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*The Digital Role in Building Public Profiles of Political Actors*¹

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Abstract

In the middle of an era characterized by continuous electoral campaigns and by the personalization of politics contained in the better-known platform society, our paper aims to shed light on the planning dynamics and practices carried out inside and outside the Net by those political actors in charge of the local election arena. Which factors related to political networks push individuals to run for a political position? What are the biographies, cultural and local relations of the territories they run for? What are the differences between political competitors in terms of the digital competence needed for campaign communication and promotion?

¹ This article should be considered a collective elaboration. However, paragraphs 2, 4 and 7 are to be attributed to Gabriella Punziano, paragraphs 3 and 5 to Federico Esposito, and paragraphs 1 and 6 to Giuseppe Michele Padricelli.

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The research design focuses on a specific case study shaped on the last local election in Naples. Through the study of the political biographies of the candidates, a framework analysis was conducted on press releases, aiming to understand the inferred narration of the election and a content analysis conducted on their official social media sources to comprehend the self-building political narratives of the observed candidates. This study aims to create a clear categorization of candidates, to understand the current digital customs adopted by political actors to draw and define their own political strategies.

Keywords: political communication, social media analysis, local elections.

1. Introduction

The transition to late modern society drives us to rethink the role of the digital sphere and its influence on every aspect of daily life because of the effects of the digital turn (Lupton, 2014) and of the pervasive presence of the online dimension in almost everything that connotes everyday life. Among multiple fields of interest for social science, the digital issue includes the political dimension. Many scholars (Bentivegna, Marchetti, 2015; Chadwick, 2013; Consolazio, 2017; Stier et. al, 2018), in fact, suggest new theoretical models, some empirically approached, devoted to defining concepts which no longer belong only to scientific debate focused on political communication per se i.e., the disintermediation process (Chadwick, 2013; Broersma, Scott, 2019), platform society (Van Dijck, Poell, De Waal, 2018), personal politics and leaderization (Barile, 2014), social media politics (Ceron, Curini, Iacus, 2016), digital self-presentation and building identities in politics (Cain, 2020; Bruns, Nuernbergk, 2019).

Furthermore, current studies on political science (Reif, Schmitt, 1980; Mazzoleni, 2004; Novelli, 2018), particularly on electoral events, suggest approaching this field by framing the issues related to pertinent practices of political actors as the electoral plans and their online communication strategies. It is for this reason that in our study we should consider the online context as an ongoing transformative environment characterized by its own rules and shaped by social constructions and culture (Castells et al., 2008) instead of as a communication instrument, or a place where it is only possible to spread content against a political opponent.

In this way, today it has become relevant to consider in depth the digital role of current political communication schemas to highlight and describe the current pattern adopted by political actors in second-order arenas (Reif, Schmitt, 1980; Eijk, Franklin, 1996; Della Porta, 2006) for election purposes. Which factors related to political networks push an individual to run for a

political position? What are the biographies, the cultural and local relations of the territories they run for? If these questions, in local electoral events such as local elections, help define the context, the scenario of opportunities and constraints, as well as the candidates' profiles (that represents the first output of our analysis), other questions arise when looking at the second-order arenas that are configured in the digital media space. Therefore, if we try to answer these questions with the first step of our analysis, other questions will arise, and we will try to answer them in the continuation of the analysis. These questions are: What are the differences between political competitors in terms of the digital competences needed for campaign communication and promotion, in other words in digital self-presentation and building identities? What representation of themselves do candidates want to create on the digital stage as a second-order arena, and to whom do they direct this effort? Is it the entire electorate or do they look at specific, more changeable and fluid segments that would otherwise be difficult to approach with the classic campaign methods of political communication? What impact and results does the construction of digital identities for political candidates have on specific electoral outcomes? To address the abovementioned research questions, this paper deals with a specific case study shaped on the past election in Naples (October 2021). By studying the political biographies of the candidates, we conduct a content analysis of their official online sources (i.e., social media pages/profiles on Facebook and Twitter) oriented to comprehend, by their communication styles and strategies, the current digital customs adopted by political actors in order to create and define their own public profiles and the targets they look at when they are on the Net.

A brief literature review will be presented from the point of view of the analytical processes of framing political communication in the media sphere. Subsequently, the object of research and the electoral scenario on which the analyses were conducted will be outlined. Furthermore, the research design will be defined, and the two-resulting analyses will be presented separately, in order to conclude by presenting a comparison of the emerging electoral and digital profiles of the candidates to the elections for Mayor of Naples.

2. Political narrative among social and media identities building

In exploring the field of local politics it is necessary to understand what it means to be a mayor of a big city today. Many scholars (Recchi, 1996; Vandelli 1997; Della Porta, 2006) have rediscussed structural assumptions related to the change in local institution mechanisms caused by multiple reforms in the 1990s, evidencing how the mediation attitude of Mayors, between political assets and

citizens, shifted towards a more isolated character “who has few and conflictual relations in the political-institutional arena, putting on a plate their own larger networks among electors” (Recchi, 1996: 71).

These structural assets find correspondence in the consequent representation of the politicians’ work both on a local and a national level. More studies focusing on the political communication field (Boccia, Artieri, Bentivegno, 2019, Fasano, Panarari, 2016; Sorice, Schlesinger, 2011; Castells, 2017) have in fact evidenced the progressive personalization of political actors’ vocations in recent years in a context no longer tied to their own parties; a scenario in which politicians are more comparable to brands (Barile, 2014:3) and are able to enhance their reputation (Novelli, 2018: 160-161) thanks to any participation and public exposition opportunities prompted by the pervasive attitudes of the web and social media logics.

The use of the concept of narrative responds to the natural tendency of human beings to think and express themselves in intimate narrative forms, growing throughout their lifetime, or at specific times of presentation of certain facets of the self at a collective level of human behavior, which can be recognized in political candidates creating a narrative of themselves as political characters suitable to hold the office of mayor (Shenhav, 2006). Narrative can be conceived as a way of understanding the world and endowing it with meaning. In political discourse the dominant role of narratives is also justified by the centrality of narrative in the formulation and maintenance of worldviews as horizons of meaning, so the themes that construct the narrative become as central as the ways in which they are constructed and kept coherent, trying to shape the present considering the lessons learned from the past, throughout each individual narrative process (Shenhav, 2006). A political narrative can be split into two different modalities: one, which can be defined as formal political narrative, emerges from a formal political forum created within an official political framework or by political speakers, produced by politicians and public officials in the course of their duties. Another, defined as informal political narrative, is produced by all the actors involved in politics by noting the contents of their narrative (such as power relations and collective decision-making or compromise) or the conclusions that may be drawn from it and not by looking at the arenas in which they talk. This concept expands the definition to include almost any narrative, especially when politics and politicians with their own identities are broadly defined. Following Blumler (2013), we can rebuild the evolution of communication opportunities and, in this way, retrace how narratives have changed due to the cultural change in communication patterns. Retracing Blumler, Bennet and Pfetsch (2018 clarifies the four specific ages of political communication to clear up the “interplay of social conditions

that define audiences, the communication processes that send messages to them, and the effects of those processes”:

1. The parties are the centered actors able to attract strong voters and to engage the social groups (post 1945).
2. TV and mass media are available to the political communication professionals centered in news formats (1960 – early 1990s).
3. The “hydra-headed beast” (Blumler, Kavanagh, 1999:213) is born due to the media overload featured by TV diffusion and Internet proliferation (1990s).
4. Public TV exposure declines and political communication is totally and directly in the hands of political actors who approach their audiences through social media in a disintermediated fashion, overcoming gatekeeping by the press (2010 – now).

This latest opportunity is also open to political communicators, whether leaders or not, who give the audience the impression of being involved in a one-to-one relationship by way of the opening of one to many and the return of the many to one, an interactive game in which collective interplay becomes the central pivot of the construction of identities narratively and across the spectrum of social media. Thus, political actors currently orient the set of their own political communication strategies through digital expression, properly applied to electoral periods, by social media. Following Howard and Parks (2012: 4), social media consists of the “information infrastructure and tools used to produce and distribute content that has individual value but reflects shared values; the content that takes the digital form of personal messages, news, ideas, that becomes cultural products; and the people, organizations, and industries that produce and consume both the tools and the content”, the right context allows identity building of politicians in order to gain electoral support and consensus.

