

The Campaign on Facebook for the 2016 Roman Administrative Election from a Mixed-Methods Perspective: The M5S/PD Face-Off

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Abstract

While the internet offers up great masses of both textual and numerical data that can be analyzed using the automatic features of powerful software programs, this does not on its own represent a viable work strategy. The wealth of available data should in fact mark the beginning of a varied and complex process of research and analysis that looks to combine a plurality of investigative tools and techniques, both traditional and of the latest generation. The presentation here of the key findings of an empirical investigation offers an opportunity to highlight the advantages of a mixed-methods approach. The Roman administrative election in the spring of 2016 was the object of an articulated program of research. This paper will focus on the methodological choices and results obtained regarding the electoral campaign conducted on Facebook by the mayoral candidates ? Raggi of the 5 Star Movement (M5S) and Giachetti of the Democratic Party (PD) ? up to the time of the vote itself. The research goals are: the reconstruction of the procedures followed by these political actors in their electoral campaigns; the definition of the role of social networks, Facebook in particular, in this context; the examination of the tone, content, and communicative style of the leaders in the campaigns; the analysis of the reactions, sentiments, comments and endorsements in the online interactions and relationships of the most frequent web users.

Index terms— facebook, electoral campaign, mixed-methods research, 5 star movement, democratic party.

1 I. Objectives of Analysis and

Instruments Utilized igital technology and the internet are now able to furnish great masses of data, in the present instance textual data bases, which can be analyzed by means of automatic features built into the powerful software programs. These do not, however, represent a viable work strategy on their own. The wealth of available data should in fact mark the beginning of a varied and complex process of research and analysis that seeks to combine a plurality of investigative tools and techniques, both traditional and of the latest generation (cf. Di Giammaria and Faggiano, 2016 and 2017; Amaturio and Punziano, 2016). The presentation here of the key findings of an empirical investigation offers an opportunity to highlight the advantages of a mixed-methods approach.

The aim of the paper is to focus on the methodological choices and results obtained with regard to the electoral campaign conducted on Facebook by the mayoral candidates -Raggi of the 5 Star Movement (M5S) and Giachetti of the Democratic Party (PD) -up to the time of the vote itself(Biorcio e Natale, 2013). Our purpose is to highlight the advantages of the process followed, which is undoubtedly adaptable to other themes and to research contexts that, like the one presented here, feature: 1. a social media network as a context for the observation and sampling of textual information; 2. abundant textual material covering a significant period of time; 3. the aim of using

multiple and complementary lenses to identify and explore not only the lexicon and the prevailing themes and sentiments, but also relationships, interactions and decision-making processes.

Research objectives include: the reconstruction of the procedures followed by the political actors in their electoral campaigns; the definition of the role of social networks, Facebook in particular, in this context; the examination of the tone, content, and communicative style of the campaign leaders (Giglietto, 2015;Boccia Artieri, 2015); the analysis of the reactions, sentiments, comments and endorsements in the online interactions/relations of the most frequent web users (Pira, 2012).

The investigation considered all the web posts submitted by the candidates on their own public Facebook pages during the course of the entire electoral campaign (346 in total, of which 149 from Giachetti and 197 from Raggi). The empirical base also included the set of comments on these posts (more than 170,000, a volume of around 2,000,000 occurrences). The finalized research design sought to select, for each level under investigation, the tools and techniques that would be most suitable and fruitful for the purpose of obtaining interesting and reliable results. This involved oscillating between extensive analysis over the entire data set, automatic and semi-automatic analysis of the big textual corpus, and the hermeneutic analysis of significant portions of texts selected ad hoc (Faggiano, 2016). Specifically, for both the messages from the politicians in the field and the reactions to them from the voters, we can include as recognizably complimentary the following choices: 1. Survey analysis of contents; 2. Hermeneutic analysis of the text; 3. Semi-automatized analysis of a big text corpus; 4. Analysis of conversations.

As mentioned, Facebook, in close connection with Twitter and with other internet channels in a broader sense (Faggiano and Nobile, eds., 2016) represented the main context of the campaign, carrying an incisive selection of content and messages from the traditional media (radio interviews, clips from TV shows, excerpts from news programs, newspaper articles, etc.). The campaign under analysis may be classified as exceptional for a number of reasons, including the condition of distress and decline of the city, the widespread and exponential rise of a new political force, the particular nature of the parties/movements that reached the finishing sprint, and the social/demographic (age, gender) and cultural (political background) characteristics of the candidates in the field.

