Cross-Platform Political Communication by Target and the New Season of Politics in Italy[*]

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Abstract

The results of the 2018 national elections, together with the socio-demographic heterogeneity of the main social platforms, make it interesting to understand if and how social categories have been mentioned or incorporated into the 2022's national electoral campaign in Italy. This contribution aims to analyze the multi-platform communication of the main political candidates from various coalitions and parties to investigate whether they based their media campaign on specific social categories and issues, and whether this effort had the electoral impact it deserved. Empirical evidence shows that only some candidates have focused their attention on specific social categories without taking into account the diverse audiences of the platforms.

Keywords: election 2022, political communication, content analysis.

1. Introduction. Politicians, communication and socio-economic categories

Campaigning has been an increasingly important factor in election outcomes due to the proliferation of opinion voting at the expense of membership voting. The proliferation of media and the digitalisation of many social practices determine the conduct of electoral campaigns on social media.

It is possible to see the potential of the web and social to build consensus since Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 presidential elections. Even in Italy, the web has played a significant role in politics. Consider, for example, the birth of the *Movimento cinque stelle* (Five Star Movement), which took place thanks to

the support of the web. Online campaigning is a complex operation that must consider the heterogeneity of web audiences and how they are distributed across different sites and social platforms. Users' age and socioeconomic backgrounds vary significantly across platforms (Hargittai, 2015). Some social networks attract the youngest users, while others attract the oldest (We Are Social, 20/23). Political entities should adapt their messaging to align with the demographics of the social media users they engage with, even when implementing a "catch-all party" campaign strategy (Kirchheimer, 1966). On the other hand, a deviation from a generalist campaign was seen in the 2018 general elections, when the M5S adopted a political campaign firmly focused on specific social categories. A choice proved electorally successful (Tuorto, 2019; Emanuele and Maggini, 2019). For political expediency, socio-demographic categories could be included in campaigns either (a) to attract the votes of a particular population segment, as seen in 2018, or (b) to tailor the message to different social groups. Therefore, it is interesting to see whether political leaders focused on particular social groups during the campaign for the 2022 general election. In the same way, it would be interesting to see if there is a relationship between the themes used by the politicians and the social media on which they are communicating. These are the questions that the research presented in the following pages attempts to answer. To this end, the first two sections of the paper analyse the role of socio-demographic variables in explaining the vote and the characteristics of today's election campaigns. The third section is dedicated to the methodological explanation of our research; in the fourth section, the work results are presented, highlighting the characteristics of electoral campaigns, while the last section reports our conclusions based on the results of the analysis.

2. Socio-demographic variables and voting choices

Many variables (Bellucci and Segatti, 2010) have been used to explain electoral behaviour and political participation. These variables range from the macro level, like territory, to the micro level, down to psychological variables, like personality characteristics (Furnham and Cheng, 2019). In the study of the determinants of voting, socio-demographic variables have been widely analyzed. In Italy, as in the rest of the world, the debate has focused both on ascriptive variables (age, gender, ethnicity) and on achieved variables (occupational status, education, income, social class), and it has concerned not only voting but also the phenomenon of abstention. The empirical evidence from these studies has been helpful in the interpretation of political election results through the description of the socio-economic composition of the

electorate. Regarding the ascriptive variables, especially age, different generations tend to show relatively stable behaviour over the years. It depends on the social and political climate in which the members of these generations were formed; indeed, Corbetta and Ceccarini (2010) hypothesize a generational cleavage[1]. However, this cleavage would affect only certain generations; for example, the '68 generation in Italy would tend to prefer left-wing parties, unlike younger generations, which would show no particular political preferences. Regarding gender, the authors point out that women were more conservative in previous decades because they were mainly involved in the family and the church. The progressive emancipation of women has reduced these political tendencies. The ethnic variable appears in the analysis of ethno-regionalist parties (Strijbis and Kotnarowski, 2015; Tronconi, 2005) but not in post-election analyses (Ipsos, 2018; Ipsos, 2022).