Considering the Internet today no longer as a mass medium instrument but as a mass consumption instrument, in the way the consumption objects are temporary relations between the involved actors of political communication scenario on top-down perspective, the current challenge is to rethink in terms of the “concepts of press/institution interactions, often centered on how news frames produce effects or public engagement” (Howard, Parks, 2012). Taking into account the disruptions in the political communication scenario demonstrated by the diversity of information and fragmented media content (Van Aelst et al., 2017) this challenge can be addressed following proper research approaches focusing on the sense-building processes used in top-down approaches and their representation. The correct interpretative schemas must be drawn, retracing the argument held by politicians in the social media environment and so isolating the logic of their argument, highlighted by the

main framing topics they elect. In the same way, empirical studies argue how the abovementioned four ages of political communication are not mutually exclusive (Nossek, Adoni, 2017; Chadwick, 2013; Deacon, Wring, 2011). Taking into consideration how social media logic is radically differentiated compared to traditional mass media¹, another important step for the current research is to approach the media discourses held in the press, radio and TV in order to accurately depict candidates' profiles in our case study, traceable by the context and frame sharing during the electoral campaign. First of all, this approach can be addressed through a careful study of the representation of their own dimensions paying attention to the communication styles and exposure that they adopt in terms of self-presentation on social media. Therefore, two ways of profiling will be discussed. The first is obtained by reconstructing the narratives that more or less traditional media (printed newspapers, radio, TV, blogs, online newspapers) construct of the political candidates analyzed, reconstructing the emerging electoral profile of each candidate. The second method of profiling will aim to reconstruct the digital profiles of the candidates created through self-representation and self-building of identity which comes from the specific use that these electoral candidates make of more or less traditional media (social profiles but also reporting of direct discourse in the media mainstream).

Assuming the main purpose of politicians work is political communication, i.e., to gain support from their voters or to engage their rivals (Graham, Jackson, Broersma, 2014), the empirical investigation related to the narration via (or through) social media deals with the two main dimensions the literature duly schematized (Zhao, Rosson, 2009; Miller, 2008; Marwick, Boyd, 2011) in the dichotomous personal-professional exposition. Following Colliander et al. (2017), contemporary sharing of the private person and personal lives (shaped to increase intimacy with the voters) as well as political professional lives, suggests a relevant effect to address in political communication research, or rather the possibility of a context collapse (home and work) and a mixture of “commonly distinct audiences” (Marwick, Boyd, 2011: 115).

3. The 2021 electoral scenario in Naples

The Naples municipal elections of October 3 and 4, 2021, handed the center-left coalition broad success in the first round. Mayoral candidate Gaetano Manfredi — a former university minister and former rector of the

¹ In terms of architecture, language and cultural codes, but based on overlap in terms of narrative production processes (Klinger, Svensson, 2015: 1257).

University of Naples Federico II — won with more than 60% of the overall votes. Manfredi was at the head of a broad front of alliances formed around the two most important parties of the Italian center-left: the Democratic Party and the Five Star Movement. The majority obtained by the former minister was surprising, especially considering the detachment reserved for the main challenger, the center-right candidate Catello Maresca, anchored at 22%, and the presence of two other candidates also affiliated with the center-left: the former mayor of the city and President of the Regional Council of Campania Region, Antonio Bassolino, reached 8%, and the former city councilor, Alessandra Clemente, exponent of the outgoing administration, gained only 5% of the consensus².

The electoral results suggest an even more unexpected connotation for the recent administrative history of the city. The City of Naples held elections after a political season marked by the dual mandate of Luigi De Magistris, a magistrate who in 2011 had undertaken the electoral battle for the city by placing himself at the head of a civic coalition of the radical left, an alternative to traditional alignments. Against several predictions, the mayor of what was called the “orange coalition” was able to defeat at the ballot in 2011 the contender of the center-right, Gianni Lettieri, replicating the same result five years later against the same competitor. In both rounds, the Mayoral candidates indicated by the coalitions led by the Democratic Party (Mario Morcone in 2011 and Valeria Valente in 2016) had been excluded from the second round of voting, creating a heavy defeat for the reformist area of the Neapolitan center left. This was also true for the candidates of the Movimento 5 Stelle, who came out of the two previous elections with decidedly modest percentages.

Certainly, in the span of a decade, the Italian political framework — and consequently the local one — has radically changed and has presented as a major new element of the plebiscitary affirmation of the movement founded by the comedian Beppe Grillo, who turned out to be the first national political force in the 2018 general elections, especially in the south of the country (Brancaccio, Mete, Tuorto 2019) consequently representing the hard core of several parliamentary majorities that have managed in recent years to lead the country. Notably, the alliance that supported the second term of government of Giuseppe Conte, one of the leaders of the Five Star Movement (thereafter M5S), built an axis with the Democratic Party (thereafter PD). In that very government, the newly appointed Mayor of Naples, Manfredi had been called to head the Ministry of Universities and Research as a PD area technician, also

² These were the four leading candidates. There were also three other competitors in the electoral competition: Matteo Brambilla, Giovanni Moscarella and Rosa Solombrino, who achieved very modest electoral results.

by virtue of his past as rector of the Neapolitan university and president of the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI).

Manfredi then capitalized on his government experience by running for Mayor of Naples. The center-left chose to bet on him to regain the government of the city, which eluded him in 2011 after having held it since the early nineties, first with the mandate of Antonio Bassolino (1993-2000) and then with that of Rosa Russo Iervolino (2001-2011). A twenty-year period in which the City of Naples has undergone a process of important modernization, positioning itself as a tourist attraction of international importance thanks to a complex redefinition of the area's image. The juntas of the nineties placed the cultural heritage (material and immaterial) of the city in the middle of the administrative action, modernized the public transport system and, above all, marked a disconnection from the past, characterized by bad administrative management and judicial scandals (Fruncillo, Gentilini, 2016). A period in which the city was definitively included in an international circuit of relations between great metropolises (Musi, 2002), and which was welcomed by the citizens, who in 2001 had chosen to give continuity to the plebiscitary role of Bassolino by electing Iervolino, also a candidate of the center-left, as mayor.

The experience of the first and only female Mayor of Naples began at the same time as Bassolino's election as president of the Campania region. Although she had progressively demonstrated a certain autonomy from Bassolino, she had always been perceived as a direct reference to the former mayor. Her administration was not as brilliant as the previous one, even if she led the municipal machine with great ability. At the end of her second term she was overwhelmed by some judicial inquiries concerning public contracts and, above all, she was involved in the administrative and political crisis that hit the region in the form of an emergency related to the disposal of urban waste. At the time, the waste scandal became a media case of considerable dimensions and for which the center-left of Campania was considered mainly responsible. There were several judicial inquiries and journalistic investigations into the management of the waste service, while the cities of Campania, including Naples, showed their streets submerged in waste. In the narrative of the emergency, many accusations were made against local politicians of collusion with local criminal powers, making this moral issue one of the main themes of the electoral campaign for the administrative elections of 2011. A period in which, among other things, even the center-right in Campania (along with the national center-right) was under indictment for the alleged relationships of some of its known exponents with the clans of the Camorra.

In this scenario, a crisis of the local center-left took place (Sales, 2012) and the candidacy of Luigi De Magistris, former magistrate, and exponent of a party of a justicialist nature, Italia dei Valori (Italy of the Values), took shape. The

magistrate took advantage of the growing climate of indignation to propose to the citizenship an element of discontinuity with respect to the experiences of government of the center-left but also against the center-right in Berlusconi's traction. He thus managed to impose himself in a surprising way in the 2011 elections and was again elected in 2016 at the helm of the city. His first administrative experience, characterized by populism and focused on the concept of territorial autonomy (Brancaccio, Fruncillo, 2019), was welcomed by the Neapolitans, however, they gradually lost confidence in him, electing his rivals at the last elections.

The former mayor was criticized because he was considered responsible for many problems in the city which have affected the City of Naples for many decades. Such issues often recur in public debate and concern specifically the quality of the public transport system, the road system, the cleanliness of the city, waste collection, social services, unemployment, the suburbs, and security. These issues are inevitably linked to the real big problem of the city: public debt. The municipal coffers have in fact been in dramatically deficit situation for years. The City of Naples is among the most indebted in Italy and on several occasions extraordinary funds have been requested to resolve financial problems, to provide investment and to lift the city from a crisis that is now enduring. The theme of public debt was therefore also central to the electoral campaign in question, in which it was the winner, Manfredi, who presented himself as the definitive resolution to this long-standing problem through the promotion of an extraordinary law to restore the budget of the City of Naples, a move that seems to have rewarded the current mayor, who emerged from the polls with a plebiscitary consensus, also replicated in the municipalities, in which the absolute affirmation of the center-left, which has conquered the totality of the municipalities, has occurred. In addition, Manfredi has experience in running one of the largest national universities, making a profit and being the catalyst for resources that have changed the economic structure and the possibility of growth and visibility. So why not rely on a subject of this kind to solve one of the biggest problems of city management, that is, the one related to public debt?

