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Exploratory Study on Elites' behaviour on Social Media and Technocratic, Techno-populist and
Populist Attitudes



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General Introduction

In what follows, I provide a general overview of the present work, outlining in particular its contributions to the existing literature, limitations and possibilities for further research.

In light of the vast literature on populism and the elites - and especially their connection with social media - the general research question underlying the present work is to explore elite actors, their behavior on social media and their connection with populism, elitism and technocracy. This general question is addressed and tested by several hypotheses in three autonomous (albeit connected) chapters. For the purpose of this work I will rely on a vastly accepted definition of elites in political science¹: *“persons who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organizations and movements of whatever kind, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially [...] top position-holders in the largest or most resource- rich political, governmental, economic, military, professional, communications, and cultural organizations and movements in a society”* (Highley & Burton, 1989:18).

Furthermore, I focus on the Italian case for three main reasons; first, there is a vast literature pertaining elites, technocracy and techno-populism in Italy and the country has been considered as a fertile ground for populism. Second, Italy is characterised by low trust rates towards both the political and the media elite. Finally, for more practical reasons, including language barrier and, mostly, contextual knowledge of the domains which I have empirically investigated and codified. Likewise, for what concerns the analysis of social media data, I opt to focus on Twitter both because it is considered to be an “elite platform” or a platform that is

¹ For an example of other approaches, sociological research generally relies on Bourdieu’s conception of elites as actors who own capital, might it be economic, cultural, symbolic or social.

vastly adopted by members of the political, media and academic elites especially and, more pragmatically, for the accessibility of the data.

The first chapter identifies the members of the elites and analyze their main socio-demographic characteristics, vastly confirming previous research's findings. Among the others, I find an increased number of women within the ranks of the most powerful actors over time. Likewise, I find, in line with what was posited by the literature, that the political elite is more heterogeneous compared to the composition of other elites. The second chapter explores the propensity of these actors to adopt, be active, and be early adopters of social media on part of the elite members. Furthermore, I analyze, by means of exponential random graph model (ergm), the Twitter following network among these actors. Finally, the third chapter explores two questions: first, the main topics elite members discuss in their online communication and, second, it tests in particular whether such discussion pertains technocratic, populist or techno-populist attitudes.

Among the major contributions of this work, I provide an original approach at the study of elite on social media by considering members of all elite sectors (elective, media, bureaucracy, etc.) at the same time, allowing to compare their characteristics and their behavior on social media. Second, we explore a vastly uncharted territory by focusing on the attitudes (and especially technocratic one) on part of elite actors. Furthermore, we contribute to the existing literature by building three main datasets. The first one detailing information on more than 5000 elite members, building on, and updating, the previous literature results. The second dataset details such elite members' behavior on Twitter: adoption, activation, number of followers and date of joining. Third, a dataset comprising more than 60.000 tweets automatically collected, 10.000 of which manually coded, explores elite actors' attitudes as to technocratic, populist and techno-populist stances.

To introduce the chapter we first provide a review of the state of the art and the contribution this work provides. Second, we provide a literature review of the main concepts that are employed; populism, technocracy and elites.

State of the Art and Contribution: The Importance of Elites Identification and Analysis

In the wake of major technological transformations, social unrests, and, in the last years, the worst health crisis in Western Europe since the Spanish influenza, understanding who has the power to take decisions or otherwise substantially and consistently influence society has become more urgent than ever. In particular, researching elites, what are their socio-demographic characteristics, their relation within and between each other and with non-elites is more crucial than ever.

Thus, the present work maps and investigates elites and, specifically, the relations within the elites, *between* elites, and the circulation of technocratic, or techno-populist ideas, on social media. The scope is, in general, threefold: on the one hand, I build a novel dataset detailing all the members of the elites in Italy, updating previous research. On the other hand, I explore elites' actors behavior on Twitter: first, by comparing their adoption and activation patterns, second by exploring the likelihood of connections within and between elites', exploiting a simple network model. Finally, on the back of a vast and growing literature on technocratic, populist and techno-populist attitudes within public opinion, I explore the same attitudes in elites' actors and how engaging they are for the general public.

Despite the vast and flourishing literature, and the many reasons that could be advanced for investigating elites, I will focus on three main (all interrelated) reasons, plus one determined

by the historical juncture. In order: the tension between populism and elites; the increasing relevance of ‘experts government’ and the diffusion of technocratic tendencies within public opinion; on the other hand of the spectrum, the ‘democratization of science’ and the virtually unlimited access to information; finally, the contextual case of the Covid-19 induced pandemic.

The first reason lies in the connection and tension of elites and elitism with populism.

