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Scientific report for Short Term Scientific Mission at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research  
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The aim of the Short Term Scientific Mission at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research was to structure the study of the communication of the populist leaders and the populist parties for the first stage of a broader research about the connection between populists' messages and the political attitudes and opinions of the populist voters. The successful case of the Five Star Movement at the 2013 Italian general election has been chosen as the focus of this research, consequently the communication of this party and of its leader Beppe Grillo has been considered the object of analysis to be settled. Moreover, in order to highlight the characteristics of the communication of these actors (in terms of more stressed populist elements, owned issues, communication style and political positioning), it has been chosen to study their political messages in comparison with two other Italian political actors generally considered not populist: the Democratic Party and its leader in 2013, Pierluigi Bersani.

#### 1. The work carried out

The Short Term Scientific Mission has been precious for the setting of a strong methodological base for the study of the direct and mediated communication of the Italian leaders and parties during the 2013 electoral campaign. It has been possible first throughout the assessment of the state of the art on populist communication: previous works on both the populist parties' direct communication and their media coverage have been taken into account and organized by paying particular attention to the methods adopted and the operationalization of populism followed. This critical revision of the existing literature has successively led to a series of choices about how to set the analysis of the communication of the Italian political actors. Firstly, it has been the starting point for a reflection about a satisfying operationalization of the concept of populism suitable for its measurement in the Italian political parties' communication. Subsequently, it has permitted to build a codebook for the analysis of the direct communication of the populist leaders and parties on different communication platforms (electoral rallies, official web site, Facebook and Twitter pages, party manifestos). Concerning the media coverage, initially it was thought to study it starting from a secondary dataset already available, the 2013 Itanes study on the media coverage of the Italian political actors. The idea was to choose a set of variables useful to reconstruct how the image of the Five Star Movement, the Democratic Party and their leaders had been conveyed by television and the newspapers during the 2013 Italian electoral campaign. However, since an attentive look to the dataset revealed some criticalities, it has been decided to abandon the use of this secondary data and to conduct an original analysis for this type of communication too. Consequently, it has been decided to apply the codebook built for the analysis of the direct communication also to the analysis of the mediated communication. Because of limited time and resources, it has been chosen to circumscribe the analysis of the media content (new programs and newspapers) only to the last week of the Italian electoral campaign, while for the direct communication the whole last month of campaign will be taken into account. Finally, during the Short Term Scientific Mission, the elaborated codebook has been tested by conducting a preliminary analysis on a small sample of the communication material concerning the two leaders and their parties and it proved to fit the data. Concerning the whole analysis, it will be carried out by three Italian coders (two graduate students and me) of the University of Pavia but its results will be discussed and interpreted in collaboration with the Professor Linda Bos of the University of Amsterdam.

## 2. The results obtained

The main result of the Short Term Scientific Mission has been the elaboration of a codebook useful for analysing the communication of the populist parties and leaders. This codebook shows two positive aspects: the former is that it is flexible in the sense that it could be used for the analysis of both different types of direct (speeches, social media contents, web site contents, party manifestoes) and mediated (newspapers and television news) communication. The latter is that it considers many aspects of the phenomenon of populism and of its manifestations, so it can depict an exhaustive picture of the kind and degree of populism of the political actors under analysis. In effect, the codebook permits to measure many different characteristics generally attributed to populism. Firstly, it measures the fundamental elements of populism as a thin ideology: the valorisation of “the people”, the corresponding devaluation of the elite and the insistence on the opposition between the good people and the evil elites. Moreover, it considers other elements typical of populist manifestations such as the identification of out-groups as a threat against the people, the insistence on the necessity to restore the general will of the people, the reference to the direct relation between the leader and the people, and the simplistic vision of the political process. In addition to these populist characteristics, also the typical trait of the populist rhetoric of affirming that the nation is facing a critical juncture that requires the intervention of a new force in the political landscape has been considered. The political actors’ reference to the fact that the nation is in a crucial point of its history, their exaltation of a distant glorious past, their expression of concerns about the present and the future have been coded as much as the targets they blame for the downfall. Furthermore, given the appearance in Europe of new kinds of populist parties, that not only seem to cover the complete political spectrum but also to take distance from it by not embracing any ideology, another characteristic of populist parties has been considered relevant to be analysed, their vision of the world. In order to measure it, the issues to which the political actors under analysis refer have been coded and their political positioning, both on the left-right political continuum and on the GAL-TAN (Green/Alternative/Libertarian - Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist) dimension, have been measured. Finally, also the communication style of the populist actors has been considered: the codebook contains a section about the type of language and humour devices (irony/sarcasm, jokes, wordplays, use of nicknames, metaphors/similes, offensive language, self deprecation) displayed by the actors under analysis and another section about their reference to positive or negative emotions.

This codebook will be used for analysing the direct communication of the leaders Beppe Grillo and Pierluigi Bersani and their parties in the last month (20 January - 23 February) of the 2013 Italian electoral campaign. More specifically, the codebook will be applied on 1520 Facebook posts, 2233 tweets, 103 Beppe Grillo’s Blog posts, 33 ‘copertine’ of the Democratic Party’s website, 40 leaders’ speeches and two party manifestoes. Moreover, the codebook will be applied also on the media coverage of the last week of the Italian electoral campaign (16-23 February 2013). Both the political news appeared on the first page of five Italian newspapers (Corriere della Sera, La Stampa, La Repubblica, Il Sole 24 Ore, Il Giornale) and the first three news of the main Italian television news-programs (Tg1, Tg5, Tg La7, Sky Tg - 8pm edition) will be analysed.

Even if the codebook built during the Short Term Scientific Mission will be firstly used for the analysis of the communication of two Italian political actors, it could be easily applied, in future, to the communication of parties and leaders of other countries, making this research the first step of a broader comparative study.

## 3. Outcomes and future collaborations

The Short Term Scientific Mission at the University of Amsterdam has greatly improved my PhD research project. The theoretical chapter of my final dissertation will be enriched by the revision of the literature about the populist communication and a whole chapter of this dissertation will be dedicated to the explanation and interpretation of the results of the analysis set at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research. Furthermore, the analysis set up at the ASCoR will be presented at the Annual Conference of the Sisp (Società

Italiana di Scienza politica) in September 2015; thanks to its comparative potential it has been accepted to the panel "Comparative European Populism". Finally, if the work developed will led, as expected, to valuable results, it could evolve in a future publication, desirably with the collaboration of the Professor Linda Bos. Besides these more direct outcomes, the Short Term Scientific Mission has enforced the link between the Italian components of the Cost Action and their Dutch correspondents, and it has paved the ways for further collaborations on the study of populist communication.