Hence, public debt has become a topic that has inevitably intertwined the political agenda of all aspiring Mayors regardless of political affiliation. The electoral result was quite clear, however, despite a record abstention never recorded before: only 47.2% of eligible voters went out to vote in the election for the new city council, signaling a general disaffection of Neapolitans towards politics. On the other hand, even if less than half of the people entitled to vote did so, the vast majority showed themselves determined to have Manfredi as their mayor, clarifying this time that together with the feeling of disaffection there is also a desire not only for change, but for specific change on issues

directly related to the problem-solving skills that are attributed to the elected candidate.

4. Research design: two steps, two profiles and the way to be Major in Naples

Considering the theoretical premises reported and after describing the scenario within which our observed focus fits, in this section the research design that underpins the conducted study is described. Specifically, by focusing on political narratives as tools for constructing profiles of political candidates in certain electoral events, the research design developed aims at a concurrent analysis of both the electoral and the digital profiles of our candidates, in a triangular mixed methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). This is a parallel convergent research design within which the methods chosen for the analysis are used simultaneously, the analysis is separated, and the interpretations combined, integrating the results in the final phase of the study. The objective behind such a process is to enrich the understanding of the two data sources used and the results they lead to, by cross-referencing the results obtained from different methods. Following this logic, the mixed methods approach is used to address the limits of individual methods. Two different steps in this work can be highlighted, with associated different research questions that justify their combined use.

Placing the political narratives in their informal conception at the middle of our reasoning, separates them from the place of production of the narrative as a political place deputed to this function, but recognizes all spaces of discussion in which arguments of a political nature can be treated as narratives as possible arenas. Two modes of construction of these narratives can be highlighted and are linked to the agent objects that convey them: media in general on the one hand, and social media on the other, recovering the contingent of the two seasons of political communication that Bennet and Pfestch (2018) identify as a “hydra-headed beast” and “the era of disintermediation”.

While this certainly represents an element of rupture in the classification of political narratives, another element that cannot be overlooked concerns the types of production of narratives generated by the modes of presentation, representation, and reputation construction. If on the one hand the narratives inferred by the media, information professionals and other actors capable of affecting the dominant opinions can be brought to light, on the other hand the narratives self-produced by the protagonists of politics can be brought to light,

which in our case are represented by the candidates for Mayor of the City of Naples.

Crossing these two theoretical dimensions, different types of media and social media productions can be used as data to conduct an in depth analysis of electoral profiles, essentially inferred (newspapers, TV, radio, trending hashtags on social media) as much as of candidates' digital profiles are self-made as a direct and personal emanation of the political narrative and self-presentation (Facebook and Twitter personal profiles of the candidates and materials reported entirely by mainstream media such as interviews, quotes, documents, programs, etc.). In the diagram that follows (Figure 1), the first dimension (agent objects) extends along the vertical line of the diagram, the second dimension (type of production) is positioned along the horizontal line and in the intersection it is possible to find what feeds the two profiles, and in particular, in green, the data that will be used later for the reconstruction of electoral profiles and in blue those that will be used for the reconstruction of digital profiles of our candidates.

Therefore, for the electoral profiles, which represent the first step of the research design, a qualitative hermeneutic analysis will be developed on the various sources, also addressing historical and sociological sources, to arrive at a profile for each candidate, highlighting the main characteristics that emerged from the reflections on the sources analyzed. The research questions that will guide this step of analysis will be: Which factors related to political networks push individuals to run for a political position? What are the biographies, the cultural and the local relations with the territories they run for?

The digital profiles of the candidates, which represent the second step of our research design, will be developed following a procedure of automatic analysis of text retrieved from the social profiles of the candidates and from the self-produced material disseminated by other media. In this case, *topic modeling* was applied to the text, aiming to retrieve emerging themes as elements of political narratives. Lexical correspondence analysis was also used, in order to understand latent spaces of meaning that systematize the themes and the ways in which they are dealt with. Finally, a *cluster analysis* was used to synthesize the results achieved and to produce digital profile schedules of the candidates, it also highlighted the main characteristics that emerged from the analysis. The research questions that are addressed in this step are: What representation of themselves do the candidates want to provide on the digital stage as a second-order arena, and to whom do they direct this effort? Is it the entire electorate or do they look at specific, more changeable and fluid segments that would otherwise be difficult to approach with the classic campaign methods of political communication (what target audience are they aiming for on social media and how consistent is this with the audience of associates)? What impact

and results does the construction of digital identities for political candidates have on specific electoral outcomes?

FIGURE 1. Conceptual dimensions, main modalities, source and types of data used.

		Agent objects in building political narratives		
		Media building political narratives		
Type of production of narratives as presentation, representation, and reputation	Self-made	Materials reported entirely by mainstream media such as interviews, quotes, documents, programs, etc.	Newspapers (Media mainstream)	Inferred
		Candidates' social pages (Facebook and Twitter)	Hashtag followed through the main social networks (#elezioninapoli, #elezioninapoli2021, #manfredi, #maresca, #bassolino, #demente)	
		Social media building of political narratives		

The time span considered covers a period of time from May 2021, the moment in which, more or less, the willingness to run for mayor was expressed by the subjects analyzed, to October 2021, the moment in which the electoral operations were concluded, and the newly elected mayor assumed office.

In conclusion, the results obtained from the first stage of the research will be compared and contrasted with results from the second stage, the final objective being to understand how much these two profiles are comparable for certain points of view, how much they diverge in other aspects and how effective they have been in the results obtained by the candidates in this electoral round.

5. Candidate profiles: a first step to reconstruct the inferred political narratives

The first analytical step concerns the profiling of the four main candidates for Mayor of Naples and the reconnaissance of the inferred electoral narrative. Therefore, we proceeded to consult mainstream media, the hashtags and topics used on the main social networks, the programmatic proposals implemented during the electoral campaign and the candidates' curricula. A qualitative hermeneutic analysis was carried out on these sources, useful for the reconstruction of the identikit of the four candidates, articulated on a double dimension concerning, on the one hand, personal biographies and professional careers and, on the other, the political, social and territorial networks activated by their candidacies.

The first candidate was Gaetano Manfredi, a center-left candidate with 13 lists: 57 years old, from Nola, previously a university professor, former rector of the University Federico II, and former Minister of Universities (2019-2020). His candidacy was the result of an agreement between the secretariats of the two main parties of the Conte II government (PD and M5S), who intended to build on the Neapolitan elections a sort of national political laboratory to experiment with their organic alliance. In this sense, the candidate's electoral campaign was immediately oriented by the possibility of establishing an institutional pact with the government to resolve the serious financial problems of the City of Naples caused by administrative inefficiencies perpetrated for decades. Therefore, the main figures supporting the candidate were the national political leaders: respectively Enrico Letta of the PD and Giuseppe Conte of the M5S. Despite the closeness to the PD (Manfredi's brother, Massimiliano, was a democratic parliamentarian in the previous legislature and had entered the government in 2020 as a technician close to the PD) in the public opinion the aspiring mayor was perceived as a direct expression of the former premier Conte, of whose government Manfredi was a minister. For this reason, his candidacy, despite the support of party structures and leaders (in addition to PD and M5S, he also obtained the support of Green, Article One, Italian Left, the former Right Italian Party and several civic coalitions, for a total of 13 lists), managed to communicate a relative independence from the apparatuses. The proximity to Conte — who, despite being a political leader in all respects, embodies in public opinion the model of the civic character repurposed to politics — seems to have helped Manfredi to build a narrative of himself based on autonomy, is also strong in the acquisition of skills and professionalism developed over the years and recognized by the public especially for his past as rector. Nonetheless, various political exponents have mobilized around his candidacy. Among the many, a fundamental role has been played by the president of the Campania region, Vincenzo De Luca, who has built a list in his support (Napoli Libera - Free Naples) and several former components of the area linked to the former Mayor De Magistris, transmigrated in the center-left coalition. Manfredi's candidacy, moreover, has mobilized what can be simply defined as the "good living room" of the city. The circuits of the city's bourgeoisie, the world of the professional and the sphere of Neapolitan intellectuals have, for the most part, lined up in favor of the former minister's candidacy. These dynamics are influenced not only by the social extraction of the candidate but above all by the professional circuits activated over the years by the former rector, who built his academic and political career in Naples, coming from a provincial city, Nola. His electoral success has however abundantly exceeded the forecasts, which gave him the favorite for the final winning at the second round. The success in the first round seemed therefore

to reward an electoral campaign with moderate tones, in which the candidate has conveyed, among others, themes such as administrative competence, institutional collaboration and the ability to interact with central government bodies for the allocation of financial resources allocated by the government's recovery plan from the socio-economic crisis generated by the COVID19 pandemic.