Regarding the achieved variables, the debate has long focused on class voting, a concept linked to the capital-labor cleavage, one of the four cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). This concept has also guided studies dating back to the beginning of the last century, such as Tingsten's 1937 study on the effects of the concentration of working-class people in a given area on voting. Social class used to be a strong predictor of voting, especially for left-leaning parties. More recently, its predictive power has been debated. The rise of post-materialist values and changes in socioeconomic structure have reduced the impact of class on voting (Ballarino et al., 2009). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have even described the concept of class as a "zombie concept' "However, the debate has never ultimately died down. There are two positions in Italy: the first hypothesizes a steady decline, while the second hypothesizes an ambiguous trend with no precise direction. For example, Ballarino et al. (2009) argue that the right-wing vote of the working class in 2001 was not a sign of the end of class voting but instead of the decline of the democratic class struggle[2]. Interest in analyzing the relationship between class and voting has increased with the rise of populist movements across Europe and Italy.

In the view of Kriesi and colleagues (2006), the "losers of globalization" are the primary source of the votes for the populist parties. "Losers of globalization" are the people whose spending power and position in the labor

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[1] According to the authors, experiencing one's youth during a particular historical-political period shapes personal beliefs and unites individuals around a specific worldview, ultimately influencing their voting decisions. "The authors categorize the sample into 9 generational cohorts, each marked by a specific historical event. These events span from 'Fascism' and extend through the '1968 movement' to 'Berlusconism'.

[2] The concept of democratic class struggle assumes a) the existence of class (working class) voting and b) that it is expressed for left parties.

market have declined in the wake of globalization and the world economic crisis in 2006.

The return of "materialist" concerns has renewed interest in how socio-demographics affect voting, especially for populist parties.

This interest has been reinforced by the fact that, for the first time, the wealthy classes supported left-wing parties (De Sio, 2018). In Italy, the debate on the social determinants of populist voting has predominantly been built around social marginality/peripherality rather than social class. This choice, in the author's view, is due to practical considerations regarding data availability and purely theoretical reasons. It is not easy to define the meaning of class today. Moreover, the proposed definitions are not reflected in the available secondary data. It is a fact that some ecological analyses of voting have not used the concept of class voting, but others, such as marginality and peripherality (Emanuele, 2013; Tomassi, 2018; De Falco, Sabatino, 2019). The analysis of these concepts has used a combination of variables such as income, educational attainment and employment status.

In Italy, M5S's 2018 success was also attributed to its political platform, committed to marginalized people in socioeconomic distress (Tuorto, 2019; Emanuele and Maggini, 2019). This commitment was observed during the 2018 election campaign through the promotion of policies targeted at marginalized or poor people, the most prominent of these being basic income (Valbruzzi, 2019; Emanuele et al., 2020).

Given the election results just mentioned, it is interesting to understand whether recent campaigns have focused on general, cross-class issues or issues related to particular social groups.

3. The power of social media: reaching diverse audiences in political communication

In the past thirty years, Italian and global politics have undergone a profound metamorphosis, transitioning from a traditional model to a more innovative one known as "pop politics" (Mazzoleni and Sfardini, 2009). Political discourse permeates civic discourse in a society and is an essential part of a democracy (Esser and Pfetsch, 2004). Denton and Woodward (1990) characterize political communication based on the intentions of its senders to influence the political environment. Therefore, its content and purpose characterize political communication. The elements of political communication reside in the actors who undertake it: citizens, media, and political organizations (McNair, 2017). Specifically, the use of social media in the political sphere has brought about significant transformations in the current political landscape

