Twitter for Politics and Facebook for Leisure? The Social Media Behaviour of Italian Politicians

Marco Morini
Universita degli Studi di Padova
marco.morini@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In Italy, Internet diffusion is still limited compared to other European countries, but social media users are massively growing year by year. Interestingly, many Italian social media users claim to use them to discuss politics. What is the prevailing social media behaviour of their politicians? Do they prefer Twitter to Facebook? Twitter seems to be the favourite social media for politics while Facebook is somehow considered by Italian politicians as a recreational tool. Twitter is also changing political rhetoric: while once Italian political discourse was obscure and pompous, it is now becoming simple and concise.

Keywords: *Social media and Politics, New Media, Political Communication, Italian Politics, Sociology of Media.*

ITALY: THE POLITICAL AND MEDIA LANDSCAPE

Television is the main source of political information for Italians. A few months before the 2013 general election, 55 percent of Italians still named TV newscasts as one of the two most important sources of information for their voting decisions (Censis, 2013). Italy's controversial mixture of politics and media has often made headlines at home and abroad, with concern regularly being conveyed over the concentration of media ownership in the hands of former Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi. His Fininvest "empire" owns Italy's top private TV stations and controls the major advertising company – Publitalia. Meanwhile the public broadcaster, RAI, has traditionally been subjected to political influence. Between them, Mediaset and RAI dominate Italy's TV market and they remain a powerful political tool, especially as about 80% of the population, according to another recent opinion poll, rely on television for its daily news - the highest percentage in the EU (Eurobarometer, 2012). Early analyses on Internet

usage hypothesized that the widespread development of the Web would have improved the situation and would have helped Italy in coming out from the duopolistic media market (Campus, Pasquino and Vaccari, 2006).

However, Internet diffusion in Italy has developed slowly, and the political usage of the Web has not been comparable to what have happened in other Western countries. While in the U.S., for instance, the signs of transition into a massive political use of the Web already appeared in the 2004 Democratic primaries, Italian politics has remained far from that experience because of the huge systemic differences, and above all, the handicap in Internet speed and diffusion. For more than a decade, Italian politicians and political parties used the Web in a very underdeveloped way: they were stuck into a 1.0 idea of the Web and their websites contained mere information points, with no interaction offered at all. The campaign for the 2006 Italian general elections showed a situation that lagged not just behind the U.S. but even other less developed political contexts such as the 2007 French presidential elections (Bentivegna, 2006). The analysis of Segolene Royal's online campaign showed a fully employment of web marketing techniques while Italian reality looked very distant: here political parties and candidates' websites, with no exemptions, seemed to be just as mere news archives. The communication was exclusively top-down and there were no spaces for interaction between candidates and voters and between voters and voters.

Finally, the gap in the political usage of the Web was filled while approaching the 2013 Italian general elections, when parties and candidates became fully aware of social media's potential. In 2013, candidates searched for a constant interaction with voters, in a generalized social trend that probably had to do more with social habits than with the online development of Italian campaigns (Di Fraia and Missaglia, 2013). One of the reasons that contributed to this rapid change has been the surge of the Five Star Movement (M5S), founded and led by Beppe Grillo, who transformed his personal website into an online platform of democratic participation. Throughout the website, *beppegrillo.it*, early subscribers were able to vote for the so called parlamentarie (M5S primaries for the general elections); to select their candidates for the Presidency of Republic; and to decide on several questions such as potential coalitions, parliamentary bills, other members expulsions and political standings in general (Bartlett, 2013). In other words, M5S has gone further than the Web 2.0 ideal and it has been able to create a sort of democratic community of citizens, organized around its founder's official website. This mixture of grassroots politics, populism and online activism was appreciated by many voters and Beppe Grillo's social media politics astonished political commentators: in 2013 the Five Star Movement won 25 percent of the votes in Italy's national election through mixing new technology with old-style activism. Throughout his online mobilization, Beppe Grillo has been able to channel Italians' general frustrated apathy into a powerful political movement, spurning mainstream media to talk to them directly through Twitter and Facebook. Grillo has, by a wide margin, the largest social media following of any politician in Europe. He has one and a half million Facebook friends, and a similar number of Twitter followers (centre-left candidate Bersani has about a quarter of that). His blog is the most widely read in Italy.