Antonio Bassolino, the second analyzed candidate, classified as independent with 5 lists: 74 years old, from Afragola, he can be described as a politician by profession and is former Mayor of Naples, former President of the Regional Council of Campania. Antonio Bassolino boasts decades of political experience in the communist and post-communist tradition. Since the sixties he has held various leadership positions within the Italian Communist Party (hereafter PCI), until in 1983 he became regional secretary of the party and, ten years later, Mayor of Naples, reconfirmed for a second term in 1997. He was one of the promoters of the so-called "Neapolitan renaissance", where, as mayor, he relaunched the urban and cultural policies of the city, capitalizing on the consensus obtained during his trade union action with the election as president of the Campania Region in 2000 and 2005, after a brief experience as Minister of Labor between 1998 and 1999. The two mandates at the head of the region, however, represented for Bassolino the end of his impressive political rise, which had seen him elected to the Italian Parliament in the eighties. Because of some judicial events that affected him, especially related to the waste scandal that hit Campania in the early years of the millennium, the popularity of the former mayor declined sharply, prompting his exit from politics and from the top roles of the center-left and in particular of the PD, a party that he himself had helped to found. However, Bassolino's political aims and the esteem he still enjoys from the Neapolitan electorate, which positively remembers his period as mayor, allowed him to stand for first citizen in the last local elections. Leveraging his previous experience, in February 2021 the former mayor presented his candidacy, trying to converge the forces of the center-left and in particular the PD in his name. After the official announcement of Manfredi's candidacy by the PD, Bassolino chose to run in the elections alone, leading as an independent a civic coalition composed of five lists, including Action, a center party led by former minister Carlo Calenda. Manfredi's announcement of his candidacy and the subsequent invitation to withdraw addressed to him by the national secretary of the PD is, however, connotative of a process of weakening of Bassolino within his political area and the party, already highlighted in the last electoral round for the municipalities, in which the former mayor's reapplication was destroyed after bitter clashes within the coalition. The loss of consensus, with a part of the Campanian and Neapolitan PD already aligned for some time with Vincenzo De Luca — his historical rival

in the PCI and then in the parties that derived from it (the Left Democratic Party and, subsequently, the Left Democratic) — allowed Bassolino to count in this electoral round only on residual historical figures of the Campanian left and to see others move away. In this sense, the clash between the old ruling classes of the regional PCI, of which Bassolino was undoubtedly the most important exponent, seemed to reproduce itself, even if in much more limited terms than in the past. In the long-standing internal dialectic within the communists, some political and intellectual segments linked to the old Ingraiian current of the PCI³, long led by Bassolino, and several co-protagonists of his previous experience as first citizen, sided with the former mayor. Because of the weakening of the circuit linked to him, Bassolino has followed in this electoral campaign the imprint of the expert politician at the service of the city, carrying out his project of civic and independent candidacy aimed at the administrative relaunch of the municipal body through policies of bureaucratic modernization, enhancement of welfare and cultural initiatives, in open contrast with the administrative experience of the outgoing junta: a strategy through which he still managed to get a fair response, gaining 8% of the consensus. This result however strongly diverges from the expectations that the same candidate had placed in the electoral round, in which he believed he could play outsider at least in the second round against the favorite Manfredi. The probability of an affirmation that would allow him to challenge the favorite in the runoff round was, moreover, constructed by the public narrative of the mainstream media. In particular, press and local TV seem to have built the story of a surprising rise of the outsider Bassolino, engaged in initiatives throughout the city: rallies, meetings in neighborhoods, and door to door collection of consensuses. The image of the "great Old Man" who returns to the field for the city by offering his wealth of experience and skills was also conveyed by the candidate himself, who played on his return to politics, starting with the provocative slogan used: "Bassolino again?". However, the discrepancy between the public narrative and the electoral result appeared rather evident at the end of the vote.

Catello Maresca, the third candidate analyzed, from the center-right with 8 lists: 49 years old, from San Giorgio a Cremano, and a Magistrate. Catello Maresca had been announced as a major contender to candidate Manfredi, especially in view of the support received from the secretariats of the three main center-right parties: Lega - League, Forza Italia - Strength Italy and Fratelli d'Italia - Brothers of Italy. The candidacy of the anti-Mafia magistrate, known in the public opinion for having in the past led important trials against the

³ Bassolino was for a long time an important member of a minority current within the PCI, headed by Pietro Ingrao, the historic national leader of the party's internal left wing.

Camorra clans of Caserta, had matured in the center-right as a prestigious civic candidacy to try to win the leadership of the Neapolitan administration after the experience of the De Magistris juntas, judged failed by the right. The image of the passionate “iron magistrate” (the slogan was “With the heart, without fear”) has therefore been exploited by the candidate, who has tried to build an electoral self-narrative based on the themes of legality, strengthened by his professional experience in the fight against the Mafia. A narrative that, by the way, also seemed prevalent in the media, which frequently portrayed Maresca primarily based on his work. Already a suitable candidate for the center-right in the regional elections of 2020, he formalized his candidacy for Mayor of Naples in May of the following year, gaining the immediate support of the national leader of the Lega - League - Matteo Salvini. The subsequent support of the other center-right parties had thus configured for the magistrate the possibility of being the main competitor for the center-left candidate, against whom much of his election campaign was concentrated. Maresca’s race towards Palazzo San Giacomo was however characterized by several criticalities, linked to the presentation and delivery of the electoral lists in his support. Due to errors related to purely logistical issues, as stated by the staff of the candidate, four lists in his support have been discarded out of the 12 initially presented. The first two excluded lists were of direct expression of the candidate (Maresca Mayor and Catello Maresca); another one was the list expressed by the Animalist Party; yet another one was a very important loss: it was the list called Naples First, a container of candidates belonging to the Lega - League, the main party of the center-right whose program Maresca rode in a territorialized declination of the most relevant issues such as security and employment, with specific focus also on cultural policies, innovation, public environment and tourism. The lack of presentation of the four lists (in total Maresca could count on eight lists) has however ineluctably compromised the electoral campaign of the candidate, who came out strongly reduced in the outcome of the vote, collecting a consensus three times lower than that obtained by the candidate of the center-left. Despite exclusions, Maresca’s real problem seems to have been the lack of harmony amongst one of the parties of his coalition, Fratelli d’Italia - Brothers of Italy, who were split in an internal controversy concerning the compilation of the list of the party led at the national level by Giorgia Meloni: controversy resulted in real physical violence in the electoral office of the district of Soccavo between some local leaders of the party. Another problem seemed to be the discrepancy between his experience in the judiciary and some alliances built during the election campaign, not considered to correspond to the principles of legality by which the same candidate for mayor claimed to be inspired.

Alessandra Clemente, the last considered civic candidate of the left with 3 lists: 34 years old, from Naples, lawyer, former alderman and city councilor. The

electoral campaign of the candidate Alessandra Clemente, at the head of a civic coalition affiliated with the former Mayor De Magistris, has also been marked by themes of legality. Daughter of Silvia Ruotolo, murdered by the Camorra in 1997, Clemente has a long experience in the civil anti-Mafia movement. In particular, she has been an activist for the associations Libera - Free - Associations, names and numbers against mafias and Italian Antiracket Foundation (FAI), and a promoter of several initiatives in memory of her mother and of the other Mafia victims, also thanks to her militancy in the Family Coordination of Innocent Victims of Camorra, a reality that unites a large group of people throughout the region. This background allowed her to be called by De Magistris to hold a position in the first term of his junta (2013-2018). For the then first citizen, Clemente represented the “new course” that the nascent administration intended to pursue against illegalities, under the sign of an electoral campaign conducted mainly on those issues. The administrative experience has allowed the candidate to compete in first person at the next municipal elections of 2018 as the leading name of the coalition still led by De Magistris; a competition that has seen her reach about 5000 votes of preference, resulting the first of the elected in the orange team. Thanks to her successful term, she obtained reconfirmation of the role of city councilor with a relevant specific weight within the council majority. Not surprisingly, it was the same De Magistris to indicate Clemente as candidate for mayor in 2021, with the intent to give continuity to the political project born ten years before. However, the investiture has accelerated the continuous process of disintegration of the political area linked to the former mayor. In the lists supporting Clemente, in fact, there was a residual quota of former majority companions, who mostly migrated to the coalition that supported Manfredi. Clemente’s candidacy therefore appeared rather weakened with respect to generating the proposal: De Magistris himself did not participate in the public initiatives of the aspiring mayor, who in the end obtained little more than 5% of the consensus. Nevertheless, she did not succeed in appearing completely autonomous from the ex-mayor, the attempts of emancipation, with the vehiculation of messages oriented to innovation, to youthfulness and to the renewal of the executive class, are destroyed by the hostility that wide parts of the population demonstrated towards the outgoing administration. Clemente has also pushed hard on being the only female candidate for mayor, with the added value of being a direct witness to Mafia violence. These aspects, however, have clashed with the mainstream narrative, which most often seems to have painted Clemente as too young and inexperienced to be the mayor of the third largest city in Italy, despite her significant experience in leading the city. Her political proposal was therefore not convincing to the Neapolitan electorate, especially

on issues such as administrative continuity, youth policies, gender issues, urban regeneration, ecology, and sustainable mobility.