The web postings analyzed are those submitted over the course of four weeks, the two leading up to the first electoral date (5 June 2016) and the two that preceded the runoff between Raggi and Giachetti (19 June 2016). Giachetti submitted 70 posts between 23 May and 5 June, and 79 between the 6 th and 19 th ; Raggi, on the other hand, posted 111 times in the first twoweek period and 86 in the two that followed. In percentages, Raggi submitted 57% of the posts under analysis and Giachetti the remaining 43%. Even though Raggi submitted more posts than the PD candidate, both in absolute numbers and percentage, her productivity declined with time while Giachetti's increased (61.3% vs 38.7% in the first part of the campaign; 52.4% vs 47.6% in the second). The tone and communicative style, content of posts, and mode of use of the platform were systematically analyzed for each candidate and phase of the electoral campaign.

The analyses undertaken, aimed at bringing out the distinctive characteristics of the two mayoral candidates, allowed us to outline more than a few common notes regarding plans for setting "priorities for the city" (for example, similar solutions concerning the problem of mobility and road safety, the recovery of the city's historical and cultural heritage, etc.). The clearest differences that came out concern the tone, the communicative style and the use of the platform. The only thematic front on which the candidates were directly opposed is the question of the 2024 Olympics, with Giachetti in favor of Rome's candidacy and Raggi opposed. The second part of the campaign, swirling round this core theme which became the battleground for open confrontation, was progressively empty of content and embittered in tone. All this worked in favor of Raggi, who was probably seen by the voters as more composed and coherent than her opponent.

As mentioned, in addition to the posts, the analysis considered all the comments on them as well, representing a data base of huge proportions. The section that follows is an account of the predominantly quantitative approach followed in the analysis of the posts and comments 1 II. The Content of the Campaign: From the Candidates' Posts to the Electors' Reactions (survey analysis of post contents, statistical/textual analysis of the comments), while the third and fourth sections describe the qualitative analysis of the conversations that developed around the posts. The sole function of the framework utilized is to lend order and coherence to the discourse, to offer the reader a linear representation of a synergistic and complex process of inquiry in which quality and quantity were equally fundamental in producing the results.

The survey analysis of the contents yielded interesting results as regards the following issues: the frequency of use of the platform by the candidates, the style of posting, statistics concerning reactions to the posts (by quantity and type), the intensity of propagation of posted content on the web through the "sharing" function. Apart from a certain alignment along the mean of the number of daily comments on the posts, all the average values for Raggi far outpace those observed for Giachetti (cf. Morcellini, Faggiano and Nobile, 2016 for the actual data). Comparing the extreme values for each indicator the differences between the candidates are even more striking:

? min 0-max 15 for Giachetti and min 1-max 25 for Raggi on number of posts;
 ? 1327-17734 for the PD candidate vs3266-79391 for Raggi on "likes"; ? 1345-18383 for Giachetti vs3328-82903 for Raggi on total reactions;
 ? 389-12857 vs426-10935 respectively on comments;

? 216-5659 vs809-37506 on "shares". 1 We have deliberately avoided excessive indications of numbers and percentages. For precise details of this type see the full research report (Morcellini, Faggiano, Nobile, 2016).

Raggi, in addition to being more present and especially more visible on Fb, also stimulated a higher level of participation. The figures for reactions and for the volume of 'shares' speak clearly, although it should be noted that the reactions the candidates get may also be negative. It should also be pointed out that by tradition supporters and activists of the M5S use the internet on a particularly regular basis to discuss/inform/ mobilize, and not only in exceptional circumstances like the electoral campaign. Having taken these distinctions into account, the fact remains that Raggi was the real star of Facebook during the electoral campaign and, by exploiting it in a more lively and active way she had a greater web response than her opponent. With respect to posting style it can be said that the extensive use of photographs, generally accompanied by a brief written text (for example, showing Raggi and Giachetti casting their votes), figures at just over 42% for both politicians (which remained stable from one phase of the campaign to the other). The most striking difference, on the other hand, is that Raggi posted videos in more than half the cases, as compared with just over 30% for Giachetti. This is the most structurally complex kind of posting: words, hashtags, and links are accompanied by a video, as a rule originally designed, shot and edited for the occasion (for example, the live phone call from Grillo during an event at Piazza del Popolo or the live toast by Giachetti with a glass of wine on the eve of the election).