Grillo is one of the first politicians in the World who has made social media a central part of his political vision rather than just a handy add-on (Grillo refuses to speak to Italian media, and is in many respects a genuine anti-establishment politician). He insists that he does not want to create a political party, but rather a movement that changes the party political system in Italy, one that gives more power to ordinary people - a new version of direct democracy

with social media at its core. He uses the internet advantage to raise issues, arrange and advertise offline events, and foster discussions and mobilise activities at grassroots level - arranging local meet-ups, demonstrations and getting the vote out. Grillo has been able to transform the online support into real world political impact. By using social media as the primary medium of communication, recruitment and organisation, his Five Star Movement has grown from practically nothing to a major political force in Italy in the space of three years (2010-2013). He has identified political themes that chime with the concerns of many Italians and brought them into the mainstream: corruption, bribery, sexual scandals, and the politics of privileges and favours that he argued has created the so-called *casta* (caste).

While the Five Star Movement has brought Italy ahead of many other countries in term of online politics, in some other respects things have probably been left behind. Internet diffusion is still limited compared with many other European countries: in 2012 just 58 percent of Italians (around 30 million users) had used the Internet in the previous three months, as compared with 74 percent of respondents from the EU as a whole (Eurostat, 2013). As a result, fewer citizens engage in the wider political discouse in Italy compared to other democracies such as UK, France, Germany and the U.S. (Vaccari, 2013).

Italy may have limited broadband connections compared to other European nations, but this has not prevented the growth in social media use among Italians. Indeed, social media has become rather popular: according to a recent survey, 38 percent of Italians use social networking sites – almost at par with France (39 percent), higher than Germany (34 percent) but less than Great Britain (52 percent) and Spain (49 percent). Furthermore, 36 percent of Italians who are on social media use social media to discuss politics, ranking Italy second among Western democracies (Demos, 2013). Consequently, social media have become increasingly relevant in election campaigns, as both politicians and citizens have integrated them into their communication toolkits. A reseach finding shows that socio-demographic and political characteristics of Italians who engage with politics online are similar to those of their Western counterparts: relatively young, well-educated and highly interested in politics (Vaccari, 2013). Keeping in mind that the functioning of representative democracy depends on the quality of citizens' information about public affairs (Powell, 2004), the increasing proportion of citizens using social media to acquire political knowledge is indeed a relevant issue.

The success of social media and the slow but relentless growth in Internet usage could also be linked to the increasing tendency of media users to access social media through mobile devices. According to recent Audiweb data (2014), in 2013, 29 million of Italians have accessed the Web from mobile devices (22 millions from smartphones, 7 millions from tablet) and about the 62 per cent of Italians now own a smartphone. This number highlights the general trend: Italy crossed the 50 percent smartphone penetration mark in December 2012. Sales expectations for 2014 are 15.6 millions of smartphones, placing Italy in the 11th place in the world ranking (Mediacells, 2014) just behind other European countries such as Germany (22 millions), France (18.7 millions) and the United Kingdom (17.7 millions). The ranking is dominated by China and India (with 283 and 225 millions of expected sold smartphones, respectively). Italian mobile devices users do not differ by area or income, but obviously young people are more engaged in web usage throughout mobile devices.

It is widely believed that the emergence of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as arenas for political communication has the potential to expand the possibilities for political talk among citizens (Robertson et al., 2010) and researches show that in advanced societies,

organizations that do not use the new media and the cyber communication techniques are often doomed to failure. In this virtual sphere, the social media represent a suitable resource and channel for the implementation of political marketing 2.0, as it provides a scenario where the interaction with users is possible. Among the various internet tools, social media appear to be particularly prone to accidental exposure (Baresch, Knight, Harp and Yaschur, 2011); especially because of the increasing possibilities of sharing content offered by social media, many internet users organize and obtain their news via Facebook and/or Twitter.