FIGURE 2. Synoptic scheme of the candidate's electoral profile.

		GAETANO MANFREDI	CATELLO MARESCA	ANTONIO BASSOLINO	ALESSANDRA CLEMENTE
PERSONAL DATA	Age	57 years old	49 years old	74 years old	34 years old
	Provenance	Nola, NA	San Giorgio a Cremano, NA	Afragola, NA, Napoli	Napoli
PROFESSIONAL CAREER	Education	PhD in Structure Engineering	Law Degree	High school diploma	Law Degree
	Profession	University Professor	Magistrate	President <i>Fondazione SUDD</i>	Lawyer (non- practising)
	Past experiences	University Researcher; Rector of the University Federico II of Naples; President of CRUI.	Prosecutor of the DDA of Naples; Deputy Prosecutor, Naples; Lecturer of law and legislation antimafia, University Vanvitelli	Political Officer; Trade Unionist	Secretariat Counter Antiracket FAI; Educator in schools for <i>Libera</i> ; President of <i>Silvia Ruotolo</i> Foundation.
POLITICAL CAREER	Role	No role	No role	No role	Alderman of the City of Naples
	Political placement	Center-left independent	Center-right independent	Center-left independent	Left
	Past placement	PD	No placement	PCI, PDS, DS, PD	DemA – Democrazie e Atuonomia
	Past experiences	Advisor to the Minister for Reforms and Innovations in Public Administration; Minister of University and Research	No experiences	Regional Councilor Campania PCI; Secretary of the Federation PCI Campania; Member of the Central Committee of the PCI; Deputy of the Republic X and XI Legislature; Mayor of Naples; Minister of Labor; President of Campania Region	Alderman and municipal councillor of Naples.

MOBILIZED NETWORKS		Professionals, party apparatus, intellectuals, associations	Entrepreneurship, party apparatus	Intellectuals, former politicians	Youth, social centers, women
MAIN TOPICS		<i>competence, knowledge, institutional collaboration, pact for Naples, Pnrr, economic development, innovation</i>	<i>safety, work, culture, tourism, green, efficiency, innovation</i>	<i>modernization of administration; welfare decentralization; fight against inequalities; right to live; urban humanism; cultural and civic enrichment; eco-sustainability; reforestation; digitalization.</i>	<i>youth, women, legality, urban regeneration, ecology, sustainable mobility, memory of camorra victims, administrative continuity</i>

Ultimately, we are faced with profiles that appear remarkably different from each other. Manfredi is characterized as a high-profile professional, recognized for his academic experience but especially for his ability to gather around his candidacy a body of supra-local power able to ultimately offer answers to the atavistic economic crisis of the city. After all, the candidate himself promoted a pact for the city and built his electoral campaign around this proposal, mobilizing not only the local political apparatuses lined up in his support but also national ones, convincing moreover wide popular groups and a large slice of the city bourgeoisie: professionals, the academic sector, intellectuals and entrepreneurs.

This dynamic inevitably relates to his long experience as the head of the first Neapolitan university, which allowed him to present himself as a competent administrator and allowed him to establish important relationships in the city even though he came from a provincial city, an operation that seems to have failed Maresca. It is precisely his prestigious professional experience in the fight against organized crime in the judicial field that has highlighted a discordance with the alliances built during the electoral campaign, especially with regards to some public statements in support of some political leaders such as Silvio Berlusconi, who was on several occasions involved in Mafia trials.

His positioning was therefore perceived as contradictory in the public opinion, and this seems to have amplified the difficulties encountered by his coalition in the phase of presentation of the lists. Moreover, the loss has been substantial not only in terms of votes. What seems to have penalized Maresca most was this consequent inability to mobilize the apparatus of the parties deployed in his coalition, which in many cases produced minimal effort to organize the collection of consensuses. This dynamic seems to have also characterized the electoral campaign of Clemente, whose proposal appeared

weakened by the voluntary departure of relevant exponents of the political area of origin. Clemente successfully mobilized a proportion of young people and women but suffered heavily from the absence of party structures in her support (with the exception of the left-wing movement Power to the People!) and paid especially for the exposure she had within the De Magistris juntas.

A role that, on the one hand, has exposed her to criticism from those who were in open disagreement with the outgoing administration and, on the other, has generated a substantial disintegration of that political area, in which several exponents were aiming, like her, at the candidacy for mayor. Previous experience was also a weakening factor for Bassolino. Far from the plebiscitary consensus obtained in his past elections, the electoral campaign of the ex-mayor was characterized by the break with the PD and by the historical contrast between him and De Luca, president of the region and *deus ex machina* of the party in Campania. Bassolino has mobilized some old politicians together with a large group of intellectuals who have been close to him since his first mandate, but he is unable to converge around his candidacy the support of young people and the electorate not traditionally aligned to the left, despite the attempted expansion to the centrists and right-wingers.

6. Social candidate profile: a second step to reconstruct the self-made political narratives

In light of the research design and the abovementioned scenario concerning the election of last October in Naples, the following section aims to underline the methodological path followed in the second stage of our research, in particular by describing the empirical base, the data collection phase and the techniques adopted, to explain the main results and the emerging digital profiles of our candidates.

First, the empirical base of this step is composed of the posts that the observed candidates create on Facebook and Twitter. Following the 2020 reports edited by *blogmeter* and *we are social*⁴, the latter social media platforms are in fact the main consulted platforms in Italy by those wishing to stay informed on political issues, while the first is more generalist and diffuse to a much wider audience. Therefore, these two social media sites have been selected in order to observe of the digital self-presentation of our candidates. The data was collected via *Crowdtangle* and *FanpageKarma*, through which it was possible to interrogate Facebook and Twitter APIs respectively from May the

⁴ *Blogmeter*, *Italiani e social media*, ed. 2020. Available at: <https://www.blogmeter.it/it/reports/italiani-e-social-media-2020>.

1st to October the 10th, and in time to observe the entire election campaign and gather the first contents referred to in the election results.

After the collection and organization of the data in a relational matrix composed of 2355 observations, the information was categorized following the structure of a proper standard gather grid (Losito, 2003; Amaturò, Punziano, 2013) divided into two main domains (General Information and Context Information) and then organized into nine variables defined as follows:

- General information: Platform (Facebook, Twitter); Page Name (Name of the candidates' page names); Date of post (duly aggregated month by month).

- Context information: Type of post (Link, Live Video competed; Live Video Scheduled; Native Video; YouTube; Status; Tweet; Photo); External sources (Local Press; National Press; Press agencies; Associations and think tanks; Candidates' official websites); Likes (duly classified in terciles Low-Medium-High), Comments (duly classified in 5 intervals: Comments Not Available – Low – Medium Low – Medium – High), Shares (duly classified in 5 intervals: No Shares – Low – Medium Low – Within Average Value – High) and message (to which we collected the entire corpus of posts).

In order to follow the aims of this step, a multi-stage analytical procedure is proposed. It consists in the application of bottom-up *topic modeling*⁵ to underline the main arguments on which the electoral campaign communication strategies were set. A lexical correspondence analysis (*LCA*) is a useful tool to detect the latent dimensions by which the correspondence between the topics emerged and to identify other variables, thus aiming at underlining the communication features of the observed candidates in terms of their self-presentation patterns, communication styles and coordination strategies. The *LCA* is proposed to highlight the features of electoral communication in Naples thanks to the empirical evidence marked out by correspondence between the selected variables and the most frequent words used in posts, categorized through *topic modeling*. Finally, we conducted a *cluster analysis (CA)* in order to explore in more depth. The clustering procedure returned a further synthesis of the information contained in our dataset as digital narrative strategies used by our candidates.

5.1 Topic Modeling

Due to the large amount of information related to the posts and the difficulty in tracing their semantic structures, we identified a robust solution: *topic modeling*.

⁵ Blei, Ng and Jordan, 2003.

