Chodorov was discussing the solution to the Recession of 1953 proposed on The New York Times by "eminent economists":

"*The prominence of these doctors makes it presumptuous for one who has not "majored" in economics to examine the ingredients of their curative concoction. Yet the fact is that all of us are economists by necessity, since all of us are engaged in making a living, which is what economics is all about*"

Hofstader, 1962, p. 14. The quote is from Chodorov F. (1958). Shake Well before Using. In *National Review*, Vol. 5 (7), p. 544.

On November 26th, Il Sole 24 Ore - the newspaper quoted by Castelli during the talk-show - published an article explaining how the argumentation of the M5S representative was only partially correct (Il Sole 24 Ore, 2018). Nonetheless, since the focus of this analysis is not on the economical or political argumentation, the main problem to understand is whether these skepticism and hostility towards expertise qualifications are part of the politician's personal spontaneous attitude or if it is

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[11] "*No, non volevo essere accademico [...] non era certo mia intenzione fare lezioncine. Però, questo sì, ero un cittadino indignato: trovavo inaccettabile che un membro del governo volesse negare l'evidenza di un fatto sicuro, certo*" ("No, I didn't want to be 'academic' [...] it was certainly not my intention to give lectures. But yes, I was an offended citizen: I found unacceptable that a member of the Government wanted to deny the evidence of a certain fact, that for sure")
[12] "*Comunque, non c'è problema. L'ho scritto persino su Facebook [...] Che adoro la satira. Quindi non mi arrabbio*" ("Anyway, it's all right. I even wrote it on Facebook [...] That I love satire. So I won't get angry")
[13] "*non è che perché uno ha studiato più di un'altra, quello che ha studiato ha per forza ragione*"

part of her communication strategy. The mediatization approach, as explained by Krotz (2017), argues that individualization processes are blurring this distinction: "the actual push of mediatisation is taking place globally and [...] mediatisation depends on individual activities and demands" (p. 108). If this is the way Castelli is presenting herself on media, be it a self-presentation on her media channel or a coverage received by news media, this can be understood as the political communication that she - as political actress - intends to deliver (Splendore & Rega, 2017).

7.4.2. Making anti-intellectualism a daily practice

In respect to anti-intellectualist communication, the term "*professoroni*", as used by Matteo Salvini, deserves a specific discussion. Case 4) is indeed an emergent case: the frequency with which the term was encountered during the analysis - most notably, in Cases 3), 7), 13) and 16) - made it relevant to analyze the use of the term itself on Salvini's media communication. Most of the times it was part of a non-political message, and in each of them the communication displayed mockery and skepticism towards opponents with technical background.

It is not quite easy to give a proper translation in English to the term "*professorone*" ("*professoroni*" is the plural version). Adding the suffix "-one", in Italian, is commonly used to emphasize the great physical size of an object: if *giacca* means "jacket", a *giaccone* is a big jacket - a coat. But when the suffix is instead used to refer to an abstract feature, the word assumes a mocking and rather childish connotation. The term *professorone* does not therefore define a "great professor", but rather an individual who poses as one. The term could be compared to terms such as "wisecracking intellectual", or "egghead", as exposed by Hofstader (1962) in their usage during the US Presidential elections of the '50s.

"We had so many wisecracking so-called intellectuals going around and showing how wrong was everybody who don't happen to agree with them"	Hofstader is quoting "President Eisenhower [...] Speaking at a Republican meeting in Los Angeles in 1954".
"An egghead is a man who doesn't understand everything he knows"	Hofstader is quoting "Charles E. Wilson, Eisenhower's Secretary of Defense".

"The recent election", Bromfield remarked, "demonstrated a number of things, not the least of them being the extreme remoteness of the 'egghead' from the thought and feeling of the whole of the people."	Hofstader is quoting Bromfield L. (1952). The Triumph of the Egghead. *The Freeman*, Vol. 3, p. 158.

<div align="right">All quotes are from Hofstader (1962), p. 10.</div>

Especially the last quote shows how the usage of such terminology in politics has a history. The frequent use of this term to refer to a specific category of opponents can be related to the concept of *coding*, which, in discourse analysis, describes the attribution of specific meanings to words and images (Rose, 2007). By just reading this single term in Salvini's communication, the user can already understand that the message - be it a tweet or a Facebook live video - contains the response to a specific critique to an individual with some claimed degree of expertise or technical training.

Even though Matteo Salvini appears to have already used the word in the past (Pucciarelli, 2016), the term has become more frequent in his communication since taking office.

"Today, for lunch, I'm treating myself good: fresh tortellini from Emilia with sausage ragù, with a

"According to Repubblica and some left-wing professorone I shouldn't share with you on Social

pint of beer [hungry emoji].
Hoping that some left-wing journalist or professorone won't get offended [eye-blinking emoji]"
IMG13. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, December 22nd 2018

Media what I do, eat or drink..!! I won't change, I was with You before being a Minister and I keep on with that today! Great kisses and Maalox to the envious [kissing emoji]"
IMG14. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, December 19th 2018

The image on the left is another example of Salvini's practice of sharing his meals. In this case, the mention to "left-wing journalist" probably refers to an article of *La Repubblica*, a newspaper with left-wing political affiliation. The article, published five days before, addressed Salvini's habit of explicitly mentioning on social media the brands of the products he consumes, comparing this habit to the one of an Instagram influencer (Tonacci, 2018). The tweet on the right shows how Salvini had already shared this article, three days before, using also in that case the term "professorone".

Within the message on the right, three terms deserve attention because they are also extremely frequent in Salvini's social media communication. "*Bacioni*", Italian for "great kisses", is an expression of affection, frequently used by adults when addressing children. "*Maalox*" is instead a drug brand commonly known for its medications for heartburn. Finally, "*rosiconi*", which does not have a proper equivalent in English, is used to point out, in a derisory way, someone's negative attitude after a defeat. All these three terms have some common features. First of all, they all belong to the Italian informal jargon, and in this sense they could be linked to the intimacy strategy (Bracciale & Martella, 2017). Secondly, they have the common aim of ridiculing and lessening the individuals expressing critiques, by implying that the critiques are a consequence of irrational resentment, rather than a divergence of opinion.

The aspect of shifting attention from the critique to the criticizer will be treated further in the paper. What is relevant for the discussion of the anti-intellectualism strategy is the fact that such terms as "*professoroni*" and "*rosiconi*" are used to lessen the claim of expertise of journalists and political analysts considered hostile. This narrative is carried on by the use of these mocking terms even explicitly out of context (Rose, 2007) - as in the case of IMG13.