Research has attested to the political relevance of social media and found that one of the main motivations behind their usage is to gather political information (Rainie, Purcell and Smith, 2011). Lerman and Ghosh (2010) analysed the mechanisms of news diffusion and talked of information contagion. By means of sharing, liking, and retweeting, accidental exposure to information can occur as individuals do not always choose what to consume and information is often presented to them.

In January 2014, Facebook reported that its worldwide user base grew to 1.2 billion in the fourth quarter of 2013, up 16% from a year earlier (even when Facebook was gaining fewer new users than in past quarters). Unsurprisingly, there is widespread consensus that social media such as Facebook and Twitter are changing political communication. However, no such consensus exists when it comes to assessing the effects that the emergence of social network services, blogging environments, and content communities have on political processes. On one hand, it is argued that the widespread use of the Internet for social networking, blogging, and tweeting fosters participatory democracy. Just as the decentralization of media leads to a reduction in the distance between the actors of political communication, the classical division of roles between actors in and around the political system become less distinct. Media are no longer the sole producers of political information; instead citizens are also appearing as contributors to the political discourses.

At the same time, how politicians communicate is changing: with their Facebook and Twitter account, they can bypass press offices and media filters and talk directly with the electorate. Processes of political communication used to be primarily linear, and shaped by professional communicators. The question arising now is to what extent do social media disrupt this linear form. The underlying idea of such media is that every politician on the Web can develop his/her own strategy, taking part in discussions and initiate topics. What is the Italian politician's use of social media? What do they actually do on the social media? Do they prefer Facebook or Twitter? This is the starting point of this research on the use of Facebook and Twitter by Italians politicians, who are probably well aware that in political marketing the social media are a great tool to undertake non-mediated communication activities, in which there are no intermediaries that re-work or encode the message and in which obtaining feedback from the audience is facilitated.

FACEBOOK AND TWITTER IN ITALIAN POLITICS

Together with the mass media and personal networks, social media comprise the information milieu that shapes citizens' political preference and actions. However, social media comes in varied forms: some specialise in offering professional networking services (LinkedIn); others are used for online dating (Badoo); and some are characterised by strong regional networks (Orkut in South America, VK in post-Soviet Union countries). Facebook and Twitter have some more characteristics in common: they are popular everywhere and share the

post function, that is the main feature of the "sober" Twitter and one of the several options offered by the more comprehensive Facebook experience. One more subtle difference is at new users' initial stage, whereby Twitter users are required to build a network of contacts. That represents an asymmetry of the relationship between users, because in general there is fewer stimuli for the average user compared to Facebook. And that is probably the reasons why, at least at the beginning, Twitter seemed to be the "Facebook of the VIPs": famous people easily get followers and are prompted to tweet, while for "normal" users is harder to build up a network of contacts.

Facebook was invented earlier and came earlier to Italy. And, as almost everywhere in Western countries, it became the social network of the masses with more than 25 million monthly users. Its number of users is much bigger than competitors such as Twitter (4.3 millions), Google+ (3.8 million) and LinkedIn (5.5 million). Google+ users remain connected for an average of four minutes per day, Tweeters about 19 minutes, while Facebook users can even reach a maximum of eight hours (Audiweb 2014).

Facebook was the first social network to penetrate the Italian market and gained momentum in August 2008 when it got 1.3 millions of accesses with an increase of 961 percent compared to 12 months earlier. In, 2008, Italy's third quarter users' growth was the best performance among all countries (+135 percent). The launch of the Italian version of Facebook shook Italian cyberspace. It was hardly surprising though, given that Italy had one of the lowest rates of Internet usage in Europe (35.6% according to a 2006 Istat report). But in just a few months, Facebook was virtually invaded by Italians, quickly helping Italy to reach the first place for the greatest (and fastest) exponential growth in the adoption of Facebook by any country. Italians seemed to have a natural affinity with Facebook and they seem to have seamlessly integrated this technology in their everyday life.