Using the software *T-Lab*⁶, we conducted a thematic analysis preceded by the automatic processes of *lemmatization*, *lessicalization*, cleaning empty words, *segmentation*, and disregarding words used less than 10 times, which left us with a vocabulary of 1591 lemmas.

Later, we set up the modeling aiming to identify topics based on the *Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA)* a “generative probabilistic model for text document collections based on a three-level hierarchical Bayesian model, in which each item of a collection is modeled as a finite mixture over an underlying set of topics. Each topic is, in turn, modeled as an infinite mixture over an underlying set of topic probabilities. In the context of text modeling, the topic probabilities provide an explicit representation of a document” (Blei, Ng, Jordan, 2003). Following this procedure, we extracted 16 topics later renamed respecting statistical criteria, such as:

- the occurrence of specific words
- the occurrence of low-high frequency words across all topics.
- semantic tagging of selected contexts to “detect the right document meaning solving disambiguation and identifying concepts by a set of words” (Bolasco, 2013: 126).

After launching a 20-topic bottom-up procedure, following the test of the model, only 19 topics with classifiable elements were identified and were named as follows (see FIGURE 3):

FIGURE 3. Topics, words, and elementary context examples.

Topic name	Most frequent Words	Elementary context examples
Left-wing candidatures	Bassolino, Manfredi, Antonio, PD, vote, Roma, Partity, to speak, Mayor, Left-wing, Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To better understand the militants and coordinators struggles of dem who in last hours have spent time with Antonio Bassolino, the former Mayor candidate against his former party. - While apparently he seems to be emphatic in support Manfredi who, in the same time, alternates reflections pauses with PD. Meanwhile resists the relevant candidature of the left-wing historic leader, Antonio Bassolino, looked with skepticism by the PD establishment.
Candidates lists-making	Candidate, Civice, Clemente, Election, Coalition, Action, To Candidate, Mayor, List, Electoral, Comunal, Win, Citizen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With me, today, the municipal councillor candidate Claudio Cecere, long last focused about the requalification of Polifunzionale; Elena Coccia, municipal councillor for the metropolitan city with the list of Alessadnra Clemente; Sabrina Ruocco the municipal councillor candidate in Naples 2030 list for the 5th municipality

⁶ T-Lab is specific content analysis software, able to process proper patterns based on textual context.

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Scampia is with Gianluca Franco, candidate for the municipality presidency of the 8th section and with the other councillor candidates of the list related to Alessandra Clemente, Claudio Cecere and Marika Franco!
City regeneration	Awesome, Morning, To serve, Model; Bigger, proper, Regeneration, Concrete, Stronger, City, Naples, Future, Citizens, Rebuild	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are a great team: the best energies to believe again in our city, the best for the future of Naples! - The municipality is the closer institution to citizens. We needed and still need start from the city and search the right solutions because any city has his soul. The first competence of a Mayor is to represent the soul of his city and address concrete problems as the street conditions, the urban requalification and a shared vision of the city.
Care of public and health administration	To take, cure, administration, friend, To merit, self-respect, pride, visit, radio, Sunday, health, healthcare, our, love, fragile, strong, today, commitment, energy, defense, to improve, representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We can't allow the degradation of our street. We must turn back dignity to our squares and our places. They deserve it. We will take care of our city every day, every hour. - Why we miss communities? The absence of police and of institutions is to blame, but we miss the civic sense of our neighborhood communities. We must take care of our neighborhood and of the places in front of our commercial activities.
Civil Rights	Woman, family, places, men, rights, worker, happen, present, nest, nursery, to welcome, kid, make, fight, number, support, to fight, freedom, continue, rally, live.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Today I met the guest children of the association "Figli in famiglia" from San Giovanni a Teduccio. Carmela Manco, the heart and mind of the NGO, is an awesome woman who welcome and contest the young exclusion in a neighborhood that need to be restored as normal. - "Madrina" is the initiative held by Rosalia Porcaro, in charge to defence of women rights. In presence Valentina Flagiello also, volunteer of Telefono Rosa and sister of Arianna, victim of a femicide.
Urban, environmental and human heritage	Giovanni, enhance, development, sea, tourist, capital, whole, touristic, trasport, center historic, Teduccio, museum, return, city, cultural, fundament, Bagnoli, napoletain, vision, area, private, imagine, investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We will restore our city coasts to reviving the tourism sector and in order to make job opportunities. From San Giovanni To Bagnoli we will give back the sea to citizens. Is not a dream but a concrete project. Naples will be the Mediterranean capital. - My kind of city give back beauty to suburbs through arts and valorization of places. By the project "Museo diffuso" we will make accessible the works of art stored in the city museums. Tourists and citizens can buy a common ticket to take a journey from the inner city museums to the suburbs ones.
Support, sharing and participation	To build, aspect, thanks share, comparison, to promote, participation, sector, campaign, thank, programme, culture, relevant, support, listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thanks a lot to everyone who contributed with ideas and proposals to my program for Naples. Thanks to Neapolitan met in last months: their needs are our compass. Will be a shared journey always open to the participation of all citizens. - Let's face together in presence to share ideas, proposals and actions to build a new and stronger Naples for every citizen. I'll wait for you in large number!
Neapolitan anthology	Services, create, public, intervention, proposal,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As if that would even be enough for him the first time, then the government charges, the parliament and then

	inclusion, green, new, social, network, metropolitan city, pandemic, realize, quality, neighborhood.	<p>the Minister: “I’ve Naples in my heart, this is the reason why I am again on the dance line. I think about politics also when I’m sleeping”. Today starts again his idea of Naples, “but I come back as a new man”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - He remarks always his institutional profile and his love for Naples, but today. Five years later, we’re back on the square one, but with two substantial differences. - Berardo Imoegno, a figure close to Manfredi, speaks about the élite-popular division in Naples. We thought the left-wing was stopped until 30 years ago. Today we realize is stopped until 300 years ago. This division is ridiculous: there’s only Neapolitans and are all my fellow citizens.
Investment in local economy	Territory, safety, to invest, open, tourism, milions, to allow, closure, euro, space, economy, work, neighborhood, to work, to open, activity, major, priority.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The winning project #Balneolis need social and cultural spaces. Aggregation ad popular production places. It replies the needing to create job opportunities for the development of a territory where a progressive declination of economy has been addressed. - One of the main aspects to consider is the most important condition for a new city model, for an economic growth and for the distribution of services (job, trade, school, loisir, nature, culture and education).
Cultural exportation	Beautiful, heart, sport, arts, generation, artist, joy, talent, artistic, big, world, become, little, year, heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A Nice sport event at Scandone public pool where has been organized the International Swimming League, a swimming competition with the best swimmer of the world. I had the chance to confront with Paolo Barelli, president of the Italian Swimming Federation and of the European swimming league. - Is arrived the time to approach seriously the trident composed by former youngs eternal - e se fosse arrivato il momento di prendere sul serio questo tridente di ex giovani, eterne promesse diventate grandi nelle loro zone di comfort, ma inespresse a livello internazionale? La voglia di rivincita e la fame di vittoria dei tre ragazzi del Sud sono quelle di tutta la squadra di Mancini
Framing of further administration	To choose, Italy, suddenly, to address, struggl, Gennaro, symbol, blood, Napoles, day, city, chose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We want to integrate a support politics for the artworkers by a specific tourism promotion project via multiannual programs able to make Naples a great international showcase for arts and crafts. - We can provide part of the real estate heritage of the municipality for the Neapolitans universities directors and create student houses for all those students who have chosen Naples for their education. We must make the entire South, the entire Italy and the entire Europe to study in Naples. Let’s make education the development engine of our territory.
Legality in youth perspectives	Us, make, camorra, believe, solidarity, better, wish, organized, to clean, identity, criminality organized, our, together, opportunity, to stop,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For us, politicians, a double commitment: hold on to offer alternatives to youngs. Explaining them what the price of the crime is. We must take side against camorra, in public and private ways. - Bring in Naples big companies means offer job opportunities and decent salaries to youngs.