What emerges, then, is a more skillful and effective use of the platform by Raggi, compared with the more traditional and static style of Giachetti who, rather than writing a post on an online blackboard, sometimes seemed to be presenting a staged speech (indeed, he wrote fewer posts but used more words overall than Raggi).

Giachetti appears, moreover, less dynamic than Raggi in the transition from one phase of the campaign to the other. Even while varying the targets, themes and registers, the statistics for his posting activity remain stable over time, and the figures are systematically lower than those of his adversary. Raggi's campaign, on the other hand, records forms of increased consensus, visibility and dissemination of content that can be interpreted as pointing toward greater effectiveness in online political communication. With respect to all the statistics on the posts (likes, comments, shares, etc.) the values for the index of variability are consistently high and in any case differentiated, as if to say that the incisiveness and success of a post are strongly associated with its form and its specific contents.

The mayoral candidates of the PD and M5S often pass from a courtly register, sometimes rhetorical (Giachetti: "I dream that our Capital might once again bask in its own light, like the newly glowing travertine of the Colosseum at twilight"; Raggi: "It takes courage ['coRAGGIo' in Italian] to change Rome"), to the use of slang expressions in Roman dialect, aimed at highlighting the identifying feature of being Roman and their own link to the local area.

The candidates use a simple and direct lexicon to articulate their short-and long-term objectives for the city, speaking of the right to housing, of cultural events and even of potholes in the streets. On the question of what they will actually do for the city in terms of concrete goals, they employ modulated tones and the most positive forms of expression, and this in a campaign that is otherwise decidedly toxic. The examples below are posts that refer to plans of action (regarding schools, waste disposal, major work projects, tourism, etc.) and specific key social categories (youth, women, seniors, migrants, etc.) Raggi:

Here is our program for a city without suburbs: [#coRAGGIo](http://m5s.info/-periferie). A new kind of urban planning for Rome: calling a halt to urban expansion, preservation of what remains of the Roman countryside and new rules to bring back the inhabitants we have lost. (?) Social exclusion is not fought using the police force but with the recovery of civil dignity in a city that needs to be turned upside down: from the center to the suburbs.

2 Giachetti:

The planned stadium for La Roma [the football team] doesn't just concern the fans or lovers of football; it involves all Rome's citizens, especially those who live or work in the Tor di Valle area. This project calls for the reclamation of the area, the creation of a natural park as big as Villa Borghese, completely covered by videosurveillance, with over 400 million in investments for the urbanization of the area. All of which will be done privately. Rome must once again attract private investment, not push it away as it has done for too many years.

For the posts of both candidates a few simple interpretive keys are applicable which may be represented using a series of opposing semantic poles: "past/future", "heritage/planning", "myself/others", "saying yes/saying no", "stagnation/transformation".

Raggi tends more to speak of "us" and of M5S more generally, while Giachetti speaks substantially in the first person. In addition, Raggi defines the political movement she belongs to as the only antidote to the misconduct that went before, the only way to bring honesty, citizen participation and transparency to the city. Giachetti presents himself as someone who wants to keep dreams alive in grand style (the 2024 Olympics, the new football stadium), a man free of constraints, honest, competent, and passionate about politics.

Then comes the harsher group of analyzed posts, those expressing the candidate's intention to defeat the other. In Giachetti's case these are directed at a specific person, Raggi, who is labeled in the most strongly worded messages as "a liar", "led by others", "remote-controlled", "she who says 'no'", "one who ducks confrontation", "symbol of populist degeneracy"; and in Raggi's posts at an entire political class, a general *modus operandi* and, essentially, a good part of Italian political history.

The analysis of words and key expressions led to an accurate reconstruction of the most frequently invoked elements of the campaign: themes, actors, communication recipients, program points, other media (social and traditional).

In a nutshell, if the first phase of the Giachetti campaign shows a predominance of positive content (principles, goals for the city, concrete actions), all this is pushed to the back burner in the second phase, and is almost completely overshadowed by the theme of the 2024 Olympics and the need to defeat the enemy. Raggi, on the other hand, even while making constant and harshly critical comments about the old politics and the old parties, has no time for Giachetti, to whom she remains substantially indifferent. Raggi's emphasis is on change, the M5S, Rome and its citizens. This plays out against a backdrop of appointments and events, media contexts in which the Movement's campaign messages are delivered and which serve as an incentive for the donations which are the only economic support for the M5S's "low-cost" campaign.