All of this considered, in the media communication of M5S and Salvini anti-intellectualism might be conceived more as a sort of sub-category of active personalization strategies, rather than a general negative attitude towards all sorts of experts. Their communication can surely fit into Hofstader's (1962) characterization of anti-intellectualism, for the terminology that is used (the term *professorone*, is the Italian equivalent for 'egg-head'), or for the duality that the communication portrays of reality (common sense and honesty versus academic honors).

However, most of the times this modality of communication is employed in order to discredit single individuals, as in the case of Boeri or Padoan, rather than the whole academic world. The emotions that the messages are directed to provoke, in this respect, are the same as the personalization strategy - empathy and affiliation for the criticized ("*I won't change, I was with You before being a Minister and I keep on with that today!*", IMG14) and hostility and skepticism towards the criticizer. Moreover, the specific and repetitive terminology contributes in making the messages quicker to grasp (Simon, 1971).

7.5. Combining strategies: Anti-Intellectualist Personalization.

7.5.1. Personalizing technical critiques.

Facebook live videos are widely used by both M5S representatives and Matteo Salvini. Regarding M5S, streaming plays a pivotal role in the party's communication because of the openness feature that it confers to public affairs and decision-making processes - Italy has a rather bad reputation regarding transparency in this respect (Transparency International Italia, 2014). The live video streaming of meetings has been set by M5S as an internal rule in many cases (Musiani, 2014).

Matteo Salvini uses instead live videos in order to address critiques while directly speaking to his voters. The videos are usually combined with an intimate register, for example by opening with an informal greeting such as "*Buongiorno amici*", "Good morning, friends" - the one of Case 3) included. This media channel represents a powerful tool for reducing the distance with the followers. By giving users the chance to give their feedback in real time through reactions and comments, live videos work almost as an entertainment media (Ciaglia & Mazzoni, 2015).

The date assigned to Case 4), i.e. the *professoroni* case (16th October 2018) is the date of release of the video which the IMG15 is a screenshot of, even though the screenshot displays the date "11.08.2018" (most probably a typo). It became clear during the analysis that this video, roughly 2 minutes long, is an edited extract from Salvini's live video of October 11th (IMG16), which was analyzed for Case 3). The extract was shared only five days after the original video most probably to remark some specific points made during the live streaming.

"*SALVINI TO THE "PROFESSORONI": LET US WORK! (11.08.2018) Where were all those bright smarty-pants professors-know-it-all, who now have all the solutions in their pockets, in the last ten, twenty, forty years???*" [Words on the video thumbnail: *"Where have the "professoroni" been in the last 40 years???"*]
IMG15. Video on Matteo Salvini's Facebook account, October 16th 2018

"*Jobs, taxes, pensions, security: bureaucrats and professoroni against the government but we keep going! #Italiansfirst*
Live from the rooftops of Rome"
IMG16. Video on Matteo Salvini's Facebook account, October 11th 2018

The extract (IMG15) starts with the Deputy Prime Minister mentioning Ugo De Siervo, a jurist who briefly served as President of the Italian Constitutional Court. In the original video (IMG16), shortly before the part from which the extract was taken, Salvini was reading the live

notifications from his Smartphone, and reported with a skeptical tone the words of De Siervo[14], which original version was not found in this research. During the extract, Salvini uses simultaneously many of De Siervo's titles to address him - "Professor Doctor President Emeritus" (0:01), "Professor Doctor" (0:15) - while referring to himself as "Poor ignorant Minister of Interiors" (0:39).

It is not possible to know the original critique as expressed by De Siervo. Nonetheless, in the extract Salvini asks the jurists for a "confrontation of data" (0:05) on disparate matters - the Fornero law on retirement benefits, job insecurity, unemployment, taxes, poverty, development, economic growth, brain drain. As stated above, it is not within the research aim of this thesis to argue for or against a stance on certain political issue. The relevant result of the analysis of this particular message regards the fact that the critique was not reported, and that many diverse topics are grouped as an argument for the defense. The consequence is, the critique is not presented as a judgment on a political issue, but as a judgment of an individual's activity in general - the Minister who "has the right to be ignorant"[15]. It is therefore an example of *passive personalization*.

The anti-intellectualist language is then combined with an *active* personalization perspective during the rest of the extract and part of the original video, when Salvini's attack moves to Tito Boeri. Boeri is the former President of INPS (*Istituto Nazionale della Previdenza Sociale*), which is the Italian public institute responsible for social security and the pension system; he served for more than four years, and his office expired last February 16th. The position might be considered a political appointment, since the President is nominated by the government and approved by the Parliament. Nevertheless, the institute is supposed to be politically independent, and this has brought conflicts with government members over the years. Boeri, who has a relevant academic formation and professional experience (Università Bocconi, 2019), has many times defended the autonomy of the institute. He often collided with politicians in office, included former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi who had nominated him in the first place (Il Post, 2019).

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[14] "*Ecco qui...un altro che ci critica...questo mancava...ex Presidente Emerito della Corte Costituzionale...Io e di Maio siamo ignoranti*" ("Here it is...another one criticizing us...we missed this one...Former President Emeritus of the Constitutional Court...Di Maio and I are ignorant" - minute 17:11 of the live video)

[15] "*Un ministro degli interni può essere ignorante*" (minute 18:28 of the live video - the tone is that of a rhetorical question, the closest transaltion would probably be "Is a Minister of Interiors allowed to be ignorant?")

