THE CHANGING SCENARIO OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

THE MEDIATIZATION OF POLITICS
The mediatization of politics

Political communication systems are in a state of transition everywhere in the world. The process of change has not recently started but has been ongoing for forty years now. In Italy, it is a complex transition that is played out at a different level, and it is particularly sensitive to the role of media (and social media) in the public information scenario. The process of pervasiveness of the media into society as a whole, and in politics in particular, is defined as process of mediatization.
The publicistic model

Scholars exemplify this transition using two paradigms. The first one is the dialogic-publicistic model, the second the mediatic one. The moving from the first to the second explains the reason why communication is becoming an absolute necessity.

Communication is a central political activity that is unavoidable.

Degree of legitimacy: strong vs weak

The mediatized public sphere

Type of legitimacy: procedural (by law) vs substantial (by social recognition)

The publicist model considers the three actors as having the same power and the same autonomy.
The mediatic model

The process of **mediatization** has important effects on politics, as regards:

a) the **party organization**,  
b) the **leadership** formation,  
c) the selection of the **political class**,  
d) the search for (and maintenance of) **consensus**,  
e) the formation of **public opinion**.

Mediatization is so pervasive that the whole public sphere tends to be assimilated to the media context so that it becomes the environment in which all the public debate takes place. The **media becomes the context** where the interaction between the political actors and citizens is performed. But the media system is a more powerful actor because it rules the way politics and citizens interact, **influencing its logic**.
The systemic effects of mediatization

**Effects of mediatization**

**Political**
- Leaderization
- Personalization
- Verticalization
- Polarization

**Mediatic**
- Professionalization
- Spectacularization
- Simplification of message
- Trivialization of language

- The **party politics** is totally inspired by the **media logic**
- The political struggle tends to be moved on a **personal** level
- The style of political communication becomes **emotional and affective** (from persuading to convincing to exciting).
- The **political language** is transformed into a **contentious language** and an **anti-language**
- The **common sense** is upgraded and **translated into a general system of values** and a political program
- The **climate of opinion** becomes a structural variable of political communication, a **battleground** but also the **prize at stake**.
The campaign evolution (Pippa Norris)

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Is the last campaign evolution a Post-Political one?

- **Campaign organization**: nationally coordinated, strongly centralized, data-driven, pop-politics,

- **Preparation**: permanent computational propaganda, black operations, automated bots running permanently, post-ideological language, micro-targeting,

- **Coordination**: Community organizing and campaign management systems, strong mobilization effort, bottom up campaigning, platform politics (platform such as: NationBuilder, DigitalVox)

- **Feedback**: real-time, social media monitoring systems, big data use

- **Media**: hybrid campaign = social media + broadcast media + citizen as media, news and media management, selfie-based penetration strategy

- **Campaign Events**: life-style media events, leader tours, video opportunities, catch-all strategy

- **Costs**: low budget campaign

- **Electorate**: instable, but social and partisan re-alignment around the anti-politics
The pop-politics

- Digital media implies the enlargement of the public sphere to subjects previously excluded.
- The media context becomes more and more fragmented.
- The places of formation and expression of public opinion are located outside the direct influence of the parties and mainstream media.
- The center of gravity of politics moves further outwards.
- In this context both communication and politics becomes centrifugal.
- To gain new followers, politics has to become more popular.
- The last evolution in political communication is the merging of the popular culture and the political discourse.

“Due to pop politics, the line between what is important and what we keep in our lives for entertainment value has become increasingly distorted. This distortion is problematic as pop politics becomes more important than regular politics.”
The pop-politics
The pop-politics

In no uncertain terms, Grillo encourages corrupt Italian politicians to relinquish power.
Changing the party organization

Political organizations started to look for new discoursive regimes (style, language, tools) in order to gain the trust of a more instable, and volatile, electorate.

In Italy in 20 years, we have assisted to:

- the born of personal parties (i.e: Berlusconi-Forza Italia)
- the introduction of primary election as intra-party democracy (i.e: the Democratic Party in Italy)
- The constitution of an internet party (i.e: M5S)
- the nationalization of a territorial populist party (i.e. Lega Nord)
- the changing of electoral law (3 times)
- the running of Referendums on Constitutional Reform
Populism becomes popular

In all cited cases, the **populist and anti-establishment rhetoric** become a relevant component of the political discourse (Taguieff, Revelli). But in four different forms:

- Televised populism
- Top-down populism
- Etno-nationalistic populism
- Socio-protestatarian

### The populist rhetoric

- **Televised** (Berlusconi, public)
- **Top-Down** (Renzi, citizens)
- **Etno-nationalistic** (Salvini, etnos)
- **Socio-protestatarian** (Grillo M5S, people)
EVOLVING PARADIGMS
DATA-DRIVEN CAMPAIGN AND PLATFORM POLITICS
Facing the political uncertainty: the data-driven campaign

In order to cope with the growing uncertainty, the **data-driven campaign** becomes the new must, and the **data-scientist** as campaign guru.
The data-driven campaign

- The *data-driven campaign* follows the same route already tracked by the so-called **professionalization of politics** (Scammel 1997; Negrine e Lilleker 2002).