First, recently, research has focused on the inherent, and dialectical, relation between elitism and populism. On the one hand, literature on populism has addressed the seeming contradiction between populist leaders and their elite background or status and has further expanded our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the increase in both technocratic and populist attitudes within public opinion (Bertsou & Pastorella, 2017). Since the 90’s (among the others: Ignazi, 1992; Betz, 1993; Taggart, 2000; 2017; Mudde 2003; 2004), literature has documented the rise (and rising) success of populist parties in Europe and the United States, especially on the right end of the political spectrum. This renovated interest in populism, from both academia and the media, peaked in 2016, with the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States and with the result of the referendum for leaving the European Union in the United Kingdom. Despite such all-encompassing attention, research has focused only partially on the connection between elites, elitism and populism. Following what has been defined the ideational approach developed by Mudde (2004), populism has been interpreted as strictly anti-elitist in essence (Schoor 2019) often coming to contradictory conclusions on several leaders deemed *populist* but whose characteristics (and statements) would make them more part of the very elites they attack. From billionaires Silvio Berlusconi and Donald Trump to politician-daughter of politician-father Marine Le Pen to Oxford-educated Boris Johnson, populist leaders have been criticized for their claim of being on the part of the people and especially part of the people is believable. Research has attempted to make sense of such seeming contradictions by introducing new theories and definitions of populism; for example, the socio-cultural approach

suggests that the populist leader imitates the supposed 'non-presentability' of the people to mobilize support by advancing controversial policies (Ostiguy 2020a; 2020b). Similarly, Schoor (2019) develops a semiotic framework to logically connect populism, elitism and pluralism, suggesting that populist leaders introduce divisions within society that allow distinguishing between a 'good' and a 'bad' elite². In her perspective, for example, Donald Trump can be part of the elites (from a socio-demographic perspective) and adopt language and values that are inherently populist. Furthermore, identifying the elites' characteristics – i.e. who they are and what they do-, their (im-)mobility and their (dis-)similarities contributes to the debate over a connection between the elites' inadequacy or unwillingness to pursue public good and populism (see for example Hayward 1996; Carboni 2008; Fabbrini & Lazar 2013). In this sense, the identification of elites, their main characteristics and their relation within and between themselves and between elites and non-elites can be considered in order to test such supposed inadequacy or unwillingness.

The second contribution is related to the growing importance of specialization, experts-elite and technocratic tendencies. There is little doubt that we live in a society increasingly dependent on information and knowledge and ever-increasing specialization, that - and at an accelerated pace after the outbreak of the pandemic – have made scientists and experts 'public persona' (see for example the recent De Cock & van Laar 2021) and active part of the political arena. This growing importance of expertise and specialization is likewise echoed in public opinions (Bertsou & Caramani 2016). Relatedly, another quite recent stream of literature (Ganuza & Font 2020) suggests a strong link between technocracy and populism, to the point of identifying 'technocratic populism' as a specific type of populism - rather than an oxymoron.

² This is also possible as citizens who hold populist attitudes tend to identify the elites depending on their political beliefs. For example, in the United States, democrats are more likely to identify as 'elites' members of the corporate and financial world, while for a Republican the true elites are the cultural ones, the media and the Entertainment industry.

Techno-populism can be roughly summarized as subset of populism as a thin ideology, that opposes experts and expertise to the corrupt political elites, where competence becomes an element of authenticity and proximity to the people (Buštková & Guasti, 2019; Castaldo & Verzichelli, 2020). Other studies frame techno-populism specifically as a “political logic”, rather than an ideology, and an assessment of how electoral competition should work (Bickerton & Invernizzi-Accetti 2021).

Thus, against the framework of techno-populism, such peculiar intersection of political elites and ‘technocrats’, coming from the judicial system, corporate or academic worlds alike, make the investigation of different elites’ relations and characteristics an important contribution.

Third, the importance of researching elites is connected to the ‘democratization’ of science, business and, more in general, information. Indeed, the recent technological revolutions, i.e. the wide-spread access of Internet connection and the introduction and development of several social media platforms, have made access to the both the production and dissemination of information and knowledge virtually unlimited. The most evident consequences of such phenomenon include the relations between blogging and professional journalism (see for example Lowery, 2009); user-generated content (UGC) as increasingly part of the entertainment diets of consumers (Van Dijck, 2009); but also related to the circulation of fake news and alternative facts or even non-mainstream and lesser-known facts about scientific knowledge. Thus, exploring how elites interact both with each other and with social media platform might further the understanding to why different elites might be differently appealing to the general public.

Finally, the contemporary context and several phenomena call for a comprehensive study on elites. First, cataclysmic events such as the Covid-19 induced pandemic and climate change,

but also the upcoming global recession, call for the discussion and role of the academic/expert elite in shaping public opinion' and other elites' beliefs and actions. Second, the surge of both populist and technocratic attitudes across the population, in connection with long-known and studied phenomena (i.e. the disruption of mass-party systems) but also relatively new ones (i.e. increasing accessibility and spreading of fake news and conspiracy theories), put the development of the political, academic and 'mass media' elites at the center of the debate and in particular questions how they contribute to the spreading of such attitudes – in opposition to pluralism. Third, phenomena such as Brexit or, again, the Pandemic and the newly devised Recovery Plan for Next Generation EU, make the relations between National and supra-national elites crucial (even if this relation will not be investigated in the present work).