In concluding the section on the analysis of the posts, it may be said that Raggi played the campaign game more skilfully and productively. The statistics from the analysis of the social media offer a glimpse of this and it is reflected not only in the election results, where the position of protest (in both the vote and the nonvote) carried the most weight, and in the urgent attention to local needs, but also in the way the campaign was conducted in terms of persuasiveness and of the broadening and strengthening of consensus.

With regard to the comments on the posts and specifically, for the moment, to the findings of the quantitative analysis, our questions concerned the nature of users' emotional reactions to the posts of Giachetti and Raggi, which of the topics introduced by the two leaders sparked the most lively debates, and what these consisted of in terms of content. As mentioned in the introduction, the corpus is massive: more than 170 thousand comments and nearly 2 million occurrences, over 100 thousand different graphics and a significant number of hapaxes, taking account of neologisms, distorted expressions and nicknames. The corpus was divided and interpreted in accordance with the partition keys "politician page: Raggi or Giachetti"; "period of campaign: first two weeks or last two weeks", "number of 'likes' for each comment: none (61.6%), 1 (17.4%), 2-4 (10.7%), more than 5 (10.3%)".

Concerning the authors of the comments (around 60 thousand), a significant gap emerged between the set of occasional comments (more than half those who submitted comments did so only once during the entire period under consideration) and that of the regular users of the Facebook pages under study.

One interesting point is that the two contenders' virtual arena indiscriminately collects not only the supporters of the two political parties, but also a range of external commentators (non-Romans, non-supporters of either of the two political groups, etc.) who nevertheless want to have their say. This vast sea of words contains as much harsh invective, often sprinkled with foul language, as it does argumentation, analysis, and scholarly insight.

On balance, if we stop at the strictly quantitative analysis, the sub-corpora of comments to the posts of Raggi and Giachetti look remarkably alike. Some differences can be appreciated through a consideration of details, from which, in Giachetti's case, the typical words that emerge include hope, begin, PD, Marino, Verdini, Rutelli, Buzzi, Alemanno, Mafia Capital, Carminati, procurement, Casamonica(for the Mafia Capital case), stadium, subway, radical, Renzi, shame, buffoon, salary, resign, investigate, promise, ridiculous, bank, debt, villa, billion, ATAC (the city transport service), thief, convict, dance, democratic, forget, seat, liar; for Raggi, hope, begin, PD, woman, M5S, Raggi, best wishes, honesty, Italy, Roman, #coRAGGio(the main #hashtag of the M5S campaign), congratulations, heart.

In any case, the most representative element in the comments is gutter language, containing no shortage of catch phrases and epithets invented for the occasion.

The hard fighting and the stadium atmosphere (fanatical at best, and verbally abusive and threatening at its most negative), at times accompanied by invective and gratuitous insults (where the target, regardless of content, is an entire party, a leader, or an internet user with a different orientation) definitely come to the fore when issues in the text corpus are analyzed (the identikit of the candidates, the capital's most urgent problems, even in a national and international context, the expectations for change, the waste and thievery in public administration, the Olympics and large-scale public works, Mafia Capital, etc.).

On the other hand, the most striking factkeeping in mind the posts of the candidates in the field is that there is almost no correspondence between the topics of the comments and the arguments offered by the candidates. The emotional forms of support and the equally agitated forms of demolition often have no connection to the posts under which they appear: "Listen dickhead, you're voting for that skank Raggi because retards like you understand each other"; "You saved the banks and fucked the poor. Shame! Just go home"; "The true left is Renzi"; "Romans we should all vote for the 5 Star Movement: it's an alternative for those who care about a better future for our children, grandchildren and for us Romans. Please don't do something stupid? and then complain about the result!!!".

We shall see in the following pages that without qualitative insights, the comments as a whole would tell us very little. Thanks to the mix of analytical tools selected and utilized, however, new research results emerge along with important confirmations at both the substantive and methodological level. The mantra of this and other authors' work on big text corpora downloaded from the internet is that moving back and forth in accordance with research requirements between quality and quantity, between big and small data, means that all elements are co-essential and integrated into a whole and no research choice is self-sufficient on its own.

III. The Campaign Conversations: Leadership and Identity

As we approach the heart of the qualitative analysis, the reader will note a number of issues that were "hidden" in the previous analysis.