Twitter came later and its Italian users' base grew massively between 2010 and 2012, as total users per month went from 1.4 million in December 2010 to 3.3 million in October 2012. Currently, there are more than 4 million of Twitter users in Italy. Although this has been an impressive increase, Facebook remains by far the social media giant with more than 25 million users. Facebook is the primary place for online social relations. According to data released at the 2013 State of the Net conference, more than 13 millions of Italians login to Facebook every day while the total number of tweets written in Italy in the first quarter of 2013 is 71.6 million. The same research shows a more matured use of Twitter, confirmed by the increasing insertion of hashtag (used by about 1/3 of Italian users, +22 percent versus 2012) and retweet (used by about ¼ of Italians, +7 percent from 2012). Data also reveal that Italians are tweeting more evenly, with only a slight decrease during the weekend. The preferred period of the day is between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m. and that is probably caused by the increasing habit of commenting on TV shows throughout tweets, using Twitter as a "second screen" (Tien, 2013). Essentially, this new set of data substantiates the idea that Twitter is making TV more engaging. In Italy, in 2013, the more relevant topics on Twitter (the most retweeted) were all about politics. And the most popular hashtag were #elezioni2013, #Berlusconi, #m5s e #Bersani (Midha, 2014).

What do Italians discuss on Facebook? Analysing 200 million interactions and topics on Facebook which occurred in the past four years, it has emerged that Italians have a tendency to follow brands, celebrities, and radio and TV programmes. The favourite topic, however, is politics, given the fact that 14 million people follow Beppe Grillo's page (leader of Italy's third biggest political party), La Repubblica (6.5 million), and Zoo di 105 - popular radio

programme – (Tien, 2013).

However, during the 2013 election campaign, almost all Italian party leaders and candidates developed a Twitter strategy (or at least presence) and the mass media often reported politicians' tweets and citizens' reactions to them. In other words, as confirmed by some research (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2013), Twitter seems to be the favourite social media for politics, while Facebook is somehow considered by Italian users as a recreational tool (Vaccari et al., 2013). What are the reasons for this difference between the two most popular social media? Who tweet about politics?

In the United States, Mislove et al. (2011) studied the demographics of Twitter users and found out that they are a highly non-representative sample of the population. Bekafigo and McBride (2013) confirm this assertion with their finding, that white, middle-aged, college-educated individuals comprised the majority of people using Twitter to discuss politics and concluded that "familiar political voices are speaking out". In the United Kingdom, Norris and Curtice (2008) decrribe a new two-step flow in campaign communication, similar to Lazersfeld and Curtis' original model (1955), whereby online opinion leaders tend to also be opinion leaders among their offline networks.

Compared to Facebook, Twitter is considered as the network with greater influence on for media, voters, as well as other politicians (Tallei and Grandi, 2014). The first tweet of a member of the Italian parliament occurred in March 2007. Since then, the presence of Italian politicians on Twitter has strongly increased. And as long as the number of political interactions on Twitter increases and people become more familiar with Twitter, the function of the social medium itself changes: Twitter is no longer one medium of communication; it is now a space where political action occurs.

Since 2011, a considerable number of Italian politicians have started to use Twitter, giving rise to a late Twitter Italian revolution in political communication. Some specific research has been developed to understand the concrete use of the new media and how politicians actually manage them. One study – for instance - has analysed a sample of 41 politicians from the main electoral lists from September 2012 until April 27, 2013. Data collected have shown a mainly unidirectional and top-down use of Twitter that reproduces the traditional mass media logic of political communication (Di Fraia and Missaglia, 2013).

In Italy, Facebook and Twitter are not comparable in terms of dimensions; neither of active users nor of finance turnover. But the 'quality' of registered users is the key issue here. About 70 percent of Italian members of Parliament hold a Twitter account, while only 55 percent of them have an official Facebook page (Spina, 2013). Twitter has 'communication nobility' that Facebook has not. For the 2014 European elections, out of a total amount of 825 Italian candidates, 517 had an account on Twitter. Data are even more impressive considering the elected Members of Parliament (MPs): 71 out of the 73 Italian MPs in the European Parliament were on Twitter. In 2011, Italian MPs with a Twitter account were 197 out of 945 (9.7 percent), in 2014 they are 684 (72 percent). However, not all of them built a direct connection with their followers, some of the politicians opened a Twitter account just as exhibiting it as a status symbol or for 'communication conformism' (Bentivegna and Marchetti 2014). In a research focused on the politicians' use of Twitter in the 2010 U.S. Congress elections; it has been observed that holding a Twitter account does not automatically means of being an active user. In that election, many candidates were holding a Twitter account but 3 percent of them never tweeted anything, 45 percent tweeted irregularly and 29 percent did