Shortly after taking office, the Conte Cabinet announced the dismantling of the Fornero Reform of the pension system, launched by the Monti Cabinet in 2012. Boeri criticized the new Cabinet's proposal, called 'Quota 100', claiming it was going to expand public spending and burden on young citizens (Repubblica, 2018). Salvini's argument for the response was that Boeri's critique was not motivated by his technical expertise, but was instead a product of his political affiliation. The 'advised' solution for Boeri was therefore to resign from his public position, and to run for office, in order for him to address the issues of the pension system from a political position. This argument was exposed multiple times both on the Facebook live video previously mentioned, on Facebook posts and on Twitter.
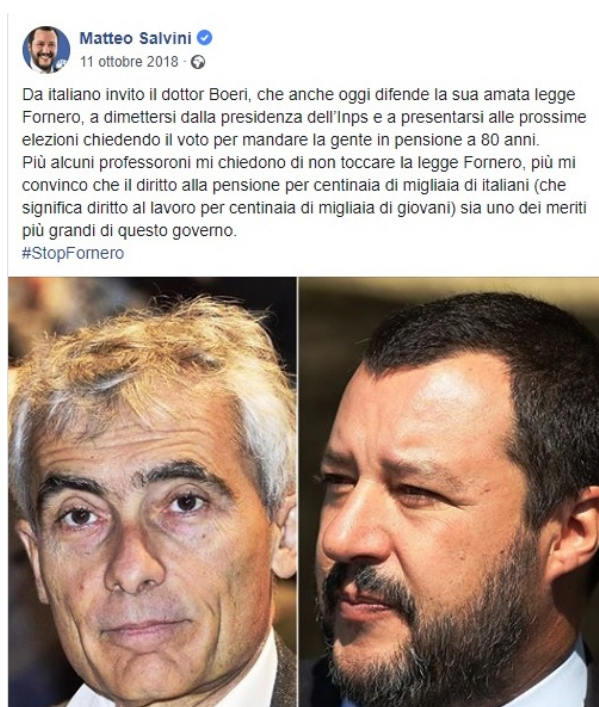
"*As an Italian, I invite doctor Boeri, who is still today defending his dear Fornero law, to resign from the Presidency of INPS and to stand in the next elections asking the vote for retiring people at 80 years of age.*
The more some professoroni tell me not to touch the Fornero law, the more I get convinced that the right to retirement for hundreds of thousands of Italians (which means right to work for hundreds of thousands of young people) is one of the biggest merits of this government. #StopFornero"
IMG17. Matteo Salvini's Facebook account, October 11th 2018

"*The President of INPS #Boeri is questioning #quota100. He's constantly in election campaign: he has exhausted [us].*
He has to resign, run with PD at the European elections and stop spreading ignorance and prejudices."
IMG18. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, November 15th 2018

Looking back at the research aim, some concern might be raised by the apparent political content of these last messages. Especially these last two appear at a first sight to be full-fledged political communication - a political speaker criticizing an opponent on a political issue. However, when considering the context of this messages, the disconnection from political ideologies becomes clear by multiple factors. First of all, besides Boeri not being a political figure, there is no evidence of him defending the Fornero reform - he had instead harshly criticized it in the past (Romano, 2018). Boeri's critique was directed to the substitutive law proposed by the Conte Cabinet. Secondly, Boeri never showed any support for the Democratic Party (PD), and the Fornero reform was not launched by a PD Cabinet; therefore, Salvini's 'advice' for his PD candidacy is not motivated by a political stance, but is rather part of an active personalization strategy (Boeri's entire political stance is assumed by his critique on a specific issue). Lastly, the fact that Boeri is specifically advised to run for the 2019 European Elections also shows a disconnection form the political issue, because a seat in the European Parliament would not allow Boeri to do much for the Italian pension system.

7.5.2. Cherry-picking anti-intellectualism

The detention of Cesare Battisti deserves attention not only for its political relevance, but also for the significant role that media played in the case. Cesare Battisti is a former activist of left-wing terrorist group PAC (*Proletari Armati per il Comunismo*, Armed Proletarians for Communism) who was sentenced to life imprisonment for four murders committed in the '70s. He escaped from prison in 1981, and had since then been on the run abroad, seeking political asylum, over the years, in Mexico, France and Brazil (Giuffrida, 2019). The case evolved in a diplomatic incident in 2011, when extradition to Italy was refused by former Brazilian President Lula (BBC, 2011 b). Battisti lived free in Brazil until the recent election of Jair Bolsonaro, who during the 2018 Brazilian Presidential campaign had promised the extradition of the Italian terrorist in case of victory. After a month of research, Battisti was finally arrested by Interpol last January 12th and transferred to Italy the day after (Giuffrida, 2019).

The analysis of this case can be divided in two parts. The first part concerns the reasons for the use of the case by Matteo Salvini in his media communication. The messages were directed

mostly to deliver an anti-intellectualist communication, but the case was also used to address other issues.

"*Elections in #Brazil tomorrow, I confirm all my support to @jairbolsonaro. In this video he is thanking me, assuring that he will give back to Italy the red terrorist #Battisti, who has always been protected by left-wing politicians and intellectuals of half of the world.*
#goBolsonarogo [italian flag emoji] [brazilian flag emoji]
[link to the video on Jair Bolsonaro's twitter account]"
IMG19. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, October 27th 2018

Until confessing having committed the murders last March 25th, Battisti had always claimed his innocence (BBC, 2019), complaining that his "monster" reputation was mainly a creation of the press (Il Messaggero, 2017). This brought many international writers and intellectuals with left-wing political affiliation to side with Battisti, condemning his case as a persecution from the State for ideological reasons (Battista, 2019).

Salvini has used many times Battisti as example to carry out attacks against political opponents even out of context - and therefore without a political connection to Battisti or his ideology. This practice could be related to one that appear to be frequent in populist communication, according to Bracciale and Martella (2017). Instrumental actualization, or "cherry picking fallacy", involves "exploiting specific events in order to support political bias", bringing the listener to a mistaken interpretation of the facts (p. 1314). IMG20 might clarify this explanation.

#Nonsiamopesci ("we are not fishes") was the slogan used last January by the activists of a movement of solidarity towards migrants. The words are reported to be those of a Congolese refugee on board of the Sea Watch 3 boat (Il Manifesto, 2019). The boat, owned by the German NGO Sea Watch, had on board forty-seven refugees rescued off the Lybian coast, but the docking on Italian soil was allowed only after twelve days (Squires, 2019). The reason for the standoff was the new Decree-Law of September 24th 2018 on immigration and security, renamed 'Salvini decree', which changed the conditions for asking for political asylum in Italy (Paci, 2019).

The Salvini decree was hardly criticized, and the movement launched a petition, which was also named *Non siamo pesci*, asking for a parliamentary commission to investigate on the effects of the law on the deaths in the Mediterranean sea (Il Manifesto, 2019). The petition was signed by many Italian writers and intellectuals, and it is the one mentioned in IMG20. Genna is not a particularly influential writer, but what is relevant in this regard is that his personality is used to discredit the entire movement by associating him to Battisti. Besides being this an explicit example of active personalization, it gives an idea of what Bracciale and Martella (2017) meant with the expression "incorrect inductive reasoning" in populist communication (p. 1314).