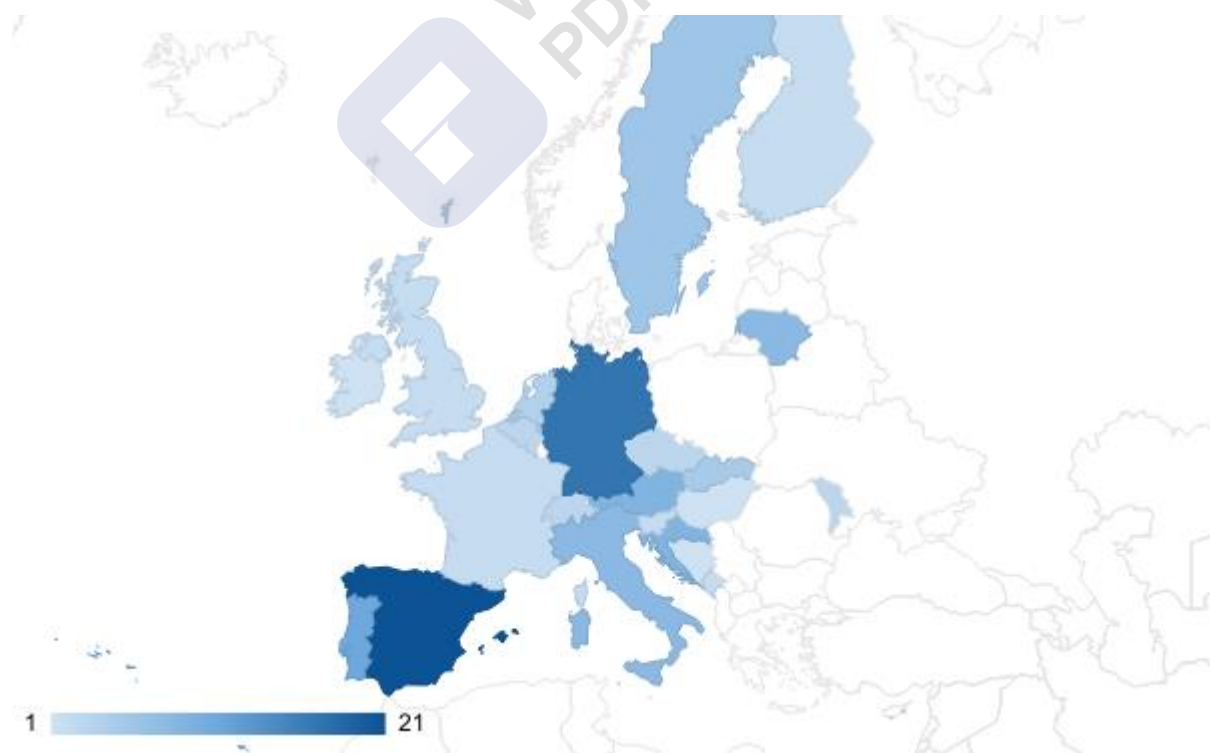
Taking into account the previous considerations, the purpose of this introduction is to briefly summarize the literature on the two most relevant concepts for the present work: populism and elite studies.



Populism

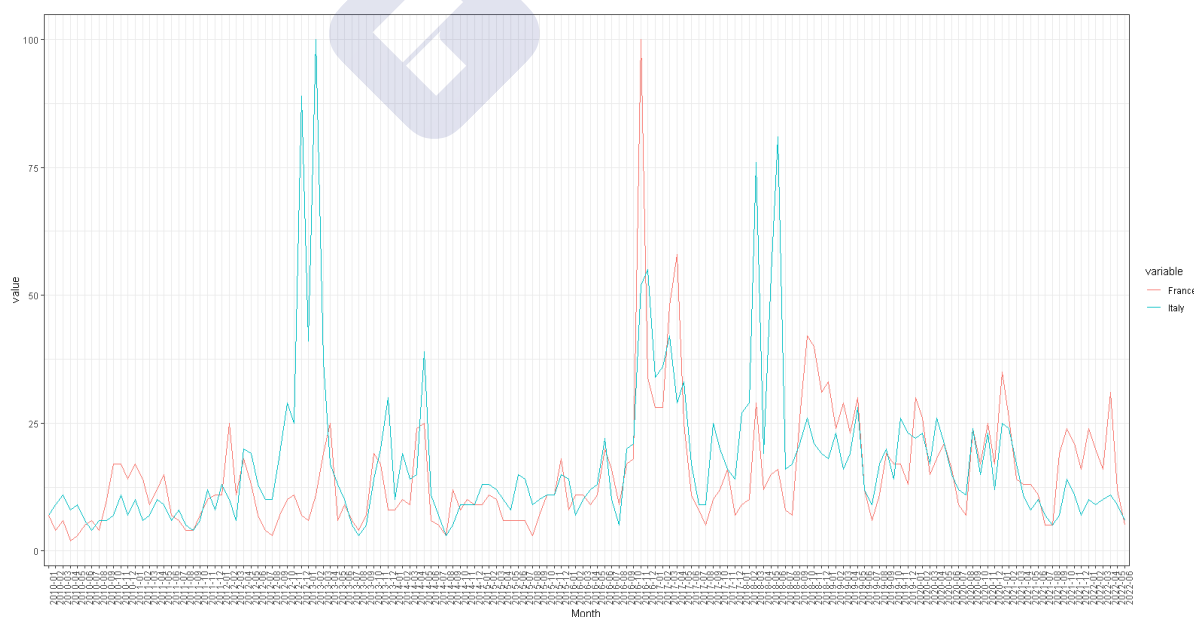
Since the election of Donald Trump as POTUS, the vote for “Brexit” in 2016 and the electoral fortunes of many populist radical right parties (PRRPs) in Europe, there has been a renovated media and academic interest in the study of populism. The interest, and skillful exploitation of the concept of populism, is not limited to news, but it is also an increasing feature of parties’ and leaders’ communication. For example, analyzing the Manifesto Project Data ranging from 1945 to 2021, of the 219 entries which contained the word ‘populist’ only 58 are dated before 2008 and 90 of them were dated after 2016. For the word ‘populism’ a similar pattern emerges; of the total 96 entries, 19 were dated before 2008 (excluded) and 50 after 2016. Casiraghi (2021) also explores the rhetorical contestation and weaponization of ‘populism’, analyzing the parliamentary speeches in the United Kingdom.