Dealing with recursive patterns of dialogue, the issue of opinion leadership must be addressed. If it is true that a leader's ability to exert influence depends on the same ability in that leader's supporters', then it is important to examine how Giachetti and Raggi's own leadership was expressed through the actions of dozens of opinion leaders in micro-contexts (cf. Katz, Lazarsfeld, 1964; it. tr., 2000, pp. 713-64). For this purpose, Fb allows a reconstruction of some active lines of influence among citizens. If opinion leadership is attributable to "subjects in a position to function as amplifiers of the information to be conveyed and even to bring about changes in attitude" (Marchetti, 2014, p. 149), a distinction should be made between these two dimensions. On one hand, there are those who seem to be megaphones for a point of view without necessarily having an impact on the attitudes of others; on the other are those who effectively contribute to modifying the opinions of other individuals.

The reported conversations are articulated around a sort of hinge, represented by one or more users to whom all the others turn. In some cases the user in question seems to be regarded as a recognized representative of one of the candidates, either through a known link to an institution, a position of sympathy with a political group, or even only through political opinions expressed in comments on Fb.

The following is an excerpt conversation that may be taken as an example, in which users B and L seem to present themselves as being at the center of the dialogue. This means that the other users often address themselves to these two. The conversation is attributable to a post of Giachetti's of 23 May that was then placed on Giachetti's public page.

A: Fooling ignorant people is too easy Mr. Giachetti, the PD voters in Rome don't know that the reason they're paying a higher TARI [waste disposal tax] is because the juntas of both the LEFT and the RIGHT, including the one you were in with Rutelli, generated a Capitoline debt of over 16 billion. Why don't you say this in your electoral campaign? B: now tell me : what's Giachetti got to do with this? I don't get it. A: B, if you can't see it, I can't explain it to you. If you make an effort, you might manage to grasp it on your own. Go on, think about it :) C: B, with all due respect, we can't let the Roman PD get their hands on the city again after the mess they made. Now they should even make Verdini's people happy. D: I think he's a true and honest person, too bad about the party he belongs to. E: We should choose the most honest people, never mind what flag they fly F: Why, are the others any better? G: I don't like this wanting to tar everyone with the same brush!!! I vote PD and I consider myself an honest person and no one should presume to doubt it!!! It's just the lowest demagoguery!!! H: sorry, but how can you vote PD? (I'm not trying to provoke; I would just like to find someone to talk to about this without the insults) G: And how can you not vote PD? Do you feel ok with this situation that's been stagnant for at least 20 years? Don't you think the time has come for a shakeup that will benefit everybody instead of just sitting there crying about it? C: Excuse me G but in these last years when we've reached an unheard of level of chaos who is it that's been in charge??? B: But do you vote for the man or the party...I don't understand these people...what's going on here... I: G, your last comment defies definition, I can't imagine that people exist who see things this way, Giachetti is a figurehead for organized crime with the PD label. L: You can vote for Giachetti without voting PD. Split your votes. It's what I'm going to do. M: If you talk about waste, stopping the robbery, salary cuts, consulting, I'll vote for you, otherwise forget it. Otherwise it's just talktalk. G: And I suppose "demonstrate demonstrate demonstrate..." is better? Anyway, jokes aside, he's already talked about how to eliminate the waste and the robbery? it's all there on Giachetti's page...look it up. With respect. M: G, the problem is I don't buy it. C: G, with all due respect, we can't let the Roman PD get their hands on the city again after the mess they made. Now they should even make Verdini's people happy. M: I'm 55 and I've been voting for them for years, but that's it, I'm done. That's all there is to say; anyway they'll win again for sure. Two significant elements emerge in this conversational excerpt. The first is that apart from the comments of A and L, aggressively hostile to Giachetti, an articulate discussion seems to develop revealing positions that are distinct but nonetheless open to dialogue. The second is that some Fb users seem to take on a central/magnetic role that leads others to refer back to them, which to some extent allows them to guide the conversation.

In the following table (Tab. 1), we decided to define the political identities of the participants in the conversation not only through their declared political affiliation, if any, but also by reference to Fb pages for which they specifically express an affinity. Concerning the relationship between political identity and opinion leadership, the voters who appear to side most with the party are the ones who get the most replies (G, in particular); the citizens who identify most clearly with the position of the PD militant seem to be those who actually receive more comments, mostly hostile. In this regard, the central position of G in the conversation seems to reside primarily in G's being identified as an advocate for the PD rather than in the actual arguments proposed. This seems to uphold the principle that assuming a clear and highly recognizable position attracts the attention of others.