- It is due to the **growing technological sophistication** of political communication (Blumler et al. 1996).

- It is strongly related to the development of **marketing tools and techniques** and to the **personalisation of politics** and **political discourse**.

- Moreover, it is an answer to the **electoral volatility** and to the difficulty of forecasting voter’s behaviour.
Let’s see what big data are

Big data are **massive amount of data** (McKinsey Global Institute) with three main features as for the 3V model (Laney 2001) + 1 suggested by Chen et al. (2014):
Big data: The reason why

- A stronger **control** of the campaign phase, voters and strategies
- A more **sensitive agenda** in respect of people needs (issues)
- A more **efficient campaign** organization
- More possibilities to **manufacturing consent** and to **monitoring campaign results**
- Extremely **targeted messages** and voter groups (segments, micro-targets)

[Diagram of voters, supporters, likely, undecided]

**Targeting**
An example: 2012 Barack Obama Campaign: The Project Narwhal

- Diverse data sources integration
- Creation of a unique data mining system
- A cost-effective and time-efficient strategy
- Real time feedback from voters and public opinion
- Microtargeting
The new augmented age of computational propaganda

Computational propaganda is the combined use of social platforms, algorithms, human bots, bots and big data to manipulate public opinion and voter’s choice (Woolley e Guilbeault, 2017)
Platform-politics: 2 dimensions, 4 types

**Platform Party**
- Functional equivalent of Party on the Ground. Platform used to organize collective action and decision making processes.
- High tech-sovereignty

**Party Platform**
- Adaptive action of the party in Central Office. Platforms used to support membership recruitment and promote party initiatives.
- Low tech-sovereignty

**Platform Organizations**
- Platform Politics as Service (i.e. NationBuilder)
- Professional management of community and campaign activities

**Platform Leader**
- Social Media as Platform Politics
- Leader popular accessibility as direct representation claim
THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM.
WHAT TRANSITION?
The form of government

Italy is a Parliamentary Republic

- The Constitution of the Italian Republic was enacted by the Constituent Assembly on 22 December 1947 and had effect from 01 January 1948.
- The republican form of government was established in 1946 by a referendum
- Power is divided among the executive, the legislative and judicial branches.
- The symbol identifying Italy is the Italian star (a greek symbol) + a wheel identifying the labour + 2 types of leaves: the olive and the oak, meaning peace and Italian territory.
The parliament, centrality without power

The Italian parliament has a perfectly symmetrical bicameral structure:

- the Chamber of Deputies (630 deputies) and the Senate of the Republic (315 senators plus 5 senators nominated by the president of the republic and senators for life) perform the same functions.

- As a parliamentary republic, the constitutional text attributes to parliament a central role in the political system with the attribution of legislative functions, political control and representation (Bagehot 1988).

The legislative function is exercised collectively by the two chambers, but the legislative initiative belongs to the executive that exercises it in the forms and ways allowed.

The President of Republic is elected by the parliament and 3 representative of regional government (art. 81 of Constitution) he is in charge for 7 years.
The government, a weak power going stronger

- The executive power is exercised by the government under the direction of the Prime Minister, also called President of the Council of the Ministers.
- He is appointed by the President of the Republic and chooses his ministers.
- The government must be supported by a parliamentary majority.
- All the ministers are jointly responsible for the implementation of the country's laws and can propose new bills to the Parliament.
- The executive power was conceived by the constitution as a weak power because of the “complex of dictatorship” (Verzichelli).