Figure 1: Mentions of the lemma Populis* in Party Manifestos of European Countries. Own Elaboration of Party Manifesto Project Data



Likewise, Guriev and Papioannou (2020) show how the share of academic articles in social sciences with ‘populist’ and ‘populism’ in the title or abstract has increased dramatically since 2016, touching a 2% peak in 2019. The same is true for Google Search data, which suggest an increase in the searches on populism all over the world: furthermore, the graph peaks and associated queries show how the interest in the concept of populism increases when populism-associated events (i.e. an election) occur. For example, looking at the Italian and French cases, it is even more clear how the (relative) success of (perceived) populist movements in national or international elections or other political events is linked with spikes in the research curves for the word ‘populism’. In Italy, the peaks roughly corresponds to the resignation of Cabinet Berlusconi IV in 2011, to the Election of Donald Trump and to the 2018 National Elections results and the subsequent taking of office of Cabinet Conte I. Similarly, the peaks in searches for the term ‘populism’ for France occur during the election of Donald Trump and the first round of the 2017 Presidential elections.

Figure 2: Searches for the term 'Populism' on Google in France and Italy (2010-2022). Own Elaboration based on Google Trends Data.



The fact that - not only in the academic sphere but also in public opinion, media and political parties' language themselves - there is a renovated interest for a word that describes a technical concept in the research field, clearly indicates that 'populism' has become one of the buzzwords of the new Millennium (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2016:1-2; DeHanas & Shterin 2018). Furthermore, it is possible to suggest that the words 'populism', 'populist' et similia, have become to signify something which goes way beyond the boundaries of a real definition and the technical aspect of the concept. Indeed, the term 'populism' has been inserted in the common language to signify diverse and variegated concepts and oftentimes used as a synonym of other (even if related) stances. In the words of Cass Mudde the concept of populism is often criticized: "as a *Kampfbegriff* ('a combat term') to defame political opponent" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018: 1), to the point where virtually no political actor could escape the accusation of being a populist (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018).

In this complex, and hyper-saturated context, it has been advanced the idea that the new cleavage on which political (and media) actors are mobilizing the consensus is populism vs. anti-populism - a refutation of populism that Katsambekis (2014: 574) has defined as 'anti-populism hysteria'. Santaniello et al. (2017), for example, investigate the emerging cleavage as an opposition between populists and cosmopolitans, reprising a work by Miller e Schofield (2003) who build on the classical conceptualization of the political space on two axes: economic and socio-cultural. To the traditional opposition between liberals (pro-state intervention and liberal on the socio-cultural axis) and conservatives (pro-market and culturally traditionalists), they add two dimensions: populists (pro-state and culturally traditionalists) and cosmopolitans (both pro-market and culturally liberal).

The concept and history of populism themselves are far from being recent and populist movements have emerged and have been successful to varying degrees in several countries. Latin America is one of the most prolific land for the emergence of populism and populist

actors (Kaltwasser, 2012; 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Among the other reasons, political instability and a persistent inequality contribute to make the populist argument particularly resonant with public opinion. The first wave emerged in the aftermath of the financial and economic crisis of 1929 and lasted until the emergence of the authoritarian states in the '60s. While communism and socialism gained popularity during the same period, the populist narrative - pitching the pure people against the corrupt elites - was particularly successful. The second emerged during the 90s and was characterized by a strong neo-liberal stance; thus, the framing of the 'elites' was peculiar, depicting the state - and the excessive statism- and the political class as the enemies of the people. Finally, the late 90's and early 2000s have seen a third wave of populist actors emerging, namely Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Similarly, to the first wave of populism in Latin America, these leaders exploited both 'Americanismo' and anti-imperialist rhetoric. Compared to the first wave, however, which strived to go beyond the left-right divide, they explicitly associated with socialist ideas (Kaltwasser, 2012; 2015; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). However, the very first populist movement have been identified in a political movement developed in 19th century Imperial Russia and to the short-lived "People's Party" founded in 1891 in the United States. While it has been argued that the former, the '*narodničestvo movement*'³, has flowed into and partially affected the Russian revolution (Hobsbawm, 1994), the organization was never able to go beyond a small intellectual movement and took a serious blow when one of its members assassinated Tsar Alexander II in 1881 (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Despite its failure to expand in the country it was born into, the *narodnichestvo* influenced the subsequent agrarian movements that developed during the 20th century in Eastern Europe and, to some extent, modern populist movements in Western Europe (Taggart