only retweets (Gainous and Wagner, 2014). The same ratio applied to the 2014 European elections in Italy: 517 out of 825 candidates held a Twitter account but only 62.6 percent of these were active accounts. Furthermore, conversations between politicians and followers have been inadequate, with only 14 percent of tweets that showed interactions (Bentivegna and Marchetti, 2014). In 2014, 511 MPs out of 930 had a Facebook account. Although this proportion seems to be just slightly below the number of Twitter accounts, here only 209 MPs could be considered active users and many of these were just "copying-and-pasting" on their Facebook accounts sentences that they had previously tweeted.

We also made a census of the thirteen Italian politicians, who were party leaders at the 2014 European elections[1] : everyone had a Twitter account, but only nine have a Facebook official page. The same proportion came from the 2013 General Election: all the fifteen party leaders[2] had an active Twitter account, while only eight were on Facebook. But that is not surprising: Pope Francis does not have a Facebook account but he is an active Twitter user, and the same is for Barack Obama. Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is the ideal example: he is a massive tweeter while in Facebook he only enjoys just several fan pages.

The activities of Italian politicians, who have both Twitter and Facebook official profiles, show their prevalent social media behaviours. For all of them, Twitter is the first-instance medium of communication. What usually happens is that the politician tweet something, then – a few moments later, that same tweet come posted on his/her Facebook page. The logic of communication behind the two social media helps to understand the different behaviours. Twitter is considered as a sort of showcase: there are no Facebook friends but followers. And followers – by definition – hang off leader's words. And because Twitter is paratactic by fact, followers belong to a fast and curt keyboard, to a fulminating hashtag, to a joke that would bring huge visibility to the politician.

Similar judgments can be drawn when analysing comments obtained by tweets and Facebook posts written by these same Italian political leaders. As we said earlier, many Italian politicians use Facebook as a second instance communication medium: they first tweet, and then they copy and paste the same sentence on their Facebook account. But while the tweet is usually commented by other politicians, journalists and other genuine or supposed celebrities, the Facebook post is usually commented by 'normal' people. That confers an 'elitist' label to Twitter, which can often appear as a sort of exclusive community of famous users.

The use of Twitter that is made by Italian political leaders can even merge into an abuse of the medium itself. It is indeed now common that Prime Ministers and Head of Departments announce on first instance on Twitter political decisions and even administrative orders. They bypass journalists' filters and not rely anymore on press conferences and media statements. Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is a master of Twitter and symbolizes this current trend. Probably because of his young age, his attention for the new media and his communication abilities, the Florentine PM is using Twitter as his direct medium of communication: posting news, announcements, political decisions and sometimes mixing public and private life (Tallei and

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1 The selected party leaders have been: Matteo Renzi (PD), Silvio Berlusconi (PDL), Angelino Alfano (NCD), Matteo Salvini (LN), Stefania Giannini (SC), Giorgia Meloni (FDI), Nichi Vendola (SEL), Ignazio Messina (IDV), Beppe Grillo (M5S).
2 The selected party leaders were Pierluigi Bersani (PD), Nichi Vendola (SEL), Bruno Tabacci (CD), Antonio Ingroia (RC), Beppe Grillo (M5S), Gianfranco Fini (FLI), Pierferdinando Casini (UDC), Mario Monti (SC), Oscar Giannino (FiD), Roberto Maroni (LN), Silvio Berlusconi (PDL), Ignazio La Russa (FDI), Roberto Fiore (FN), Marco Ferrando (PCL), Marco Pannella (LAGL).

Grandi, 2014). Another increasing trend is the live tweeting: when the politician participates to a TV talk show, he now usually interacts with his followers, tweeting during the live show.