2013-16 M. Renzi (PD+Nuovo)  
2017: P. Gentiloni (M5S+Lega)  
2018: G. Conte (M5S+Lega)
The first republic: 1946-1993

A stable model of electoral behavior
The party system
The organizational dimension of parties
The consolidation of party-government
The cycles of political coalition
The centrality of the parliament

Definition of party-government
The party is considered as an essential part to ensure stable majorities and to govern them in order to implement the program
The second republic, phase 1: 1993-2008

The crisis of party system (tangentopoli)
The majoritarian rule
The polarization of politics (bi-partitism yes, but still imperfect)
The loosing centrality of the parliament
The representation crisis
The empowering of government
The permanent campaign
Longer legislatures
The second republic, phase 2: 2008-2013

The coming of economic crisis
The enduring crisis of ideologies
The expansion of public sphere (blogs and social media)
The disintermediation of politics
The empowering of individual (voice) and the zoon politikon
The emergence of post-ideological political organizations
The post-politics advent: anti-partitocratic and anti-establishment movements
POLITICS IN ITALY: A FOCUS ON 5SM AND ITS TECHNOLOGICAL ORGANIZATION OF DISTRUST
Beppegrillo.it: disruptive power of a blog

Among the most visited blogs in the world is that of Beppe Grillo, a popular Italian comedian and political commentator, long persona non grata on state TV, who is infuriated daily - especially by corruption and financial scandal in his country.

A typical blog by Grillo calls, satirically or otherwise, for the people of Naples and Campania to declare independence, requests that Germany declare war on Italy to help its people ("We will throw violets and mimosa to your Franz and Gunther as they march through"); or reports on Grillo’s ongoing campaign to introduce a Bill of Popular Initiative to remove from office all members of the Italian parliament who’ve ever had a criminal conviction. Grillo’s name for Mario Mastella, leader of the Popular-UDEUR centre-right party, is Psychodwarf. ‘In another country, he would have been the dishwasher in a pizzeria,’ says Grillo. Through his blog, he rallied many marchers in 280 Italian towns and cities for his ‘Fuck You’ Day last September.

Least likely to post ‘Sign up to our campaign to grant Silvo Berlusconi immunity’

beppegrillo.it
Foreing Media hype on Grillo?

Grillo, European hero of the Year, 2008 Time European Edition

Time Magazine 21 may 2012, after local election
Yes, but these covers were just FAKE

The fabric of fakes and politics as spectacle

Grillo, European hero of the Year, 2005 Time European Edition

Time Magazine 21 may 2012, after Sicily local election
The popularity of Beppe Grillo is enormous as shown by Google Trends. Popularity that reaches a high pitch in two situations:

- The organization of the first people mobilization in 2007
- The administrative election in 2012
8 September 2007: The Vday

A grassroots request for change the legislation consisting of three points:

• no to anyone involved in criminal lawsuits standing for parliament,
• no to re-election after two mandates
• yes to direct election of candidates (that simply means reintroduction of preferences into electoral law)

«we are tired of feel ashamed for you»
The moving into the political arena

2008 local election:
30 local administration
7 borough officials elected

The Carta of Firenze is a first attempt to organize a shared program with activists.
The Meetup platform is used as a meta-organization platform for 5SM groups and activities (Lanfrey 2012)
The 5SM activist profile

- White-collar workers or self-employed professionals in private firms, with a smaller group of university students.
- They feel blocked by a political class who are incapable of modernising themselves or the country, preferring to insist with conservative strategies.
- They appear very radical as regards public administration, the media, the jobs market.
- They also refute the idea of leaderism and anti-politics as media simplification preferring to think of themselves as politicians.
5SM elected in local institutions
The reasons behind the success

The 5SM’s new political offer emerges
There is an empty space that a new form of representation could fill
Social Media has reached a critical mass of people
Political corruption reached levels never so high since Tangentopoli
Meantime, Italy is starting to feel the crisis arriving
In Europe, the country’s credibility have reached an all-time low
Up to 83% of citizens do not trust political parties any more
Traditional institutional equilibriums seemed to be wavering
Both the right-wing and the left-wing appear swamped in internal debate
Italian political scene had never looked so wobbly
Ruling the organization

The blog plays a central role in ruling the groups

Candidates are not allowed to stand for other elections while they are in office.

Leadership is mutually dependent on the constituency it represents

The MeetUp groups are strictly local organisations

Candidates accept to campaign always and only on behalf of local issues

The cult of the persona and careerist ambition are discouraged

Elected candidates need to account for their work every so often (compulsory mandate).

Decision-making is based on a proxy-voting system,
The liquid-democracy model

The 5S people was inspired by the liquid democracy model already tested by the Pyrate party in Germany and based on proxy vote.