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	to enhance, justice, concrete, young, continue, project	
Identity and cultural resistance	To know, to convince, To ask, happy, debate, demand, tied, Neapolitan, to see, live, make, listen, think, need, people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We have not been able to enable a new political generation. I thought about what I should do when my parents told me they don't agree with my political choices. My civil obligation drove me to present the candidature as Mayor of Naples. I could not back out from it. - In 2019 has been able to join a green business mission crossing the Neapolitan ancient traditions in a brand which retrace three fundamentals' elements: Sun, Vesuvius and hop.
Social policies and third sector	Association, commit, community, photo, enhancedo victim, close, memory, education. Voice, goods, marco, welcome, people enhancement, coordinate, path, reality, violence, to participate, Luigi, social, value, to defeat, call	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For people and community there's always social and professional involvement histories. Women and men ambassadors of values: inclusion, sensitivity for the exclusion and community sense in which I strongly identify. - Annalaura di Luggo is a social involved woman. She has given everything for this project, free of fees for the city. I want publicly to thank her for the journey done together still now. We're more united than yesterday in the same direction: The social responsibility for culture of women for women.
Horizontal politics	Place, home, formation hope, hand, movie, ciro, dreams, cinema, square, young, years, find, guy, beauty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I Received this call and I went to visit these two guys. I bought them bread and pizzas. I had a live direction on my Facebook page to tell the story of these guys, as them asked me. - Today I walked with the young guys and commercials in the heart of Rione Sanità. A great place rich of people active for their territory.
Politics expertise	Hard, society, situation, person, to govern, politician, politics, time, civil, experience, able.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "I am the most politicized and as well the most independent". The words of the former Mayor Bassolino, who met politics for the first time in Afragola, when he was young, - We have not been able to create a new political generation. I thought about what to do, also if my parents did not agree, I candidate to run as Mayor of Naples to follow my civil duty.
Action, facilities and public involvement	To meet, historical, works, zone, mercato, trade, street, local, week, month, street, neglect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take care of the city means to point specific aspects about urban requalification, of people daily life, of weak and excluded defense, and restore social structures, cultural and health services, of which the disaster condition has been marked by pandemic. - Enhance public transports and taxi ways for commercial and touristic activities. In line with my social service plan I want create in any neighborhood meeting points and cultural spots for youngs, families and old people.
Formal political participation	Come back, european, service, european, page, october, you, become, maria, for me, instrument, blue, today, watch, battle, topics, team, proud, occasion, to unite, dream, to present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A pact with Naples, for Naples. Today in Mazzini square. - An article of Stella Cervasio on Repubblica Napoli. The meeting with Bassolino come back in San Giovanni.

Funds planning and local conflicts	Challenge, resource, south, campania, possible, recovery, to aim, changing, to put, to speak, possibilities, field, attention	- You know how exclusion and the education poverty has not been resolved in Southern Italy. This is the first topic I am commitment with in order Government give answer. I will ask for resources for essential services and educative programs. The government leaves back the south and southern kids.
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5.2 Lexical Correspondence Analysis (LCA)

Following *topic modeling*, conducted *LCA* to detect the self-presentation practices used by the observed candidates as essentially narrative strategies. *LCA* is a factorial technique concerning textual data and is useful to synthesize information contained in texts, create graphic displays of association networks among words and between words and texts, and to show the connections between text and context data (Lebart, Salem, Berry, 1998).

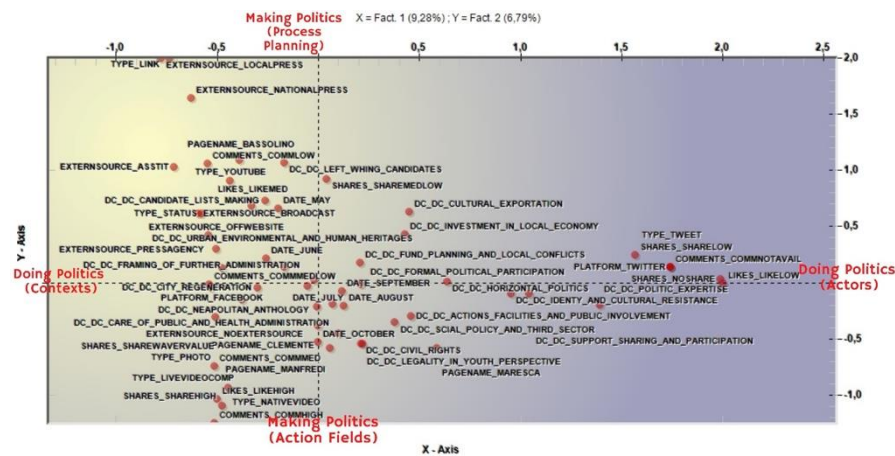
For the *LCA* setup all the variables were considered active for the factor building, including the new variables created by the emerged topics as classificators of each single post. The first result of this analytical procedure consists of identification of the main dimensions underlying the textual material processed and analyzed. After consulting the engine-value output, we realized that the most exhaustive results suggested considering the first two factors.

On the first (Y Axis, 27% of explained inertia), all the features concerning the structural aspects in the political framework during electoral campaigns emerged. In light of this, the factor was renamed making politics: in the upper side all the data concerning processes planning are enclosed, which features the electoral campaign in Naples as the potential candidates were identified (Electoral list making) as well as the left-wing candidate selection for Mayor of Naples (Left-wing candidates). Moreover, it is possible to identify other topics which feature the ‘making politics’ dimension, such as investment in local economies or framing processes to highlight in the next administration. In the same way, the lower side of this dimension reflects the fields of action in making politics, characterized by dataset portions related to the relevant implementation frames mainly focused on social and welfare issues such as civil rights, social policies and third sector or care about public and health services. The first factor is featured in the progressive timeline starting from the first day of observation (May the 1st) until the last (October the 12th).

The second factor (X axis, 32% of explained inertia) is characterized by the performance elements and the paths which candidates needed to follow to gain consensus amongst voters, so for this reason it was renamed doing politics. The right side, in fact, encloses all the dataset information oriented to the fundamentals of representative models in democracy, oriented to reduce the divisions among rulers and citizens in terms of decisions and action programs.

We can identify topics such as political expertise as well as formal political participation on one hand, and on the other hand topics such as horizontal participation, identity and cultural resistance, support, sharing and participation. Opposite to the right-side concerning actors in doing politics, on the left side are the contexts in which political contests play out, which in a city such as Naples are mainly shaped on emotion and identity, as marked out by topics such as urban, environmental and human heritage, city regeneration and Neapolitan anthology. The second factor, moreover, is also featured in the platform preferences of use, in this case the two which were used for observation in this specific empirical phase of the research. On the right side we found Twitter which, following Eriksson and Olsson (2016), is useful to connect the microlevel of interpersonal communication, the meso-level of follower–followed networks and the macrolevel of hashtag-based exchanges, while on the left, Facebook which, especially in *infodemic* periods such as the one we are currently in because of the pandemic, for Cinelli et. Al (2020:1) “provides direct access to an unprecedented amount of content and amplifying rumors and questionable information”.

FIGURE 4. Lexical correspondence analysis. Total explained inertia 59%.



As figure 2 shows, the present “social currency” (Hermina, Thurman, 2008), intended as the engagement rate, follows an increasing trend starting from the first day of observation and approaching October. Low levels of likes, comments, and shares, correspond to May and the early summer months, increasing as election day grows closer. Therefore, what’s driving engagement in this election, according to what’s happening on the candidates’ digital profiles, is the imminence of the event and not the type of content being

conveyed. It's not a matter of distinguishing between more rational or more emotional content, but at most we can see a net characterization of the candidates by type of content disseminated on the Net. This phenomenon removes the link with an emotional grouping of content. It contributes to tracing user profiles as echo-chambers characterized by communication on other digital platforms such as live broadcasts and DMs. Indeed, the candidates' profiles, even Maresca, are mainly enclosed on the lower side, which also indicates the type of post typical of direct communications such as live video directions, native videos, and photos. Bassolino, is the only candidate who finds a place in the upper side, where on the left side we can also see textual posts such as status or links-posts in which external information sources such as local and national press, press agencies or candidates' official websites are enclosed.

5.3 Cluster Analysis (CA)

To develop the analysis, stressing the information contained in the dataset and offering more synthesized and clear results for this part of the work, we conducted a multi-stage analytical path using CA through which we synthesized a combination of all the information in homogeneous and representative groups (Lebart, 1994). Based on an iterative and recursive algorithm logic, the number of groups is determined by researcher competence in detecting the correct amount in terms of reciprocal distinctions and each contained information homogeneity. In our case we selected 4 specific clusters that encompasses 42.5%, 23.5%, 8.4% and 25.5% of the analyzed posts for 88% of the total information extracted from the dataset.

Their corresponding positions on the plan, are duly plotted as follows: the first across the second and third quadrant, the second across the first and the fourth quadrant, the third in the second quadrant and finally the fourth in the third quadrant.

The composition is shaped on different narrative arrangements held by the observed candidates, that followed for more as the right fundamentum divisionis adopted for their description. To facilitate the review of this part of analysis, we start presenting classes without following the progressive numeration.