It needs to be noted that the terminology of this case is the same used in the attacks to other intellectuals ("intellettualone" might be considered a synonym of "professorone") and therefore still

part of the same coding (Rose, 2007). This might allow the communicator to include in the same category extremely different personalities, who provoke different emotions and motivations in the user-consumer of the information (McGuire, 1976). With some sort of second-degree association, many political and non-political opponents, such as Boeri, can be connected to despised individuals, such as Battisti, and portrayed as ideologically affiliated.

7.6. Cutting out the middleman: from personal channels to news media.

The second part of the analysis of the Battisti case regards its media coverage, in the sense of how the detention was shared with the public. Battisti landed in Ciampino, Italy, the morning of January 14th. The moment of the landing, official detention on Italian soil and following press conference was shared by both Matteo Salvini and Alfonso Bonafede on their personal social media channels, via Facebook live video.

"*Live from Ciampino for the arrival of Cesare Battisti. TUNE IN!*"
IMG21. Live video from Alfonso Bonafede's Facebook account, January 14th 2019

"*Live from the Ciampino airport (Rome), finally the communist assassin Cesare Battisti comes back to the homeland prisons.*
*It's an historic day for Italy, stay with us*"
IMG22. Live video from Matteo Salvini's Facebook account, January 14th 2019

The two live videos were extremely similar for length and content. Strategically speaking, the videos cannot be considered examples of intimization, anti-intellectualism or personalization.

But the fact that such a politically relevant moment was shared using a personal media deserves some discussion.

It has been previously mentioned Ronald Smith's (2013) model of *Audience Reach vis-à-vis Persuasive Impact*, which draws an inverse correlation between the degree of control that a communicator has on a medium, and the forcefulness that the messages delivered with this media can have. As can be seen in IMGa, the less control the communicator has on the medium, the greater the audience of the medium will be.
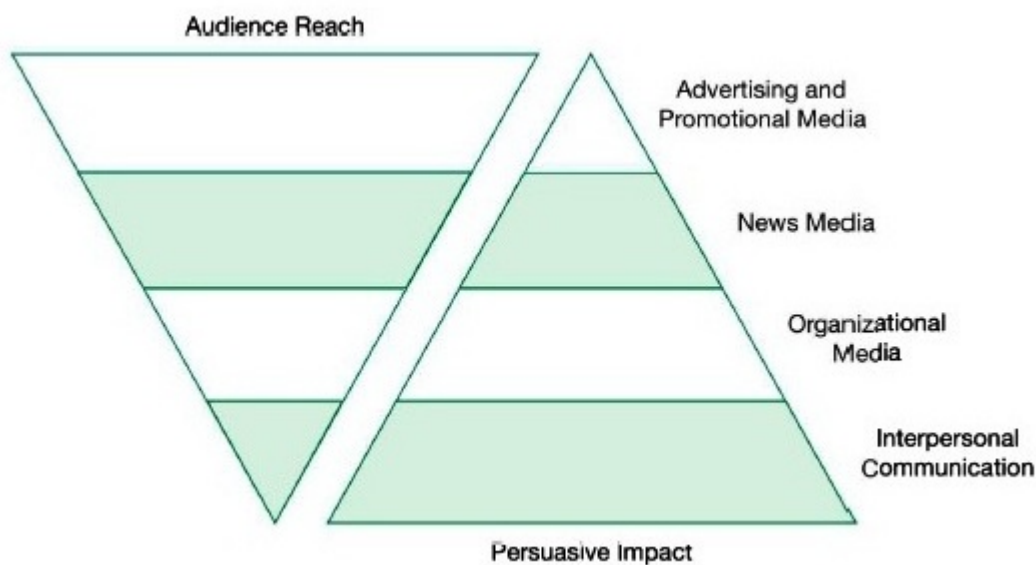
IMGa. *Audience Reach vis-à-vis Persuasive Impact* model. In Smith R. D. (2013). *Strategic planning for public relations* (4th ed.). London, United Kingdom: Routledge, p. 231, Exhibit 7.1.

A social media channel, being a medium entirely controlled by his or her owner, is an organizational medium. According to the model, the reach of the messages shared on this medium is limited, because the audience of this medium is also limited. Only those who have already liked the specific Facebook page, or only those who read a specific blog will get the message.

The model is extremely useful for understanding the efficacy of different media for organizational communication. However, there are some eventualities that are not covered by the explanatory capacity of the model, such as when an owned medium is used in disguise of a news medium: both Bonafede's and Salvini's videos feature a terminology that are typical of a newscast

("Tune in", "Stay with us"). Nevertheless, this does not directly affect the reach of the message, so in this respect the model might still be considered valid.

The situation changes when the message shared on an organizational medium is reported by news media with minor adjustments to its content and its register, regardless of the personal take of the journalist. The message passes from reaching just the audience of the organizational medium, to reaching the audience of the news media as well.

This appeared clear during the analysis of Case 10). The day of Battisti's detention, *Il Sole 24 Ore* published an article criticizing the "shameful social media exhibition" of his arrest (Prisco, 2019); the same article features a link to the video of the detention with a caps-lock description[16]. The phenomenon of news media covering politician's personal channel has also been discussed for the case of Donald Trump's communication style on social media (Zhang et Al., 2017).

When it comes to gathering information for political engagement, the bias in the system is prone to be increased by such new media practices. The personal channel of a politician should never be logically considered an unbiased channel for obtaining news, because it allows the politician to present his or her narrative without any filters. However, it is harder for the audience member to distinguish between journalistic coverage and political coverage of an issue, if the news media just re-propose whatever is presented by the politicians' own media (Zhang et Al., 2017).

7.6.1. The Conte Cabinet versus the Media

In Italy, both Salvini and M5S seem to have absorbed the overlapping between news and owned media, and appear to be actively communicating in this respect. This may be noted by considering messages aimed at disregarding specific newspapers or media in general, in the case of M5S, or at actively self-presenting as alternative source of information, in the case of Matteo Salvini.