³ Among the others, the movement has greatly inspired the character of the nihilist intellectuals in the Possessed by F. Dostoevskij.

2000, 2018; Stavrakakis 2014, 2015; Brubaker 2020). Some years later, the first populist movement in the United States, ‘the People Party’, emerged in the early 1890’s but collapsed shortly after, following the nomination of a Democrat senator as presidential candidate (Kaltwasser et al. 2017).

Afterwards, populism has subsequently emerged in varied forms and ‘attached’ to different ideologies during the 20th century. Two movements have emerged in the first decade of the 20th century, that while at the opposite ends of the political spectrum, were both characterized by a populist stance: Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In Western Europe, after WWII populist parties were basically absent. Taggart (2018), for instance, reports that when Ionescu & Gellner (1969) published their book warning against the specter of populism haunting the world, they did not include any Western European country. Such instance would be unthinkable in the present day, when virtually every country in Western Europe has at least one populist party (see, for example: Rooduijn et al., 2019; and Zulianello, 2020 for a complete list). Since the 90s populist parties - and especially in the form of populist radical right parties, PRRPs - have grown both in terms of support and heterogeneity of the form they adopt (Taggart, 2018). The distinctive nature of PRRPs, as conceptualized by Mudde (2004) and Mudde & Kaltwasser (2012; 2017) is the combination of three main dimensions: populism, expressed as the opposition between the ‘pure’, often ethnically defined, people and the internal enemy (the ‘elites’) and the external enemy (the ‘others’, usually immigrants and minorities). The second element is nativism. Nativism is linked to both the belief that nations should be inhabited by the natives, with the non-natives representing an inherent threat to the safety and longevity of the nation itself; and to the nostalgia sentiment towards the heartland and its golden age (Taggart, 2000; 2018). Lastly, authoritarianism, or an emphasis on “law and order” issues, and the necessity to enforce security, even at the expense of liberty.

While many researchers (among the others: Betz, 1994; Ignazi, 1992, 2003; Norris, 2005; Mudde, 2007) have pointed out the vast prevalence of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe, some left-wing populist parties have been successful as well: Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece being among the most notable ones. The distinctive aspect of the left-wing populism is the association with some form of socialism (Mudde, 2007; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018). March (2011) further analyzes the combination between populism and left-wing ideologies, by differentiating between populist socialist parties and social populist parties. The former are parties where the core socialist ideology is still the prevalent element, but with distinctive populist characteristics, such as a particularly vehement critical stance towards establishment and the elites. Social populist parties, on the other hand, have more traits typical of the populist discourse: a strong, personalized leadership, an inconsistent ideology and tend to adopt a mix of left or right-wing ideas. However, Marxism as an ideology should not be conflated with populism: the true distinctive element of populism is the ‘lionization of common sense’, while for Marxists ‘education and especially the consciousness of class’ are essential points (March, 2011: 120) – making Marxism a peculiarly elitist ideology.

Finally, other movements and parties are difficult to understand through the typical left-right continuum: The Five Star Movement, for instance, is one of the most famous and successful examples, that explicitly positions itself to be ‘post-ideological’. To partly address this issue, Zulianello (2018, 2020) introduces the concept of ‘valence populism’: those parties that tend to focus on valence issues, that cannot be positioned on the left-right continuum as they are broadly shared, such as transparency, the fight against corruption, and anti-establishment sentiments. Valence populism is opposed to ‘positional populism’, that is to say, the case of parties that focuses one of the two poles in the left-right spectrum.

With such a rich and fragmented history, populism has been conceptualized in many different (and sometimes conflicting) ways. One of the first conceptualizations is the one of the seminal works of Ernesto Laclau and, later, his and his colleague's, Chantal Mouffe. In their view, sometimes referred to as the "Essex school", populism is framed in an essentially *positive* way (Mouffe 2005; 2018; 2019): populism emerges "where popular-democratic elements are presented as an antagonistic option against the ideology of the dominant bloc" (quoted from Stavrakakis 2004: 254). As synthesized by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), in Laclau and Mouffe view, populism is the empowerment force towards radical democracy, in opposition to liberal democratic regimes that represent a problem. Thus, populism can give voice to the more excluded segments of society, by introducing conflict in the political arena and promote radical democracy (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017: 3). While the Laclauan approach is often overlooked in quantitative research designs in favor of more recent stances, and partly because of the Marxist undertones which sound anachronistic (Stavrakakis, 2004), it is still influential within political philosophy and in studies on Latin America and Western Europe (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017).