The Fb users, and especially a group of 5star supporters, seem interested in probing the strength of the arguments put forward, more actively exploring the limits of the positions taken. It appears, in other words, that PD militancy somehow gives rise to increased tension in the dialogue, which shows up in the comments directed at the militant and is reflected both in their number and type. It is as if the Facebook page of the

PD candidate were transformed into a sort of stage which affords visibility to the positions of the home team, and especially those of the two users most legitimately linked to the positions of the party. Some participants in the conversation, either directly or less so, give advice about how to vote. Along with the two militants, B and G, who declare that they will vote PD, E and L also seem to lean toward voting for Giachetti. They base this preference, however, exclusively on the figure of the candidate, trying to separate him from his background. L in particular advises opting for a split vote that favors Giachetti without strengthening the PD. It should be pointed out that the information note on L's Fb page contains no identity reference to the PD, highlighting L's distance from the party and from any even minimally militant position.

The participants whose political identity is traceable to the M5S tend to reiterate that Rome must not be left in the hands of a group that colluded with people who contributed to the degradation of the city. Their comments take on the function of opposing anyone who tries to defend voting for Giachetti or the PD or both. The position of D, identifiable as a supporter of M5S, is that Giachetti may even be honest but that he cannot be voted for because of his party membership. This is the borderline position of a PD voter who has switched to M5S and who at the most might go so far as to sympathize with the PD candidate but will still deny him the vote.

4 D -I

It may be assumed that the push for change in the declarations of the two mayoral candidates' supporters may be due in the case of Giachetti to the personal trustworthiness of the candidate and to a more general momentum at the national level based on the referendum. Among Raggi's supporters, liberation takes the form of scrapping in its entirety the old ruling class that colluded in the Mafia Capital phenomenon.

5 IV. Interactions and Narrative Models Compared

If the PD supporters tend to highlight the reformist mission of their party in spite of the more or less covertly recognized mistakes it made in Rome, the M5S narrative emphasizes the movement's anti-system vocation, as it did starting from the beginning of Virginia Raggi's campaign.

The following conversation helps clarify the 5star supporters intention to embark on a true process of liberation for the city of Rome. This is not a short-term battle culminating in an electoral victory, but a much farther-reaching undertaking, requiring a large-scale collective effort.

It is precisely this investment of energy and long-term support that is required, on one hand to weaken criminal powers and on the other to breathe life into a political system that will embody the ideal of the The variability of political identities and strategies of argumentation can be summarized in the following table ?? Movement, which is to progress beyond representation to direct democracy in founding a truly self-governing community. The conversation that follows is taken from a post of Virginia Raggi's after the first round of voting, when she was sure of her position in the runoff against Giachetti.

A: I think Virginia will win and I really hope she does. But the problems will come later. They will try in every way possible to put a thousand spokes in her wheel so they can say 'See? Unlike the conversations analyzed in the previous section, the narrative pattern that presents itself in this case shows no evidence of conflict, no attempt to promote some views over others.

Here the conversation tends rather to build up a narrative reinforcing a particular point of view asserting in short that even if Virginia Raggi were to win the election a dedicated show of unity and support would still be required of the citizenry. Powerful forces would continue to undermine her work even and especially after the election.

The the most magnetic user point of view (A) is augmented and strengthened through dialogue with other users, all unambiguously affiliated with M5S. The formulation of the narrative proceeds incrementally, growing and gaining strength at the same time (cf. Hedström, 2005; ??t. tr., 2006, p.111). In this process the roles of the leaders and the less magnetic users are both fundamental, the structure of the narrative proceeding with progressive comments from the leader in a game of incitement involving the enrichment of the original formulation.

Several observations may be made on the basis of the conversations analyzed. The first of these is that the most meaningful conversations do not seem to focus on any offline action/involvement, except of course for voting for one of the two candidates. The participation model that emerges from the conversations seems to fit with a type of online participation that has been defined as 'couch activism' (cf. Di Giammaria, Gennaro, 2013), basically online chatting among citizens. In other words, the conversations show no significant presence of decision-making concerning offline actions other than mere voting behavior. Thus they do not seem to have any direct impact on participatory activity external to the network.