The third class gathers information mainly oriented to a self-presentation pattern tailored to pre-digital communication logics related to the press environment and then transposed online in the social media sphere. This group includes all the external sources from local and national press, as well as from *ANSA*, the oldest press agency in Italy (Melchiori, 2007). Here are contents posted through textual codes such as Facebook status that are related to making politics processes, mainly concerning debates about the appropriate individuals

to run as Mayor of Naples. In this way, this group has been renamed Hybrid Narration, meaning those practices that see in social media an opportunity for diffusion of the type of communication originally designed for traditional or alternative media platforms such as press releases, broadcast podcasts. Following Chadwick (2013), waiting for a final migration towards digital media, today we stand in an era characterized by the coexistence of old and new media, in the sense that the latter has not yet replaced the former but rather integrates with radio, press and TV (Iazzetta, Padricelli, Punziano, 2020).

On the opposite side, the fourth group is positioned in the third quadrant across the context and the action fields of politics. It includes as its main topics city regeneration and the care of urban, public and health services. This cluster is characterized by an approach oriented to personal communication which directly connects authors and audiences. Here how gatekeeping is overcome is properly evidenced as well as the charge reduction of parties in terms of communication coordination in all the possible ways. It was not possible to identify any relation with media in terms of disseminating news and in terms of sources. All the content was created by the electoral candidates intending to communicate directly with audiences in real time and to interact on their audience's level in a mutually communicative space (Coleman, 2005). However, this group has been renamed Disintermediated Narrations, adherent with the last political communication era identified by Bennet and Pfestch (2018).

The second group which crosses the first and the fourth quadrants includes all contents posted mainly on Twitter and related to the topics in line with the actor's political and citizenship levels. This group refers to the arguments in line with participation processes as well as the exhortations to stand in Naples and contribute to city renewal and to vote for a highly competent political representative. Furthermore, arguments in line with the politics processes are enclosed, as are posts related to implementation of investment in local economy. This group, finally, seems to encase the contents needed to gain consensus from political parties and voters (Mouffe, 2005): the audiences are aware of processes related to politics and, on the other hand, the audience's participation in society is created by a set of practices in the context of conflicts provided by those mechanisms. For this reason, this group has been renamed Legitimizing Narrations.

The last group, plotted across the second and third quadrants includes contents shared via Facebook and which referred to the context framed during the electoral campaign. Here, the narratives are shaped as already legitimated by the authors in a way that needs just the emphasis of the main values concerning what it means to be and live in Naples, emphasized mainly on rhetorical codes used to strengthen emotions and citizens' connections to their city and

identities. For this reason, this group has been renamed Consolidating Narrations.

In line with the cluster features, looking again to the entire plan in figure 3 where the factorial graph is plotted on *LCA* and superimposed with a fourth class, we can notice a higher reactivity of users with disintermediated and consolidating narrations. Lower engagement rates, in terms of comments, likes and sharing, are in fact more in line with the hybrid one, as the medium rates whit the legitimating narrations.

The observed candidates are located entirely in one of the clusters and therefore relate to the corresponding narration model. Bassolino, is located in the hybrid cluster. In this case, the self-presentation of the former Mayor of Naples is oriented mainly on politics processes. He approaches the second-order arena with a self-centered narration based on the ‘hot topic’ he wished to highlight i.e., the negotiation around the left-wing candidature. Following Arcostanzo, Pansardi, (2017) and Consolazio (2017), he adopts a merit attack strategy, criticizing his competitors, in this case mainly Manfredi. He transposes traditional strategies in creating political communication in the social media sphere? Manfredi relates to the political communication third era (Bennet, Pfestch, 2018) with frequent reposts of the initiatives he made offline as rallies and speeches. The digital presence of Manfredi seems finally more directed to those who may already know his political biography and has more confidence in the internal dynamics in terms of political relations among the establishments. At the same time, always respecting a digital migration communication model, he uses the press to spread his electoral projects and enhance his reputation for the already undecided voters.

Regarding Maresca, he stands in the legitimating narration cluster. His narration is on making himself known as a newcomer to the local election. Directly connected to the fields of action and shaped on involvement and participation issues, the communication strategy he adopted change to encompass a positive strategy, as evidenced by the content he posted concerning the relevance of choosing an expert figure as the next mayor. In light of this, his self-presentation shapes a leadership personalization legitimated firstly by the party and then by the public composed also of social media users (Mazzoleni, 2004:104-105).

Clemente stands in the consolidating narration cluster. As an incumbent councilor of the previous administration, she is already well known by voters. In light of this, her narrative creates a digital self-presentation mainly shaped on rhetorical and emotional issues oriented to her network supporters. On one hand, she headlines her physical and subjective presence on digital native posts as multi-coded pictures both taken in the community and as visual manifestos or avatar-portraits. On the other hand, she shapes her social identity using a

direction. Among the candidates Manfredi particularly created his political communication strategies using and following web logics, interiorizing web specific language, expressions, and esthetic forms of the medium, in this case played out online in a digital native orientation, building content and through social media (Boccia Artieri, 2012).

7. Conclusion and discussion

At this stage, we are able to define the main profiling of the observed candidates in terms of digital self-made and inferred presentation due to the results emerging from the investigation. In conclusion, through the overlapping types of narrative inside and outside the Net, it is possible to underline not only how the last election in Naples featured candidates running for mayor but also to make clear the dimensions in which these divisions appear.

To provide a clear frame for the abovementioned results, an accurate candidate portrait based on self and inferred narrations is proposed. Antonio Bassolino, former Mayor of Naples, presented his candidature to shape the renewal of the city. In his case, the self and inferred narratives almost perfectly overlapped. Due to his hybrid narration strategy, largely characterized by reposting press articles and communication on social media, the contents analyzed in both investigations do not differ much. The evidence which emerged relates to the issue of the Neapolitan renaissance as well as to the refrain Bassolino again? since his main approach in the first electoral phase was totally devoted to the political processes used for campaign preparation such as, i.e., the candidates making lists and the left-wing discussion of the candidate selection. In this sense, Antonio Bassolino presents as a boomer politician oriented to boomer voters.

Regarding Alessandra Clemente, the narratives investigated in both stages also seem to overlap. On one hand, mainstream media underlined her already well-known profile due to her roles in the preceding administration, and her emancipatory vocation in terms of political orientation focused on cutting relations and polarization with the De Magistris era. On the other hand, her digital self-presentation emerges as a narrative process of consolidation aiming to attest to her personality in the Neapolitan electoral arena. Her focus on emancipating strategies, both on mainstream media and on digital media, is on social and civil rights issues, youth perspectives and assumptions about legality. Due to her emancipation-making attitude, Alessandra Clemente emerges as an Aspirational adulthood candidate.

The presentation of Maresca on mainstream media, mainly based on his work and professional career as magistrate, develops in line with his self-

presentation in the electoral arena which aims to legitimize him as a potential mayor. As a newcomer to politics, Maresca works hard on his social media profile to evoke trust amongst voters and confidence in his competence as potential mayor. For this reason, Catello Maresca emerges as a Trustworthy aspiring candidate.

Gaetano Manfredi doesn't make use of the best political practices in an unchanged political context, in contrast to the right-wing in their selection of Maresca as candidate. Manfredi is not related to a specific political orientation and his candidature emerges as the final solution to multi-party agreements (PD and 5 Stelle). In this way his potential voters do not support him due to any ideological assumptions, but rather because of his competence and caliber as a man capable of settling concerns and insecurities which emerge in local politics. Identified in the press as the favorite Mayoral candidate, Gaetano Manfredi did not need to create a targeted communication strategy for specific audiences. In this way, his disintermediated narratives on social media, which don't allow him to select a specific audience profile in terms of social or demographic parameters, are in line with the anticipated discourses on election results held in the press. Using a direct and personal exposition in self-presentation patterns and aiming the inferred presentation on his professional background, Gaetano Manfredi emerges as an Inclusive candidate.

From these reflections and from the substantial overlap of inferred and self-generated narratives, a meta-suggestion comes naturally. These elections present themselves as the most striking example of how information professionals have been overwhelmed by the social infosphere, assuming it as the first source of information (Jain, 2016) for the construction of narratives about the candidates. Ignoring the possibility that behind communication via social media there could be the study of a precise communicative strategy aimed at the construction of the political subject per se, what is distributed on social media becomes the first source of information as the direct voice of the candidate. A fallacious inference that, however, today shows itself as a dangerous loop in the reinforcement of constructed, mediated, renarrated information. A loop that, however, also allows outsider characters to become key figures in the city in a very short time, becoming so deeply connected to the collective narrative of Naples that it seems they have always been a part of it. And from this profound belonging also comes the ability to mobilize the electorate, to convey votes and obtain an unexpected majority result in the first round in a city where the complex political dynamics would have led to the prospect of something else entirely.

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