A second approach to the conceptualization of populism is the one developed by economists Rudiger Dornbusch and Jeffrey Sachs during the 80s, during their studies on the first wave of populism. Dornbusch and Sachs conceptualize populism as a form of irresponsible economic policy, focused on massive state spending and on strong (and myopic) re-distributive efforts in order to maximize consensus (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2018). This short-term maximization, however, eventually leads to disrupt the economic structure, making the experience of the populist leader short-lived and open to strong backlash from the population (Weyland 2018).

While it has been abandoned by other social sciences - and, especially, after the second wave of Latin American populism whose leaders embraced strong neo-liberal economic policies - the so-called 'populism economy' is still popular in economics and in the media representation

of populism. A fitting example of such representation is given by Greek case, where the emergence of a populist vs. anti-populist cleavage has been argued by Stavrakakis & Katsambekis (2018). In their empirical research on both parties and media, they underline as the discursive representation around the IMF and the Troika recovery and bail-out plans for Greece were built around such cleavage, to the point where every critical stance against the plan was immediately considered and stigmatized as ‘populist’ and every favorable voice was instead framed as anti-populist.

Currently, there are three main approaches to populism: the political-strategical approach, developed by Kurt Weyland (2001; 2003; 2013; 2018); the ideational approach theorized by Cass Mudde (2004; 2018) and later developed in his works with C. R. Kaltwasser (2007; 2017); and, finally, the socio-cultural approach introduced by Pierre Ostiguy (2009; 2018). It should be noted that these approaches are not necessarily incompatible with each other and are oftentimes conflated, especially in empirical studies on populism. The political-strategical approach defines populism: “as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, institutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers.” (Weyland, 2001: 14). In this respect, the strategical approach focuses on what the “populist leader does, not on what she says” (Weyland, 2018: 75). At the basis of the strategical approach, there is a limitation in the ideational conceptualization. While both stances recognize the dichotomy between the elites and the people in the populist discourse, the ideational approach fails to take into consideration the collective action dilemmas that prevent the populist leaders to implement their vision in the long term (Weyland, 2018: 79). Hence, the need to underline the strategic and political element and the top-down approach which still holds in populist leaders and parties, opposed to the bottom-up one which seems to be suggested by the ideational approach.

As of today, probably the most widely-accepted and used (although sometimes criticized as inherently vague as in Katsambekis, 2020) definition of populism is the one provided by Mudde (2004: 543) and which has been later conceptualized as the “ideational approach”. The ideational approach conceptualize populism as a “thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”. In this respect, elitism is understood as populism’s mirror concept, which shares the Manichean view of society, but shifts the (moral) legitimacy to govern on the elites, rather than on the ‘amoral and amorphous’ people (Mudde, 2004; Akkerman et al., 2014). Quite the opposite, pluralism is configured as the contradictory concept of both populism and elitism, as it interprets society as composed by inherently different groups and individuals with varied (and often conflicting) views and ideas.

A further development to Weyland and Mudde’s more famous - and more accepted - approaches is given by Pierre Ostiguy (2018). His contribution is twofold: first, he suggests a conception that is ‘fundamentally relational’ and, second, it adds a socio-cultural dimension which has been ignored by previous conceptualization. In particular, he introduces the low-high dimension “the conceptually orthogonal, much-used dimension of left and right” (Ostiguy, 2018: 106) to understand populism. His definition of populism is that of “an antagonistic appropriation for political, mobilizational purposes of an ‘unpresentable Other’, itself historically created in the process of a specific ‘proper’ civilizational project” (Ostiguy, 2018: 107). The precise definition of both halves, the ‘proper’ and the ‘unpresentable Other’ is varied and can be embodied, from time to time, into different concepts: the ‘proper’ can be liberalism, political correctness, European integration, and so on. The Other can be variously conceptualized as different things, but in general can be understood as something that provokes some degree of embarrassment or shame into the ‘proper’ half (Ostiguy, 2018).

The populist political actor ‘flaunting’ the ‘Other’, claims “to be speaking in the name of a “repressed truth” (especially in Europe) or (more often in Latin America) of “previously excluded social sectors” or (in the US) the “silent majority” (Ostiguy, 2018: 106). The ‘Other’ is, thus, represented as either ignored or harmed by the official discourse and policies. In this sense, according Ostiguy, populism is a performative act. In this respect, Ostiguy is able to render a sociological and relational definition of populism, able to include among populism ranks seemingly paradoxical examples of populist leaders. Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, George Bush and later Donald Trump in the United States are three examples of billionaires low-right politicians if compared to their opponents, respectively Walter Veltroni and John Kerry and later Hillary Clinton, who ‘performed’ on the ‘proper’, high-left end of the spectrum⁴.