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[16] "*GUARDA IL VIDEO - Cesare Battisti è arrivato in Italia*" ("WATCH THE VIDEO - Cesare Battisti has arrived in Italy")

"*FULL SPREAD!*	"*Newscasts will not tell you about this.*
We ask you for a symbolic gesture, to do on social	*"Many happy to go away, cold, food no good"*
media. A post on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram with	[sic[17]]
the hashtag #I'mNotFallingForThis. They have to	*This is dedicated to who said "Salvini is*
understand that Italians won't take piss anymore [sic]	*DEPORTING people" regarding the (closed)*
[words on the image] *#I'mNotFallingForThis*	*mega-immigrant center of*
[title of the linked article] *'The fourth power wants to*	*#CastelnuovodiPorto.*"
delegitimize the 5 Star Movement'	**IMG24**. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account,
#I'mNotFallingForThis"	February 6th 2019
IMG23. M5S's Twitter account, November 30th 2018	

In both images, the goal is to raise skepticism on the whole spectrum of the mainstream media. Such attitude towards media has been common over the whole life of M5S. As for Salvini, the specific expression "*Questo non ve lo diranno i tigì*" ("Newscast will not tell you about this") has been employed many times in the past[18], generally to report immigrants' misconducts, but it has become more frequent since he took office, and it usually combined with the sharing of a video on Facebook or Twitter regarding riots between immigrants or other violent scenarios[19].

This might be considered a remarkable difference with media system of the Berlusconi era, where news media were directly controlled by the head of the cabinet (Ardizzoni & Ferrari, 2010).

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[17] "*cibo no buono*" ("food no good") is an explicit mockery, in Italian, of a generic African accent.
[18] For instance https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/10154514902053155/
[19] As in the case of https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/326928944793188/ or
https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/311985159671920/

A temporal connection can anyway be traced, because also in the current situation the goal of the cabinet members is that of presenting themselves as the main source of information through party channels. If Berlusconi controlled the news media, Salvini and M5S are aiming to become the news media. In both cases, the overlapping between the government and the fourth power cannot be considered positive for a healthy democracy, considering the control role that the latter is expected to have on the former.

7.7. Self-conflicting communication: changing stance over time

The analysis revealed one last trend in the online communication of the Conte Cabinet. The two parties - M5S and Lega - do not seem to have changed their communication style over the years and especially since taking office. However, it is possible to expose certain cases where the political messages delivered in relation to a specific topic are in direct conflict with messages that were delivered even just a few months before.

7.7.1. From active to passive personalization

During the analysis, it emerged that in some circumstances an identical topic was addressed with two opposite communication strategies. This was most evident during the analysis of Case 2) and Case 13), which regarded Salvini's trial on the Diciotti Boat case. In August 2018, a direct order from the Minister of Interiors prohibited the disembark on Italian soil of 177 migrants rescued from international borders by the Italian Coastal Guard on the Diciotti Boat. The goal was to first reach an agreement with the European Union for the distribution of the rescued migrants across other EU countries (Rannard, 2018). After the event, Salvini was personally called into trial by a Sicilian Court, since confining individuals on Italian soil (the boat) is considered kidnapping under Italian law (Tondo, 2019). Also according to Italian law, Salvini could have been protected from trial through parliamentary immunity.

As explained in chapter 7.3., M5S finally ruled for protecting his coalition ally. The decision was taken despite great internal discussion, considering the fact that one of the Movimento's most relevant internal rules is the resignation of any of its members facing a public prosecution (Tondo, 2019). Investigations have also been generally used by M5S as a reason for asking opponents to step down.

"*Alfano under trial for abuse of office. The head of our Law Enforcement cannot be under investigation. He has to resign in five minutes!*"
IMG25. Luigi Di Maio's Twitter account, February 25th 2016

Angelino Alfano was the Minister of Interiors in the Renzi Cabinet - he was therefore holding the same position Matteo Salvini is holding at the moment. As explained in Chapter 6, the data collection process did not consider messages released before June 1st 2018; this specific Tweet was however reported both on the comments on IMG5 and by the news media (Il Post, 2018).

Considering the nature of this research, the goal here is not to deliver a judgment on the political principles of M5S. One can agree or not agree with the requirement of resignation for all Government members under investigation. What this research aims at uncovering is the conflict in the communication of the same party on the same topic under different circumstances. IMG5, which for ease of reading will be here proposed again, can be compared with previous IMG25, considering that Luigi Di Maio was and still is the main spokesperson for M5S.

"*It is not a matter of "holding the Minister of Interiors for trial" but instead of evaluating whether the decision of holding migrants a few days on board on the #Diciotti ship was taken on the basis of an interest of the State or not*"
IMG5. M5S's Twitter Account, February 17th 2019

Regarding the Diciotti Case, a conflict of messages can be traced also in Salvini's own communication. IMG26 presents a Facebook post shared shortly after the arrival of the boat in the docks of Catania, in Sicily. The message was collected during the analysis of Case 2). IMG27 is instead part of the Twitter report of the Lega leader's participation in the TV talk show *DiMartedì*,

on the same day the Senate was called to vote for allowing or blocking the prosecution of the Minister. The message was collected during the analysis of Case 13).

"*It seems that regarding the Diciotti boat, stationing in the docks of Catania, the [Catania] court is investigating "unknown suspects" for "illegal treatment" and kidnapping. There is no unknown suspect, INVESTIGATE ME!*
It's me, not wanting anymore ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (this is what they are in the majority of cases) to land in Italy.
If they arrest me, will you come visit me, Friends? [smiling emoji]
#arrestme"
IMG26. Matteo Salvini's Facebook account, August 22nd 2018

"*#Salvini: the vote is not in favor or against Salvini. The Senate will vote on the base of what I did: whether I did it for the public interest of the State, or not. [Italian flag emoji] [Television emoji] #DiMartedi @diMartedi*"
IMG27. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, February 19th 2019

IMG26 displays what could be considered an *active* personalization strategy: the politician is actively asking for his political activity to be identified with his persona. In this respect, the decision not to allow the Diciotti boat to dock in Catania is not presented as a decision of the Italian government, or of the Northern League party, but instead as the result of a personal stance of the individual Salvini ("*Sono io*" - "It's me"). This is an vivid example of the effect of mediatization on politics, because in this case the *micro-level* strategy is used to shape the strategy of higher hierarchical levels (Meyen, Thieroff & Strenger, 2014).

In IMG27 the message is instead extremely similar, for style and content, to M5S's communication in IMG5. The goal is for Salvini to separate his personality from his action: the Senate was asked to vote not according to their personal opinion of the Lega leader, but according to the conformity of his actions to the Italian law. If in IMG26 political activity and personality are interdependent, in IMG27 the separation of the two is underlined. The one in IMG27 could be considered as a message displaying a *passive* personalization strategy. The Minister is still dealing

with an identification of his actions with his persona; however, he appears to be passively suffering this identification, rather than actively suggesting it.