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(Boccia Artieri, 2016; Riva, 2016). This is especially evident in an era characterized by frequent elections, during which many European countries have experienced a significant shortening of periods of government stability. Social media have become an essential platform (Ziccardi, 2019; Boccia Artieri and Marinelli, 2018) for political discourse, serving as a critical added value that politicians fully exploit. The vast majority of politicians have adopted social media to demonstrate dynamism, modernity, and harness their potential (Giansante, 2014). Social media expand the political sphere, actively engaging the public, surpassing the concept of the "narcotizing dysfunction" of traditional media (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1948; Klapper, 1960). Social media have become significant extensions of the self (McLuhan, 1994), essential for social interactions, identity construction, and e-democracy processes (De Rosa, 2014). In this context, the process of "spectacularization", previously primarily evident through television media since the 1990s, is further strengthened on the numerous social network platforms we frequent daily (Bentivegna, 2002). New media have opened the possibility for politicians to bypass traditional channels and mediations offered by newspapers, and have allowed citizens to express their opinions directly (Castells, 2007; Punziano et al., 2020). From the advent of Facebook to Twitter, through Instagram and the more recent TikTok, the Italian political landscape has explored a new type of engagement, addressing the need to appear as transparent as possible. Currently, we find ourselves in a hybrid media environment (Chadwick, 2017), where the political world has further progressed in the evolving disintermediation process, involving diverse audiences and generations through variable approaches, languages, and timing, depending on the different social media platforms. The distinction between various social networks on the Internet is generally based on visibility and access to profiles. These platforms are primarily categorized based on their specific functionalities: we can distinguish between "Content-Based Social Network" and "Profile-Based Social Network" (Tissoni and Rossi, 2014). In the former case, the distinguishing feature is the shared content, while in the latter case, the focus is primarily on users' personal profiles. An evident example of a Content-Based Social Network is Twitter, with its microblogging nature and the speed at which information is exchanged, has a demographic base that often includes professionals, journalists, and individuals interested in real-time news. The platform encourages rapid conversations and debates on a global scale. Although social networks offer a wide range of services, their primary purpose is to facilitate the sharing of specific content, as in the case of Twitter, where the distinctive feature is the brevity of messages, limited to no more than 280 characters (140 until 2017). Over the past decade, Facebook has allowed political parties and leaders to build their image through storytelling, creating ideological communities through pages and groups, accelerating aggregation

processes. Facebook is considered one of the pioneering platforms and remains one of the most popular ones today. Facebook boasts a broad and diverse demographic base, engaging users across various age groups, socio-economic backgrounds, and interests. It has evolved into a virtual space where friends, family, and colleagues can share their daily experiences. In the meantime, Instagram has become the hub of online election campaigns, with political parties adapting to the platform's visual language (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2019). Indeed, Instagram has a younger and visually oriented demographic connotation. With its focus on imagery, Instagram primarily attracts a younger population interested in expressing their creativity through shared photos and videos. With the recent 2022 Italian political elections, political content made its debut on TikTok for the first time, engaging the Generation Z electorate (De Rosa and Reda, 2022; Amendola and Masullo, 2023). TikTok is characterized by a distinctly young demographic connotation. It has become fertile ground for spontaneous creativity, viral trends, and brief and engaging artistic expressions. The platform primarily attracts teenagers and young adults seeking a unique and dynamic way to express themselves through short-duration videos. TikTok's playful structure, with its intuitive interface and accessible editing tools, promotes immediate and often informal engagement. Users can participate in challenges, create humorous content, or creatively share short snippets of daily life. This underscores the significant importance of social media in the current political context and how the popularization of politics through social media has not only increased the popularity of political leaders but has also allowed citizens and the media to use this narrative to participate in or report on events, becoming authentic opinion leaders (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2019). The intrinsic peculiarities of different social media platforms today exert a significant attraction on a diverse audience in terms of age, interests, and even ideological inclinations. According to data from the "We Are Social" report, examining the audience of major social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, significant sociodemographic diversification emerges. Politicians are aware that each social media platform has a diversified audience; therefore, it is essential to tailor political communication to meet the expectations and needs of each audience. The demographic aspect of social networking platforms is not only a matter of age but also of interests, professions, and individual goals. These differences contribute to shaping the user experience and defining how people interact on the platform. It can be inferred that the demographic connotation of social networking platforms plays a crucial role in shaping how we connect and communicate digitally. These platforms are not just means of interaction but also mirrors reflecting the various facets of modern digital society. It is, therefore, crucial to consider this diversity in the analysis of political issues and

goals. The presence of these platforms, each with its distinctive audience, can significantly influence both the mode of political message dissemination and the nature of the messages conveyed. Consequently, political content may take on different forms on each social media platform. In the context of political communication on social media, unique characteristics, approaches, and timing emerge. However, these dynamics largely reflect the fundamental principles that shape public and political discourse within contemporary societies. The ability to master a specific thematic field, shape its content, and define its concepts remains centrally relevant in the realm of social media. Therefore, political parties and leaders strive to direct their communication towards the themes they deem of fundamental importance, seeking to confer greater relevance and visibility to these issues within the public domain, presenting them in a context aligned with their political positions and thematic approach (Zeng et al., 2007).