As mentioned above, another phenomenon that has recently been investigated within the literature on populism is the so-called techno-populism. The so-called ‘techno-populism’: “an anti-elite ideology that exploits competence to create the appearance of authenticity and proximity to ordinary people” (Buštková & Guasti, 2019:304). In this respect, leaders such as Emmanuel Macron, Silvio Berlusconi and, partly, Donald Trump, are techno-populist, by exploiting their own personal success and competence to present themselves as the fittest candidates to run their respective countries, opposed to the inefficient and incompetent political elite. Castaldo and Verzichelli (2020), for instance, investigate the Italian case as paradigmatic in this respect, analyzing the leadership style of several leaders who have used to varying

⁴ These three formulations are not mutually exclusive and offer both advantages and disadvantages. Ostiguy (2018) explicitly argues that his formulation can be considered a by-product of both Mudde’s and Weyland’s ones - still, he argues that while the former casts the net too broad, the latter casts it too narrow (Ostiguy 2018: 134). On the other hand, Taggart, who has generally accepted the ideational approach, has explicitly stated that, while interesting, Ostiguy’s formulation is fundamentally ideological (Taggart, 2018: 327).

degrees both technocratic and populist stances – from Berlusconi in the 90's to Giuseppe Conte in the last two years.

In the last twenty-five years, several Italian politicians have exploited their non-political expertise to gain and maintain consensus and the political class itself has frequently recurred to non-political, 'technocrats' to face various emergencies, from economic disaster (Cabinet Monti) to political stalemates (Cabinet Conte I). Finally, one of the most debated aspects of the recent rise of populism is its connection with the spreading usage of social media and the Internet per se, by the general public. Research has advanced diverse hypotheses: from the confirmation bias and polarization effects induced by either filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011) or echo-chambers (Benkler, 2016); to the progressive construction of a 'daily me' and the progressive customization of news and entertainment consumption for each individual (Sunstein, 2012); the uncontrolled circulation of misinformation, fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017) and spreading conspiracy theories (Bessi et al., 2015) on private platforms often incapable (or unwilling) to check the validity of the shared content. All of these different phenomena, linked to or caused by social media and the Internet, would have contributed to the changes in the economies and ecosystems of information and politics; to the extent that academics (see, for example, Gerbaudo, 2018) have suggested that not only social media represent the perfect ground for the populist seed to sprout, but that they would lead to a danger to liberal democracy itself.

Among the other reasons, this reciprocally reinforcing relation between populism and social media is often explained by the effects of news consumption on traditional or alternative media outlets and propensity to trust in politics and politicians. Several studies (for example, Norris, 2011; Ceron & Memoli, 2015) suggest that consumption of news on social media negatively affect the propensity to trust in political institutions and satisfaction with democratic systems. Moreover, different economic interests might incentive differently the news ecosystem.



Indeed, while before the advent of the Internet, traditional media outlets had the financial incentive to adopt the same position of the ‘median voter’ - in order to maximize their audience and revenues from both sales and advertisements - social media, entering an already saturated market, have the incentive to prioritize niche or extremist opinions. Finally, while still deemed controversial, the circulation of fake news is often associated with preference for anti-establishment and/or populist parties. In short, social media are often characterized as the ideal ecosystem for fueling anti-elitist sentiment, decreasing trust in democratic and political systems, and thus, actively fostering populist attitudes in public opinion.



Elites

The term ‘elites’ was first introduced during the 16th and 17th centuries and was commonly used to identify objects that were particularly excellent, and later morphed to include the most important members of society (Bottomore, 1993 [1964]). The word *elite* in the original French simply means “the chosen”⁵, leaving space for different interpretations, i.e., chosen by a divine entity, self-selected through skills or resources or elected. Maloy (2008) effectively summarizes the rationale behind the diverse elite theories in one fundamental concept: “a small group of people that have a disproportionately to their numbers large amount of power in society”. This basic concept is usually accompanied by one or both two corollaries: i. in modern societies, such an arrangement is inevitable and ii. it is also a *normatively desirable* outcome (Maloy, 2008).

Even though *elitism* has emerged in a vast and diverse forms in the history of thought - notably but not restricted to Plato’s argument for the government of philosophers in the *Republic* - scholars (see for example, Highley 2010; Volpe 2012) generally agree in identifying elite theory origins in the so-called ‘Italian school of Elitism’. Thus, in the works of Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923) and Robert Michels (1876–1936); as discussed below, sometimes Max Weber (1864–1920) is also considered as a founding father of classic theory of elites. The core of their, although different, arguments relies on the *inevitability* of elites’ power, in opposition to both pluralist and Marxist theorists, who are criticized as both inherently flawed and utopian (Dunleavy & O’Leary 1987; de Hollanda 2011; Khan 2012; Lòpez 2013).

Mosca conceives the ‘political classes’, (the way he refers to the tiny minority that are the elites), as superior in terms of intellect, resources and even morals with respect to the masses

⁵ From the latin *eligere*, to chose, to elect.

they are able to govern by virtue of their organizational ability (Highley 2010). Furthermore, he suggests that elite circle is composed of two ‘strata’: a *first stratum*, an inner, smaller, circle of power, whose ability to exercise leadership and rule would not be possible without the *second strata*, larger in number, that permeates all the leadership positions of a society (Delican 2000; Pakulski 2018). In Mosca’s formulation the two strata are not only descriptively typical of the government of countries, but also crucial for the functioning of any social organization. Elites should be recruited amongst the superior individuals of society and, should they be weak and fail to exercise leadership, society at large would face the threat of collapse (Delican 2000; Pakulski 2018).