7.7.2. Cherry-picking personalization

It might be argued that changing opinion regarding a certain policy issue is a common practice for politicians. Despite the fact that the Diciotti case showed a radical overturning of perspective over less than seven months - that is, between Case 2) and Case 13) - during the research other examples of conflict of messages have been detected. It is notable how these conflicts often involve topics that are not directly related to political issues.

The Sanremo Music Festival is the most relevant contest of original music in Italy. It takes place every year during the month of February, and is broadcasted live by Rai1, the most viewed channel on Italian public television. Due to its high visibility, the festival has often been used by its hosts to address and discuss issues in the Italian society, and this year's edition was not an exception (Carlo, 2019). Singer and songwriter Claudio Baglioni, this year's host, created controversies before the beginning of the contest by directly criticizing Salvini's decisions regarding the docking of the Sea Watch 3 boat (see sub-chapter 7.5.2.). Baglioni defined the standoff "a farce", claiming that such approach could not be a solution to the migration issue (Ansa, 2019 a). Salvini addressed to the critique on both owned and news media with the same response.

"#Baglioni? Sing so you'll get over it, [and] let security, immigration and terrorism to be treated by

"#Salvini: I hope many will watch #Sanremo2019. It's the festival of Italian music, not the festival of

who has the right and the duty to do so.
[Title of the linked article] *Baglioni against the government on migrants: it's a farce"*
IMG28. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, January 9th 2019

Unità[20], or of migrants. #Baglioni is a good singer, but everyone should do his own job.
[Television emoji]#Tg2Italia[21]"
IMG29. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, January 14th 2019

The critique is here on the discussion of policy issues carried out by an individual who is believed not to have the requirements to do so. Matteo Salvini had already expressed a similar opinion in the past, for example regarding the appearance of Elton John during the 2016 edition of the Sanremo Festival[22].

As for the previous case, it is not up to this research to express a judgment on this stance. What this research aims at exposing is the conflict of content in the communication, which can be understood by considering IMG30 and IMG31.

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[20] The *Festa dell'Unità* is an annual celebration organized by the major left-wing parties.
[21] Tg2 is the newscast of Rai2, the second channel in Italian public television.
[22] https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/697314124146077696 "*#FestivaldiSanremo? Strapagare Elton John, per esaltare le adozioni gay, è una vergogna. Ma è il festival della canzone, o comizio politico?"* ("#Sanremofestival? Overpaying Elton John, to glorify gay adoptions, is a shame. Is this the song festival, or a political rally?")

"*Enrico Montesano defends our political actions and says what millions of Italians are thinking, with clear and easy words. Listen to him*" **IMG30**. Matteo Salvini's Facebook account, October 27th 2018	"*I agree, and I add: do-goodism[23] has ruined Italy, because it has lessened RESPECT.* *But on immigration, security, certainty of punishment, self-defense we have reversed the course, and we're just getting started! I'm not giving up.* [words in the thumbnail] *Facchinetti: we have to throw do-goodism in the trashcan!*" **IMG31**. Matteo Salvini's Twitter account, November 5th 2018

Enrico Montesano is a movie actor who was popular especially during the 80s, while Francesco Facchinetti is a TV presenter and former singer known to the public as DJ Francesco. Salvini chose to give visibility to their political opinions by sharing their words on his personal channels. Montesano was answering a question specifically on Salvini; therefore, in the case of IMG30, the message can be considered as a way for Salvini to convey his appreciation for a personal endorsement coming from another public figure. Facchinetti, on the other hand, did not mentioned Salvini, but was instead expressing his feelings regarding the safety situation in Italian society. In the case of IMG31, for this reason, the communication is not aimed at thanking a famous personality for his personal support, but it is instead presenting the personality as a sponsor for a certain policy issue.

There is a conflict of content between the messages in IMG28 and IMG29 and those in IMG30 and IMG31, especially in the latter case. Two non-political figures, depending on their political views, are either celebrated or advised to keep their opinions for themselves. Once again, it is up to the listener to agree or not agree with a viewpoint, but a communication lacking coherence lowers the bar of the accountability requirements for the communicator.

7.7.3. Coherence of register versus coherence of content

If we consider anti-intellectualism as a perspective that minimize the expertise requirements for discussing an issue (Hofstader, 1962), IMG30 and IMG31 could fit well into this category, because neither Montesano nor Facchinetti display such requirements. This however clashes with

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[23] "Do-goodism" is probably the most close translation of "*Buonismo*". The derogatory term *buonista* is used in Italy mostly regarding political issues, and denotes an individual who behaves in an excessively compassionate way towards others. *Buonismo* defines a sort of a mixture of benevolence, naïveté and self-loathing.

what is exposed in IMG28 and IMG29, where an opinion on an issue is disregarded for the claimed lack of expertise of the individual.

A similar situation is detectable if we compare IMG26 and IMG27, where the same topic was first addressed through an active personalization strategy, and later through a passive personalization strategy. For understanding this phenomenon, it is useful to look back at one of the relevant result of previous studies that was mentioned in sub-chapter 5.6.:

(2) On social media, the register of a politician's communication is more relevant than the content of his or her messages.

Considering Salvini's communication, the most relevant similarity between IMG26 and IMG27, or between IMG28, IMG29, IMG30 and IMG31 is indeed the register that is adopted: in all cases, messages are short and the terminology is simple and non-technical. The situation is similar for M5S's communication.

The fact that all the messages exposed in this respect are short and easy-to-grasp might depend more on the fact that they are delivered on social media, rather than it is a specific choice or strategy adopted by the two parties. In both cases, the coherence of register is proven to be given more relevance on social media, compared to the relevance of the coherence of content of the communication.

8. Discussion

8.1. Results: M5S versus Salvini

The first fact that might appear evident from the analysis is that the research exposed a greater number of data regarding Salvini's communication, in comparison to that of M5S. The reason behind this choice is practical, but it also reflects the reality. The three mentioned strategies, which all contributed in answering the research question, appear to be present in the social media communication of the two political actors, but much more evidence was found in the case of Salvini.

Even though messages displaying the stylistic trends were found in almost all cases regarding the communication of the *Movimento*, the Lega leader employs these tactics on social media on an almost daily basis. This does not necessarily mean that Salvini relies more on this communication strategies than his coalition companions, but it rather depends on the fact that the former is extremely more active on social media (Stille, 2018). The second of the relevant results of previous studies exposed in sub-chapter 5.6., which attributed an higher dependence of communication style from personality rather than from ideology, appears therefore to be still valid.