4. Research design: Questions, Platforms, and Strategies for Data Scraping and Social Data Analysis

The research analysed the social media posts of the primary candidates in the Italian national elections held in September 2023, focusing on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Specifically, three research questions guided our investigation:
1. Specific Target: Were there any social, demographic, economic, or cultural categories identified in electoral speeches as political targets?
2. Social Media Communication: We aimed to understand whether the communication of politicians on different social platforms (TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram) was characterized by the presence of different audiences?
3. The campaign themes: What were the most viral campaign themes, and did they vary among the leaders?

In the realm of political communication, particularly within the blogosphere and recently on social network and microblogging platforms, certain actors commonly emerge as more influential or renowned than most other users. These actors possess the capability to influence online opinion formation processes. Consequently, political actors or political entities are keen on monitoring these prominent users regarding the content they generate. For this purpose, we have chosen to employ an *actor-centered* (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013) approach to track tweets, wall posts, and blog articles, along with their corresponding comments, specifically contributed by those influential users identified in advance. The political candidates considered represent major

factions on the national political landscape[3]: Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the Fratelli D'Italia (Brothers of Italy) party; Silvio Berlusconi of Forza Italia (Go Italy); and Matteo Salvini of the Lega, all three united in a single coalition. Also, Enrico Letta, the political leader of the Partito Democratico (Democratic Party); Giuseppe Conte of the M5S, and Carlo Calenda of the Terzo Polo (Third Pole). The period considered is the election campaign phase between August 22 and September 23, 2022. We identified the top 15 posts with the highest engagement (interactions/follower count) for each of the three social platforms. Given the distinct features of these platforms, content on Facebook and Instagram included a mix of text, video, and images, whereas TikTok primarily featured video links. The final dataset comprised 255 posts.

Table 1 – Political Leaders and Presence on Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok (Year of registration and followers).

	FACEBOOK		INSTAGRAM		TIKTOK	
	Reg. Year	Followers	Reg. Year	Followers	Reg. Year	Followers
Conte	2018	4500000	2018	1700000	2022	235000
Letta	2008	150000	2017	95100	2022	810
Calenda	2017	323000	2019	140000	2022	13000
Meloni	2008	2500000	2012	1000000	2022	100000
Salvini	2010	5000000	2014	2100000	2019	534000
Berlusconi	2010	1100000	2017	449000	2022	63000

Source: our elaboration

The examination of leaders' social positioning strategies was crucial for a comprehensive understanding of electoral communication in the digital realm. All the leaders analyzed have a social profile on the three platforms, although with significantly different numbers of followers (table n.1). Overall, Facebook is the most popular platform for the candidates, with an average of around 2 million followers per profile, while TikTok is a relatively young platform that is not as mainstream as the other two. Looking at individual profiles and their appeal, it becomes clear that Salvini has the highest positioning, as he has the most followers on all three platforms and has been present for the longest time. Giuseppe Conte, the leader of the M5S, also has a significant following, coming in just after Salvini. On the other hand, the profile of Enrico Letta, the leader of the Partito Democratico, has a relatively small fan base, especially in relation

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[3] We excluded Matteo Renzi (Italia Viva – Italy Alive - leader), because, although he is very active and popular on social media, he was not the leading candidate of his coalition, the Third Pole; instead, Carlo Calenda held that position.

to the potential electorate of his party. This is likely a sign of less active social media engagement, especially on TikTok, where there was no content from the leader.