Matteo Renzi's use of Twitter is also becoming increasingly unidirectional. Since in government, his tweets have begun to look more like self-interviews than starting points for multiple dialogues. And, in this vertical communication that sometimes resembles a press conference with no questions allowed, the limit between information and propaganda disappears. On 12 September 2014, instead of organizing a #matteorisponde (his once common #matteoanswers), he asked himself five questions about the most important issues of the week and then he replied to himself right after. It was a sort of press statement divided in five pieces of 140 characters. Again, the outcome has been multiple: he directly delivered news to his followers; he publicly pointed out his political agenda to the media and – above all - limited the capacity of action and critique of the journalists (Allegranti, 2014). Oddly enough, this technique of communication disintermediation resembles what Renzi's cabinet is proposing in other sectors: fighting against the intermediate bodies (political parties, trade unions, interest groups).

This expanding social media behaviour also bears consequences for other media because so many politicians tweet their thoughts, statements and decisions bypassing traditional media such that press and TV news are now increasingly reporting just politicians' tweets. In other words, the use of Twitter is establishing a process of agenda building that is reshaping the usual relation between politics, media and public opinion. Why Twitter and not Facebook? The answer can be found in what is defined as the main characteristic of the current political rhetoric: conciseness and forcefulness (Zappavigna, 2012). In doing so, Twitter is the right medium: 140 characters are enough to deliver catchy sentences and slogans. In the 21st century political environment, politicians' comments need to be brief: the public now avoid complex and detailed reasoning. The current trend is toward a political communication made of brief and catchy slogans, in a constant search for consensus, even far away from election periods. Twitter seems more useful than Facebook for these purposes because it is more straightforward and easier to be used even for mature users such as some politicians. Above all, however, the main reason is probably its communication model: a top-down flux of information to a system of contacts made of followers and not a community of friends such as the one offered by Facebook. That resemble the most common and hierarchical systems of communication, that are very familiar with politicians and celebrity.

In a recent interview, former Foreign Minister Emma Bonino defined her activity on Twitter as a natural way to make public her agenda and to release statements without a press office and with no upcoming planned interviews (Spina and Cancila, 2013). The words of former Minister of Culture and Mayor of Rome Francesco Rutelli illustrate the prevailing politicians' behaviours among the two social media:

> Twitter is my primary medium of communication. Since I opened my account, I started using it as a tool to describe my political stands and to inform followers of my public meetings and events. Since then, I also noticed I reduced the release of press statements and I'm now also arranging fewer interviews than in the past. Facebook is something different; I would need to have several accounts, at least one private and one public. I use just one account where I post some pictures and

I keep contact with close friends[3].

Rutelli's thought is clear and describes how political figures employ the potential of the two social media.

What are politicians' linguistic strategies on Twitter? How is Twitter modifying the political discourse in Italy? There have been a number of studies concerning the decline of political rhetoric caused by television. TV has been pointed out as the factor that distanced citizens from politics and that brought politicians to speak an obscure, ambiguous and vague language. Banal or, in some cases, violent and aggressive Italian political language has become something that appeared incomprehensible because it was not able to talk to the real recipients: citizens (Rodriguez, 2013).

In this background, Twitter burst into the Italian political sphere and affected not only almost all politicians, but also media – that started to draw precious information from it - and also citizens, who began to find a new way to connect with their representatives. The 2013 quantitative analysis offered by Spina (2012) found out two central characteristics for "having success on Twitter": the propensity to dialogue and the inclination to aggregate others (to create a community). How do the Twitter political discourses differ from TV discourses? Spina studied 37 live TV talk shows broadcasted from 1998 to 2012 and the Twitter accounts of 40 Italian politicians from November 2011 and February 2012. The corpus was made up of more than 31000 tweets, with an average production of 6.5 a day, even if some politicians posted 50 tweets a day (Civati), some others around five (Meloni) and some others not posting daily (Capezzone).

Spina's work shows a progressive estrangement from the obscurity of the language, which has been made in two steps. First of all, the conciseness required by Twitter (the 140 characters) encouraged politicians to use a very simple language (80% of the words in the tweets were made of basic lexicon). Secondly, the syntax has also been simplified: the use of subordinate clauses has been half of what it was on TV (two subordinates every one houndred words). This serial fragmentation is not useful for making real arguments but it is very effective for building up slogans based on major keywords such as solidarity, development and job creation.