8.2. Results: what does communication impoverishment mean

The potential relevance of this thesis for Strategic Communication research lays in understanding the issues for general communication practices exposed by the analysis of the messages. As introduced in the first chapters, this research was moved by the perception of a lack of political content in much of the communication coming from the current Italian Cabinet. The frequent disconnection of political communication from political ideology in the news media system had been already exposed in past literature (Meyen, Thieroff & Strenger, 2014; Bracciale & Martella, 2017; Zulianello, Albertini & Ceccobelli, 2018), but academic research regarding this phenomenon as connected to an elected cabinet is underdeveloped.

Emptying political communication from political content needs to be understood as a critical issue because, in a media system where voters are increasingly employing the Internet as a base for their political engagement (Cogoni, 2019), the absence of explicit information for comparing personalities and opinions can increase the power of the 'fast-thinkers' (Bourdieu, 1996), that is, those who know how to communicate, at the expense of those who have something meaningful to communicate.

"A certain category of journalists, recruited at great cost for their ability immediately to fulfill the expectations of the public that expects the least - journalists who are necessarily the most cynical, the most indifferent to any kind of structural analysis, and even more *reluctant to engage in any inquiry that touches on politics* - tends to impose on all journalists its "values," [...] In short, the focus is on those things which are apt to arouse curiosity but require no analysis, especially in the political sphere."

Bourdieu, 1996, p. 51. Italics are mine.

Bourdieu's argumentation regarded journalists, as more than twenty years ago they were the primary source of information for the public. For what has been argued in this thesis - that is, new actors are presenting themselves as sources of information - is it possible to extend the thought to media communicators in general, and therefore politicians.

8.3. Results: implications of the contribution of knowledge

This research has also shown both discrepancies and similarities with previous studies. Common points were found even when considering dated studies. Sub-chapters 7.4. and 7.5., for instance, exposed the increasing practice of combining personalization and anti-intellectualism strategies to attack institutional authorities, recalling what was argued by Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999) twenty years ago. At the time, institutions were starting to suffer major hits on their autonomy by the interference of mass media, but seemed to resist in maintaining their independence. Social media appear to have provided a new channel for institutions to be attacked from, and in the Italian case their autonomy is often questioned on the base of their disagreement with the government - "if he disagrees, he should resign and run": see the analysis of case 3) in sub-chapter 7.5.1. Similarities were found also with Ancu and Cozma's (2009) study. Even though the technological landscape has greatly changed, politicians appear to be seeking similar reactions from the users, such as affiliation motives.

The analysis of intimization strategies has shown how personal life aspects can be shared both to address a political issue, to drive attention away from it or to blur the distinction between private and public life (see section 7.2.1.). These findings only partially confirm what was argued by Weiss Yaniv and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2016), who did not find the disconnection of the communication from political content. Nevertheless, it might be relevant to note that their study was conducted before the Donald Trump era - whose communication style has been greatly influential for both Salvini and M5S (Stille, 2018).

A comparison of results with Anders Larsson's mentioned studies (Larsson & Moe, 2014; Larsson, 2017) would be more difficult to make, because the correlation of approval rates and online interactivity can hardly be proved, and because of the differences between the Scandinavian and Italian political contexts. Nevertheless, the exponential increase over the years of support for LN and M5S, who communicate mainly through the internet, shows the potentiality of social media for political outsiders.

This thesis has found consistencies also with previous research on populist communication. As exposed at the beginning of the analysis, the major communicational traits of populist politicians (Bracciale and Martella, 2017) were traced also in the case of a populist Cabinet, and they were still poorly connected to a either right. or left-wing ideology. In the case of M5S, internal values and principles appeared to have lost relevance when the sake of the Government was at stake. In this respect, a comparison can be made with the works of Treré and Barassi (2015) and of Gerbaudo (2017) who, in different ways, argued that the claims of equality of web-based movements were often used to reinforce internal power hierarchies. The notable difference found by this research is that M5S has used personalization strategies to reject its principles and expand these power hierarchies to actors *out* of the Movement, such as coalition allies - see for example the discussion of case 2) and 13) in sub-chapter 7.7.1.

8.4. Future research recommendations

One issue to be considered of the most relevance is the lack of coherence in political communication, because it attaches the accountability of the individual politician. This research aimed at exposing the lack of political relevance in much of the communication of the Italian populist Cabinet, and did not therefore present cases of incoherent politics that can be directly problematic for democracy.

In other words, the fact that a Deputy Prime Minister states on a social medium not to have ever shared his private life with the public[24], while sharing his private life with the public on that and other social media does not *directly* affect the political situation. But the fact that the modalities of communication on social media allow him to do so without raising concerns on his accountability has to be acknowledged as a relevant phenomenon introduced by the new media system.

The recommendation for future research proposed here regards therefore the coherence of strategic communication on social media. If adopting and maintaining an equal register allows a communicator to deliver conflicting messages over time, this needs to be understood as a strategy that can be potentially undertaken by politicians and other relevant categories of communicators. Further studies could develop models or concepts allowing social media users to perceive these contradictions and behave accordingly, for example by comparing messages over time. The new media system permits users to have free access to an overabundance of information. Users need however the tools to critically interpret these pieces of information; especially in case this information gives them direction for their political engagement.

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[24] https://www.instagram.com/p/Bpz90yXBCiI/?utm_source=ig_embed - "*Per educazione, carattere e rispetto non ho mai buttato in piazza la mia vita privata, non comincerò a farlo adesso, agli Italiani non interessa*" ("For good manners, personality and respect I have never exposed my private life, I will not start to do it now, Italians are not interested in this" - from Matteo Salvini's Instagram account, November 5th 2018)

9. Conclusion

This research was aimed at studying the effects of the new media communication practices on political communication, by considering politicians who deliver most of their messages on social media. The specific goal of the research was to find stylistic trends in the communication of the Italian Cabinet, which was formed as a result of the alliance of two populist parties with different political stances but similar communication practices.

The analysis was not intended to provide a judgment on the political activity of these politicians, but instead to discuss how they report their activity on their social media channels, choosing what to underline or what to draw attention away from. This choice of topic was motivated by the peculiarities of the two parties' communication, which is often mixed with the individual communication of their representatives.