The data extraction process relied on two web tools: Crowdtangle for Facebook posts and ApiFy for TikTok videos. Both platforms facilitated the export of a post matrix containing information on interactions (likes, shares, comments), content, and monitored profiles. In addition to this type of data, we created a form for content analysis of the posts, following the first and the third type of Rositi's[4] content analysis approach (Amaturo and Punziano, 2013). This technique involves post analysis through a data collection form. The form included three dimensions for data collection: one for topics, another was for demographic or socio-economic targets, if mentioned, meaning if there was an explicit reference to a specific segment of the electorate. This was defined through six variables: gender, age, educational level, economic status, family status, and professional position. Finally, any reference to the private life of the politician was noted. Two quantitative analysis techniques were adopted to respond to the three levels of analysis. The first, statistical frequency analysis was used to identify the prevalent targets in the posts and to understand the extent of leaders' multiplatform communication. Insight into the main themes, where they emerged, was carried out through lexical correspondence analysis (LCA), a textual analysis technique for detecting statistical associations between words, to better identify latent dimensions of meaning[5] (Lebart et al., 1998). To better show this visually, words were projected onto a Cartesian plane.

5. Three-Level Analysis: Content, Target, and Social Media Usage

The analysis was structured across three distinct levels. The first level focused on the explicit or implicit identification of specific target audiences, assessing whether the posts contained more or less direct references to one or

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[4]Rositi identifies three types of content analysis: in type I the units of analysis are linguistic elements that are recognizable at the level of the signifier, such as words, phrases, and paragraphs. In type II the units are not recognizable at the level of the signifier, but are defined at the level of meaning, such as narrative functions, semantic structures, and social representations. In type III the units are composed of complex systems of meaning, such as cultural models, ideologies, and values.

[5] Lexical correspondence analysis is an exploratory technique that is used to identify and analyze relationships between words in a text corpus. Like all factorial analysis techniques, LCA aims to extract new variables from the original matrix in order to summarize the information.

more categories of individuals. The second level of analysis extended beyond the message content to investigate the potential multiplatform usage by political leaders and how this usage was executed (were the messages consistent across all platforms or diverse? Was there variance in usage frequency?). The third level involved the exploration of prominent themes arising from the continuous digital communication flow of political leaders.

Imperative to emphasize the importance of digging deeper into the issues each leader chose to address. The wealth of information is often hidden behind superficial figures, and through a deeper approach, we can better understand the communication strategies adopted by Salvini, Berlusconi, Calenda, Conte, and Meloni. Now, let us proceed to explore in more detail the key themes that emerge from each analysis, delving deeper into each leader's communication choices and the resulting socio-political implications.

Salvini's approach seems to be focused on specific segments of the Italian population. 10 % of his focus is on parents, 8% on the 18-34 age group, and another 10 % on those with a middle school degree or less. In addition, 8% are targeted toward the lower or lower-middle class (Table n.2). It is relevant to note that there are demographic groups to which Salvini seems to pay no attention. These include housewives, women, college graduates, and retirees, all of whom are 0%. This distribution suggests a specific selection of target demographics, with an emphasis on specific socio-economic and age categories, while other groups do not receive direct consideration according to this numerical analysis. In the table n.2, Berlusconi focuses with 18% of his interest on parents and seems to prefer using Facebook as the main platform for communicating with this category. As for young people between the ages of 18 and 34, Berlusconi devotes 23% of his focus, favouring TikTok as the primary communication channel for this demographic group. In addition, retirees receive a 10% share of his attention, mainly through the Facebook platform. However, it is notable to note that Berlusconi does not seem to directly address issues related to social class (low, middle, high) and educational qualifications, as both are excluded from his focus distribution. This approach suggests a clear segmentation of issues addressed on social media by Berlusconi, with a preference for parents, young adults and retirees, using specific platforms to reach these groups (table n.3). At the same time, other aspects, such as social class and education level, seem to be neglected in his communication.

In the political landscape, Calenda also follows a focused approach, focusing 8% of his attention on women and taking special interest in white-collar workers, particularly teachers. In contrast to Salvini and Berlusconi, he does not seem to place emphasis on different walks of life and makes no mention of educational qualifications in his communications. Interestingly, in

terms of the ratio of the number of posts to the topics covered, Calenda shows the lowest score among the leaders mentioned.