Among the PD supporters the difference in level of attraction between those who identify with the party and those who express a political identity linked exclusively to a specific personality, most notably Giachetti, emerges quite clearly. In contrast, supporters of the M5S seem uniformly focused on emphasizing the value of both individual personalities (Raggi and many other leaders of local and national importance) and the Movement in its own right. Disappointed leftists and supporters of the Social Right are both recognizable among them.

Giachetti's supporters seem to represent a vision whose approach is reformist and a liberal conception of democracy based on a separation of powers and the principle of representation. Raggi's supporters seem instead

350 to embrace a vision oriented toward moving beyond the status quo, which on one hand channels its aggressiveness
351 into anti-system criticism, and on the other presents itself as a project of wide scope whose slogans invoke the
formation of cohesive and self-governing communities. ¹ ²

1

Level of activity
in the
conversation
(N. of comments
submitted)

Figure 1: Table 1 :

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Political identity	Argumentative strategy	Fbuser
PD group		
Identity tied to specific politicians, mainly followers of Bersani	Removal of the candidate-party link	B
Identity tied to the Yes vote in the referendum for constitutional reform, a specific politician (Renzi)	Support for candidate and party	G
and to the PD as a party		
Identity tied to a specific politician and to the PD as a party	Negative portrayal of adversary (victory for opponent seen as extremely bad)	F
Identity tied to the Yes vote in the referendum for constitutional reform and opposition to Grillo	Removal of the candidate-party link	E
Neutral	Removal/termination of the candidate-party link	H - L
M5S group		
Identity tied to the Movement and to specific politicians	Negative portrayal of adversary extremely bad) (victory for opponent seen as	A - C -I
Identity tied to the Movement	Negative portrayal of adversary (victory for opponent seen as extremely bad)	

Figure 2: Table 2 :

The 5stars have failed, they can't govern, they're not capable. Come back and vote for us'. Making Virginia fail as mayor would pay the PD big dividends at the national level. B: This is what we're all afraid of. Also because they have ALL, I mean, ALL the means -politics and the media -to do what you say. C: This is why it's not enough to vote for her, we all, and I mean all have to work actively now and later...don't give up D: Not so sure? I'm afraid that in the privacy of the voting booth there will be a lot of turncoats. The wavering on the Olympics and Metro C are not acceptable :(E: Sorry to say I agree!!!! Too much urban decay!!! F: The success of Virginia and all of the M5S depends on the responsibility and cooperation of us Romans. G: don't be afraid of change A: Of course not, naturally. But we need to be ready for what's coming. That's why we expect them to try everything to discredit us, like Quarto, aimed not so much at convinced Movement voters but more at those who are hesitant, uncertain, who maybe would vote with us but without understanding much about us. It's these people the pd is interested in, who don't even consider why they ought to support the 5 stars. If we're not ready we're in trouble. H: You citizens will be the ones who help her, may the stars be with you?!

true, but anyone who doesn't look into it or doesn't care will fall for it quite easily.
M: This is why if she is elected we have to help her,
all us native and adopted Romans, to carry out the program! To see the stars once again
N: So here's X -they change names but do the same ridiculous things: copying posts from other discussions and pasting them in to try and create disorder? RIDICULOUS BEYOND BELIEF!!!!!!

You poor retards, everything posted is public, online and transparent. I'm waiting for you to put the same energy and effort into finding out who bankrolls the foundations that fund Renzi, the so-called Buffoon of the Arno, as well as SorBuzzi and SorCarminati, as I've had occasion to point out in the past. So long moron!!!!
B: X, I see you're shitting yourself, eh? Your freeloading time is about to run out, find yourself a REAL job!! What, you can't? Well, of course, with little Renzi the Hun around it's not so easy... O: X I went and checked the site? now can you kindly tell me where to find the PD's 'expenses'?? thanks P: Think about those in your party who in addition to taking bloated salaries steal as well and have reduced Italy and the Italians to sh*t. Q: A? it's just what's happening in Livorno? I hope the people there reconfirm their trust in the Movement. A: X These arguments of yours aren't the type that take in anyone who is even a little bit informed about things. These days you can easily find the proposed bill that was discussed and then voted down which was intended to exclude non-parties from the election and therefore from the possibility of being represented in parliament. If what you say were true, that is that the 5stars want to become a party, what better occasion than that? And instead they opposed it. So the facts are there to disprove this thesis. I don't

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