The findings showed the frequency with which the members of the Conte Cabinet adopt an informal register, on social media, to address institutional issues, such as defending their political activity and attacking political opponents. Relevant communication trends were found to be adopted regularly on social media, mainly with the purpose of a more direct contact with their voter base.

These same trends raise however concern for the correct execution of the institutional role of the Cabinet, not only because these trends represent a break with the institutional communication of previous cabinets, but because they might reduce the government's accountability in the eyes of the people. This might happen because the autonomy of non-political reference authorities is questioned, because expertise requirements for political activity are considered unnecessary or because maintaining the same communication style is considered more relevant than maintaining the same ideological principles.

The research involved a specific context (Italy), a specific time window (from June 2018 to April 2019) and certain specific subjects (Matteo Salvini and the M5S representatives). Results are therefore relatable to these specifics. Nonetheless, previous studies have exposed the common communicational traits of populist communicators worldwide, and similar traits have been noted in the communication of a Cabinet formed by this category of politicians. The hope is for this study to

be considered by future academic research involving strategic communication in politics, and for its results to be commented in respect to other territorial and temporal contexts.

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11. Appendix

TABLE 1.

/	Salvini		M5S		TOT per case
Case	**Tweets**	**Facebook Posts**	**Tweets**	**Facebook Posts**	
1) The Morandi Bridge case (18.08.14)			7	5	**12**
2) The Diciotti case, part 1 (18.09.07)	6	6			**12**
3) The Salvini vs Boeri case (18.10.11)	5	5			**10**
4) The "professoroni" case (18.10.16)	9	2			**11**
5) The Castelli vs Padoan case (18.11.23)			0	3	**3**
6) The DiMaio Senior case (18.12.03)			4	0	**4**
7) The Nigerian Mafia case (18.12.04)	2	1			**3**
8) The "Lui/Lei non ci sarà" campaign case (18.12.08)	15	2			**17**
9) The Nutella-Earthquake case (18.12.26)	6	2			**8**
10) The Cesare Battisti detention case (19.01.14)	7	3	2	2	**14**
11) The Salvini vs Saviano case (19.01.20)	14	1			**15**
12) The San Remo case (19.02.10)	8	1			**9**
13) The Diciotti Case, part 2 (19.02.18)	22	3	4	0	**29**
14) The Bonafede vs Carofiglio case (19.02.20)			2	1	**3**
15) The TAV case (19.03.08)	1	1	3	0	**5**
16) The Autobus kid case (19.03.22)	7	1			**8**
TOT per social media channel	**102**	**28**	**22**	**11**	**163**

Table 1. Recount of analyzed data.

KEY

[blank cell] = The party was not involved in the case.

Red = The case was not exposed in the paper.

0 = No data satisfying the collection criteria was found.

TABLE 2.

/ Case	Crisis / Pressure	Authority attack	Salvini			M5S		
			INT	PERS	ANT	INT	PERS	ANT
1) The Morandi Bridge case (18.08.14)	V					V	x	x
2) The Diciotti case, part 1 (18.09.07)	V	V	V	V	x			
3) The Salvini vs Boeri case (18.10.11)		V	x	V	V			
4) The "professoroni" case (18.10.16)		V	-	x	V			
5) The Castelli vs Padoan case (18.11.23)		V				-	-	x
6) The DiMaio Senior case (18.12.03)	V					-	x	x
7) The Nigerian Mafia case (18.12.04)		V	V	V	V			
8) The "Lui/Lei non ci sarà" campaign (18.12.08)		V	x	V	x			
9) The Nutella-Earthquake case (18.12.26)	V		V	V	x			
10) The Cesare Battisti detention case (19.01.14)	V		x	x	V	V	x	-
11) The Salvini vs Saviano case (19.01.20)		V	V	V	x			
12) The San Remo case (19.02.10)	V		x	V	x			
13) The Diciotti Case, part 2 (19.02.18)	V	V	V	V	V	-	V	x
14) The Bonafede vs Carofiglio case (19.02.20)		V				-	-	x
15) The TAV case (19.03.08)	V		-	-	x	V	-	V
16) The Autobus kid case (19.03.22)	V		x	V	V			

Table 2. Characteristics for criterion sampling and qualitative content of the analyzed cases.

KEY

INT = Intimization strategy

PERS = Personalization strategy

ANT = Anti-intellectualism strategy

V = Data of major relevance was found to display the strategy.

x = Data of minor relevance was found to display the strategy.

- = No data was found displaying the strategy.

[blank cell] = The party was not involved in the case.

Red = The case was not exposed in the paper.

TABLE 3.

IMAGE	Page	Available at
IMG1	32	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1039408775390785536
IMG2	32	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1097151759921881088
IMG3	34	https://twitter.com/DaniloToninelli/status/1031917369042632705
IMG4	34	https://www.facebook.com/danilotoninelli.m5s/posts/1171417122996383/
IMG5	36; 60	https://twitter.com/Mov5Stelle/status/1097206278642954242
IMG6	38	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1070734601830756352
IMG7	38	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1071094939000430593
IMG8	39	https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/photos/10156241695443155/
IMG9	39	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1070692010456244225
IMG10	41	https://www.facebook.com/movimentocinquestelle/photos/10153938344935813/
IMG11	41	https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/
IMG12	43	https://www.facebook.com/456712937738176/posts/2049136931829094/
IMG13	46	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1076446710044479493
IMG14	46	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1075456110189010944
IMG15	49	https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/307285479866447/
IMG16	49	https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/311876909611156/
IMG17	51	https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/photos/a.278194028154/10156123689828155/
IMG18	51	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1063078166711943168
IMG19	43	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1056113320061747200
IMG20	54	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1089238914932662274
IMG21	55	https://www.facebook.com/Alfonso.Bonafede.M5S/videos/271818083486377/
IMG22	55	https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/761058407596121/
IMG23	58	https://twitter.com/Mov5Stelle/status/1068424764220416000
IMG24	58	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1093121480643264512
IMG25	60	https://twitter.com/luigidimaio/status/702954947785203712
IMG26	61	https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/posts/10156008979018155/
IMG27	61	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1097962136247115777
IMG28	62	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1083045720884690944
IMG29	62	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1084905935934537728
IMG30	63	https://www.facebook.com/salviniofficial/videos/2102997659730651/
IMG31	63	https://twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1059428807223005185

Table 3. Location in the thesis and source of images.