The former prime minister, Conte, adopts a distinctive communication strategy characterized by a high ratio of the number of posts published to the issues addressed. He has a strong focus on two main demographic segments: the 18-34 year olds, with a significant share of 31%, and the lower and middle classes, also with a share of 31%. In addition, Conte devotes special interest to the unemployed, with a share of 31%, and blue-collar workers, with a share of 28 %. From a social platform perspective, he mainly focuses on Instagram and Facebook to communicate with his audience. This analysis suggests that Conte has a clear propensity to address issues related to young adults and the lower social classes, with a particular sensitivity to employment issues.

The current prime minister, Meloni, also takes a specific approach in her online communication. She stands out for a significant focus on parents, with a significant percentage of 38%, mainly conveyed through Facebook. She also devotes part of her communication to the age group of 18-34 year olds, with a percentage of 15%, but without specifically mentioning degrees or students. This analysis underscores its emphasis on parenting issues, with a focus on young adults and the lower and middle classes. However, the absence of mentions regarding academics and students in its online communication is noteworthy. The choice to primarily use Facebook may reflect its strategy aimed at reaching specific demographic segments. In sum, the analysis reflects a variety of strategic approaches among political leaders, with each favouring specific demographic segments and social platforms to convey their messages.

In the second analysis, we observed how politicians use different social media platforms. The hypothesis is that since social media platforms have diverse audiences, politicians adapt their message to the prevalent audience on the platform. Among politicians, there was a prevailing trend of consistent usage across the three social media platforms, resulting in a relatively uniform communication style across platforms. An exception to this general trend is Letta, who engages more with young audiences on Instagram, aligning his communication strategy with the platform's audience. Within Salvini's social media universe, TikTok appears different from the other two platforms, not so much in terms of themes and targets, which largely remain the same, but in terms of content. On TikTok, there are various videos concerning immigration and themes discrediting opponents, such as protesters invited on stage. Except for some videos on TikTok explaining how to vote and go to the polls, Meloni and Conte seem to maintain a consistent communication style across platforms. Looking at the specific issues, there is considerable variation among platforms. On Facebook, the discourse regarding parents and retirees is more prevalent. This could be interpreted in relation to Facebook's demographics, which often

include an older age group. Topics related to parents and retirees may reflect the concerns and interests prevalent in this demographic group. On Instagram, the discussion is more diverse, with a significant focus on different socioeconomic categories and the unemployed. This could be attributed to the visual nature of Instagram, which encourages the sharing of images and stories that cover a wider range of life experiences and economic situations. TikTok, on the other hand, emerges as the leading platform for discussion of youth-related issues. This result is congruent with the inherently dynamic and youth-oriented nature of TikTok, which makes the social network a fertile ground for exploring and sharing issues relevant to this demographic.

Table 2. Categories for political leaders (%)

Row Labels	Sal.	Berl.	Cal.	Cnt.	Let.	Mel.
Parent	10	18	0	23	26	21
Men	3	0	0	8	0	3
Women	0	3	8	8	8	10
18-34 Years	8	23	5	31	24	3
35-49 Years	5	3	0	15	5	0
50-64 Years	5	0	0	5	0	0
Over 65 Years	0	0	0	0	0	5
Graduates	0	0	0	0	3	0
Diploma	5	0	0	0	0	0
Middle School Diploma Down	10	0	0	0	0	0
Upper Class	0	0	0	0	3	0
Upper-Middle Class	0	0	0	0	3	0
Middle Class	0	0	0	3	0	3
Lower-Middle Class	8	0	0	31	8	15
Lower Class	8	0	0	31	8	13
Entrepreneurs/Liberprof/Managers	3	3	3	21	3	5
Tradesmen/Craftsmen/Self-Employed	3	0	3	3	0	5
Clerks/Teachers	3	3	8	21	0	3
Blue Collars And Similar	3	3	3	28	0	5
Unemployed/Unemployed/Inactive	3	3	3	31	0	8
Students	0	0	3	13	0	0
Housewives	0	3	0	0	0	3
Pensioners Or Other	0	10	0	0	0	5
Num. Cat. Mentioned	29	27	13	105	34	41
Num. Post	39	39	39	39	38	39
Ratio	0,74	0,69	0,33	2,69	0,89	1,05

Source: our elaboration

Further analysis was done with the graphical representation resulting from a LCA (Figure N.1) and provides an intriguing perspective on the communication of the six political leaders considered. The two main factors extracted, identified as factor X (28.27%) and factor Y (22.49%) respectively, show clear distinctions in the narrative and communication strategy adopted. The first factor extracted (factor X) emerges as a significant indicator of political

leaders' language preferences. The narrative dimension, characterized by the type of verbs used, emerges distinctively.