CONCLUSION

Although television remains a major medium and Internet usage and diffusion is spreading slower than in other countries, social media have rapidly expanded in Italy. Facebook came first and since 2008, millions of Italians have become Facebook users. In 2014, it had more than 25 million accounts and it is by far the most successful *social media* in Italy. Twitter arrived a few years later but it rapidly gained about 4 millions of users. Probably because of its simplicity, its hierarchical structure (contacts are followers) and being a no-frills communication medium, Twitter usage expanded among famous people, politicians in particular. Since 2011, and more intensively during 2013, all political leaders and most MPs developed a Twitter communication strategy. Italian politicians prefer Twitter to Facebook and recent researches on social media in Italy are showing how more politicians are on Twitter than on Facebook.

Suddenly, Facebook has become a second-instance social medium: politicians firstly

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3 Personal interview (18/6/2014).

tweet and only secondly, communicate the same thing on Facebook. Zuckerberg's social network is somehow going back to his original aim: making contacts with old friends. Many politicians are holding just private profiles and are not using them for communicating with voters (at least not as in the first-instance of communication). The leaders of the two main Italian political parties are the utmost examples of this trend: PM Matto Renzi and M5S leader Beppe Grillo are strong social media users and they massively rely on Twitter. The Five Star Movement has been built around and throughout the Net there is no surprise about the effectiveness and the expertise demonstrated by Grillo and his MPs. The centrality of the Internet is at the basis of the M5S itself and the younger average age of the Movements' candidates has certainly contributed to this massive online presence (with a Twitter preference as well though).

Matteo Renzi has even gone further; his Twitter account is now probably the main source of political news for Italian media. Italian Prime Minister is often releasing "2.0 press statements" throughout his Twitter account. As Beppe Grillo and his MPs avoiding traditional media and Renzi's massive reliance on Twitter, media coverage of politics is quickly transforming. This process of disintermediation undertaken by the two main Italian political leaders (and also by many other minor political figures) has brought journalists to focus their reports on politicians' tweets.

In the long term, this trend could jeopardize the role of media as the "Fourth Estate" because news reporting is supposed to be objective and independent not being mere collections of politicians' tweets. Monitoring the political process is essential in order to ensure that political players don't abuse the democratic process. Additionally, the social media behaviour of many Italian politicians is not the one expected. Twitter has been heralded as a new channel for discussion between citizens and politicians, but for many Italians MPs social media are considered as just as a tool for self-promotion and often their online presence has been determined by a "communication conformism" ("everyone is in Twitter, I should be there too"). This is confirmed by the number of Twitter accounts that have been opened but not actively used and by the small amount of conversations undertaken between politicians and citizens (14 percent only).

Twitter, due to the volume of participants and the conditions of control over the message, seems to be an ideal tool to gain followers in the political activity, both in the planning of great campaign performances and in the necessary field of interpersonal communication that all candidates need to promote to maintain or create their image, to disseminate ideas, and to promote circles of support. But politics 2.0 will also require the capacity of the politician to open up to the citizens, to encourage their participation, and to value their comments and opinions. The creation of blogs or profiles on social networks that only aimed at offering presence and lack participation will cause more discontent among the public than the absences will, because the benefits of the presences in environments 2.0 only start to be obtained when uni-directionality is removed, the feedback comes into play and communication becomes collaborative.

The social media era is changing not only political communication but also political language. In the late '70s, novelist Italo Calvino criticized the Italian political discourse for being "specialized but not univocal" and with a syntax that was described as "sinuous and ramified". In his opinion, it was "an instrument more useful to hide than to describe". Nowadays, Twitter 140-characters rule is lowering the quality of the political language.

Vocabulary is narrowing and the Italian political rhetoric is becoming concise and easy to understand for everyone. Italian political leaders are avoiding complexity, but problematic issues required complex approaches. If language and thought are one and inseparable from each other, it becomes hard to explain (and to resolve) current political issues with the employment of just basic words.

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