After have tested different platform the Casaleggio Angency decided to build a own platform:
2013: the “counter-democracy” in movement

Parlamentarie
The primary election that Grillo organised to select candidates for parliament

Tsunami Tour

Streaming
Grillo’ electoral Campaign
Intra-parties relationships and parliament works in streaming Streaming

Quirinarie
The primary election to select the Head of the State

199 Route Campaign
199 is the number of lists presented to the 2013 local election
Tsunami tour: an analogical campaign in a digital environment

- Young and students: the post-political electorate target-group
- Old and new way to campaign
- Leader tour: Grillo meet citizens in over 70 squares
- Meetup groups rose from 500 to over 1000
- About 300,000 registered to the Grillo networks
- Opinion polls rank the movement up 20%
- 2012: The Statute defines the electoral status of the movement
2013: a seamless campaign

- Use of anti-language and going negative
- Globalizing the network finding a common enemy
- Re-mediation of communication
- Unifying media and message
- Shared goals: Giving people an objective to fight for
- Social-empowering
- Organised communities
- Micro-mobilisation
Election 2013 and the winner is: none

The Movement got 8.69 million votes in total, **2.4 million in the South**, 2.1 in the North-East, and 1.6 in the so-called “red regions”.

In the Lower House, the 5SM comes second to the Pd, with 25.55% of votes.

In the Senate it gets 23.79% of votes.

Voting turnout decreases of over 5%
The technological organization of mistrust

Video-streaming democracy was the new format adopted by 5S activists which had serious implications on transparency and control.

The control chain and the no-confidence stance are very closely-linked. The 5SM activists control the political classes in the public office but are controlled by the Movement on the ground, thus making the accountability process a very central question.
Understanding Grillo

- Grillo’s 5SM is the tip of the iceberg of a complex phenomenon that emerges from the **dealignment of legitimacy and trust**, two principles which theories of democracy and representation had merged together in the form of electoral processes (Rosanvallon, 2008).
- The electoral process can no longer be seen as sufficient reason for keeping afloat a **political class that fails to respond to citizens’ needs** and, more importantly, fails to deserve their trust.
- Grillo is then a product of a set of unique circumstances: the political and **economic situation**, the **party system crisis**, the **transformative power of new media**, which now are enabling a critical mass of citizens to claim their rights, demanding transparency, effectiveness and participation in political processes.
- In this contest, the movement can be seen as a **technological organization of distrust**.
POLITICS IN ITALY: TOWARD THE III REPUBLIC?
Transition or not?

For the last twenty five years we have witnessed:

- a process of **verticalization/personalization** of power
- a tendential transformation (pressure, behaviours) - in a **presidential** sense - of the form of government (Calise 2007).
- a **strengthening** of the government with regard to legislative power through the use of **confidence vote, urgent decrees, and delegation**.
- three electoral reforms (majoritarian in 1993, proportional with no personal vote in 2005, mix proportional and majoritarian with no personal vote in 2017) has transformed the accountability of the system into party discipline.

The combination of the **strengthening of the executive** and the **control of candidacies** has created a condition of **subordination** of the parliament to government action and a **loss of representation**.
Toward the third republic? 2018 election

Rosatellum bis: New electoral law same problem: how to ensure representation and governability in a country still too inhomogeneous

61% Proportional + 37% Majoritarian + 2% overseas vote, + list soils 5%
Keywords of the most awful campaign ever

- **Going Negative**: attack, media bias, fakes, meme (the hybrid war theory, Gerasimov doctrine),
- **Going Public**: media events, populism,
- **Going Social**: voter mobilization, agenda setting, occupying public debate
- **Going Personal**: “character assassination”, a unique enemy to fight (Renzi), but with all its likely voters
- **Going Comparative**: compare any present event/story/person with a present/past similar event/story/person to “argument” a theory only apparently rational: create anger and social envy

...and what about the PD?
Electoral results: The CDX is the winner but…

Voting turnout 2013: 75.24%
Voting turnout 2018: 72.93%
balance: -2.31
The 5SM is the ultimate winner

The 5SM is the only party running alone claiming the victory and the premiership of government...but the movement alone does not have the political majority.
The geo-distribution of votes: a shocking picture

- The South voted for the 5SM, first party in the country
- The North for the Center-Right, more specifically for the Lega Nord which is the first party in the Right-wing coalition.
- The Center-Left disappears. The Democratic Party is the first party in the left-wing coalition
The halved party

The Democratic Party went from 33.2% of the vote in the 2008 elections to 18.7% ten years later.
PD voted by higher classes

On the opposite side, the 5SM becomes representative of workers, poor people, small entrepreneurs.
It is not about a coalition…but about a contract
The third Republic: what should be?

Still unclear if we are facing to a third republic. However some changes in power relationships seems relevant.

For example:

- The simplification of the political system with a bi-party system
- A form of legal negotiation – the contract among Lega and 5SM – instead of coalition
- The statement of pragmatic and non-ideological approach to government
- The statement of supremacy of politics over economics, bureaucracy, sovra-national organization
- The pressure for institutional simplification with reduction of MPs
- The pressure for introduction of forms of bottom up