Table 3. Socio-demographic categories on social media

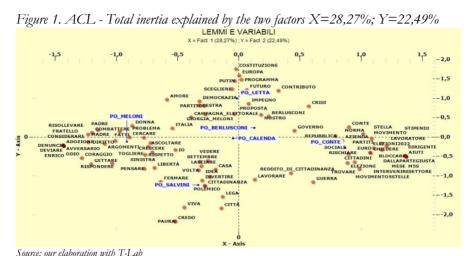|	Sal.	Berl.	Cal.	Cnt.	Mel.	Let.
Parent		Fb		Fb	Fb	
Men						
Women						
18-34 Years		T.T.		Fb		Inst
35-49 Years				Fb		
50-64 Years						
Over 65 Years						
Graduates						
Middle School Diploma Down						
Upper Class						
Upper-Middle Class						
Middle Class				Inst		
Lower-Middle Class						
Lower Class				Inst	Fb	
Entrepreneurs/Liberprof/Managers						
Tradesmen/Craftsmen/Self-Employed						
Clerks/Teachers						
Blue Collars And Similar						
Unemployed/Unemployed/Inactive				Inst		
Students						
Housewives						
Pensioners Or Other		Fb				

Source: our elaboration

On the negative side of this factor, we note infinitive verbs such as "raise", "consider" and "deviate", suggesting a tendency to avoid or escape from certain arguments or positions. On the other hand, on the positive side, lemmas such as "worker", "wages" and "ask" emerge indicating a positive attention to labor issues and people's demands. The second factor extracted (factor Y) focuses on the communication strategy in relation to the subject of discourse. At the top of the graph, the positive side of this factor is characterized by headwords such as "constitution", "europe", "program" and "future", suggesting a predisposition to discuss broad topics such as European perspectives and future programs. On the negative semi-axis, lemmas such as "city", "citizenship" and "blocking" emerge, indicating a preference for more specific and local topics. In the context of this factorial plan, a considerable disparity emerges in the focus of issues adopted by political leaders, configuring themselves in diametrically opposite ways. In particular, the positions of Calenda and Berlusconi suggest significant proximity to topics that can be described as "empty" and this is evidenced by their proximity to the middle of the factorial plane and isolation from surrounding lemmas. In fact, Calenda and Berlusconi,

through their proximity to the midpoint of the plan, seem to be oriented toward a language or discourse that could be characterized by a certain abstractness or lack of thematic specificity. This is further evidenced by their isolation from surrounding lemmas, suggesting that the topics covered by these political leaders may lack clear and specific content, or may be oriented toward more generic discourses. Within this complex political landscape, the positioning of leaders in the different quadrants of the factorial plane offers a fascinating glimpse into the various nuances of political communication adopted during the election campaign. First, we find Enrico Letta, whose positioning between the first and second quadrants reflects a clear emphasis on concepts such as "democracy", "choose", "program" and "Europe". These key words indicate an orientation toward institutional and democratic issues. The presence of the headword "Giorgia Meloni" might suggest a connection based on obvious contrasts, plausibly arising from attacks during the election campaign. Moving toward the second and third quadrants, Giorgia Meloni emerges with a proximity to evocative words such as "mother", "father", "brother", emphasizing the importance of family in campaign dynamics as well. This highlights a communication approach centered on family values and their relevance in the political context. We can find also words "denounce", "fight" and "opponent". Some of Meloni's posts, in fact, serve as complaints against political opponents who would like to prevent her from expressing herself democratically. At the same time, in these posts, Meloni criticizes law enforcement for not intervening to prevent this from happening. In the same quadrant, Matteo Salvini's communication stands out with words such as "stop", "controversial", "citizenship", "leave" and "fear". These language choices suggest a communicative strategy focused on issues of immigration control, controversy, and perceived fear. Finally, in the fourth quadrant, former Prime Minister Conte is placed near lemmas such as "worker", "work," "social" and "risk". This placement seems to reflect a focus on labor and social issues with a risk management connotation.

In sum, this in-depth examination of the factorial plan reveals the different facets of political communication adopted by leaders during the campaign, highlighting their communication priorities and strategies in relation to institutional issues, family values, immigration control and socioeconomic issues. This diametrically opposed positioning of the leaders in the factorial plan underscores a significant difference in the nature and approach of the political communication adopted and offers a critical look at the choice of language and issues, contributing to a deeper understanding of the communication strategies of these political actors and the perception they intend to convey through their discourse.

Figure 1. ACL - Total inertia explained by the two factors X=28,27%; Y=22,49%

Source: our elaboration with T-Lab

6. Conclusions

The paper had a clear empirical objective: to analyze the content of the posts of prominent Italian leaders during the 2022 national elections. Based on three questions - which can be simplified as what they talked about–to whom, and how–we studied the most followed posts to obtain a snapshot of what could be mainstream Italian political communication. Based on theoretical considerations and empirical analysis, electoral communication adopted by political leaders can be situated within a framework in which specific trends emerge. The analysis of the posts reveals an interesting picture, as materialistic themes (as defined by Inglehart 2015) do not play a predominant role. Instead, political communication appears to revolve around what we can define as "empty themes," lacking a clear socioeconomic and demographic targeting strategy on social media platforms. These data, along with analyses of electoral flows and divisions of the electorate based on generational and sociodemographic criteria, offer an in-depth perspective on Italy's current political situation. In recent years, the widespread presence of politics on social media and the emergence of web-born movements have introduced new variables and dynamics into the political landscape, significantly influencing the dynamics and interpretation of the current political context. In particular, the most recent political elections have highlighted the impacts and consequences of the interaction between different generations, characterized by differences in linguistic and communicative rules. In the scientific field, these observations provide a more detailed understanding of the communication strategies of

various leaders, contributing to our knowledge of the complex dynamics in contemporary political communication. These observations are particularly relevant in the era of social media, in which politicians seek to reach and influence diverse audiences. Only Conte seemed to refer to specific socioeconomic issues and goals. His campaign was based on the defense and strengthening of policy for socially disadvantaged individuals; therefore, his audience consisted mainly of them. The lack of attention to sociodemographic variables is also evident in communication on social platforms; there are no significant differences between platforms. Apparently, targeting the electorate on social media was not a prevalent strategy, or at least it was not successful. Unsurprisingly, when analyzing the sociodemographic characteristics of voters of various parties, the only consistent result that emerges from our analysis is the profile of voters for the Five Star Movement, who mostly have marginal sociodemographic characteristics. The lack of appeal to other sociodemographic categories by other leaders can be explained either by the specific electoral phase considered for the analysis, which may leave little room for this type of messaging, or by the fact that, as political science teaches us, major parties tend to frame their political message in a crosscutting way to gain as much consensus as possible. Regarding the different types of social media, TikTok stands out as a platform that deviates from the traditional social media paradigm, as it actively contributes to generating user preferences. Therefore, the TikTok experience requires a set of specific skills that, until now, seem to have yet to be acquired by the majority of political leaders who have chosen to open an account. This phenomenon raises important questions about digital competence and political leaders' adaptability to the evolving media landscape. To develop this analysis, in-depth research should be conducted to explore the relationship between the communication strategies of political leaders in more detail, the prevalence of general posts, and their impact on voter turnout and political participation. Above all, this work has some limitations that provide us with insights for further development. We highlight four of these points. The first limitation is related to the limited observation period. Election campaigns have become permanent, so the timeframe for analyzing posts can be extended. The second, related to the first, concerns the numerosity of the posts, which certainly needs to be expanded, allowing us to return more robust results. Another limiting element is the postselection criterion based on engagement. This rendered our corpus as the "most viral" and did not reflect the overall social electoral communication. Finally, it might be interesting to understand how, compared to previous rounds, references to the dimensions highlighted in this study have changed.

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