Likewise, Pareto conceived modern societies as composed of *elite* and *non-elite* members; elites are further divided into *governing* and *non-governing* elites. Thus, he postulates the *elite law of circulation*, suggesting that history is the product of the alternation of different elites in power, as a result of their peaceful (assimilation) or violent (revolution) competition (Lòpez 2013), suggesting that “history is the graveyard of aristocracies” (Pareto, 1935: 1405). In a perfect society with a truly unrestricted possibility for social mobility, elites would be selected by means of their talent or superior ability; in the real world, however, elites are those who possess either force or persuasion. Thus, drawing from Machiavelli (Maxwell 2007), Pareto identified two main typologies of elites, foxes and lions: the former being cunning and manipulative, more open to change and adapt, the latter being more powerful and resourceful, but also more conservative (Delican 2000; Highley 2010).

Finally, Michels introduced the *iron law of oligarchies* (Lòpez 2013): societies and, in general, large organizations, are destined to ‘degenerate into bureaucracies governed by the few’ (Brym 2010: 21) by their very nature because of three main conditions: i. the increased number and complexity of *duties* to be performed which demands for specialized staff ii. the large and complex number of *issues* to be dealt with, limiting the ability to participate only to those with

the necessary knowledge or skill; iii. the large number of *members* of the organization impede them to interact with each other, allowing the ‘oligarchs’ to exploit the *divide et impera* motto, making this Caesaryst ineradicable (Brym 2010; Highley 2010). Thus, as societies and organizations grow larger and more heterogeneous, the need for individuals to control and organize efficiently becomes pressing; as resources flow in a few hands, power becomes more and more concentrated determining the inevitability of elites (Linz 2006; Highley 2010). Lastly, some scholars (Bottomore 1991; Putnam 1976; Pakulski 2008; Highley 2010) have suggested to recruit also Weber among the elite theorists’ ranks, by virtue of his concepts of power and dominations (Lòpez 2013). As highlighted by Pakulski (2010), Weber was as persuaded as Pareto that a small minority of people dominated all through society. In particular, he identified in the ability of the ruling class to be united their capacity to rule. In turn, unity depends on three requirements, i. the centralization of authority, ii. the common acceptance of shared norms and iii. an ‘informal cohesion’ that could only be provided by “the principle of small numbers” (Pakulski 2010: 19). Despite the many differences that characterize these four early formulations of elite theory, they all share the conviction that achieving a large measure of democracy was utopist at best and the most achievable result would be an elite-dominated democracy (Highley 2010).

A second phase of the study on elite is the “critical elite theory of Mills, Hunter, Burnham, and Lasswell, popularized in postwar US sociology” (Woods 1998: 2). During this second phase the antidemocratic and peculiar elitist instances of the classical theory were generally rejected - to the point that most scholars disregarded the definition of ‘elite theory’ in favor of the more neutral *realism* (Woods 1998; Hoffmann-Lange 2008; Lòpez 2013). Particularly influential for this second phase of elites’ studies are Mills’ *The Power Elite* (1956) and Dahl’s *Who Governs?* (1961).

Mills (1956) focuses on US society, arguing for the existence of a ‘power elite’ deep-seated within politics, military and business worlds, able to influence the outcomes in society way further than the fragile democratic institutions. While these positions of power may seem separate at first glance, the individual actors of these elites form a ‘dense network’ through the intertwining of family, friendship and work relationships (Hoffmann-Lange, 2018). Furthermore, the fortunes and relative positions of power of military, politics and corporate men change overtime with some gaining or losing influence depending on the historical moment.

For example:

“Of the three types of circle that compose the power elite today, it is the military that has benefited the most in its enhanced power, although the corporate circles have also become more explicitly entrenched in the more public decision-making circles” (Mills 2000: 271 [1956])

Dahl (1961), on the other hand, argues against such view, suggesting instead that American society is indeed a pluralist one where power is actually distributed among different groups and that citizens are able to influence decision-making, at least indirectly (Noren & Jason 2017). Taking his cue from the city of New Haven, Connecticut, “typical of other cities in the United States” (Dahl 1961: 9), Dahl explores power dynamics in policy-making. In particular, Dahl focuses on three broad areas: nominations, urbanistic and public education, demonstrating that different individuals yielded power in each area, and that only the mayor – checked by those who voted for him - was able to influence all three (Noren & Jason 2017).

In the last forty years, and in particular thanks to the contributions of Highley and Burton (1987; 2006; 2018) elite theory and studies developed a new paradigm (Lòpez 2013). First, the concepts of elites and non-elites have been better defined and operationalized.

A generally-accepted definition of elites in contemporary sociology and political science is: *individuals or groups with regular and substantial influence on important decisions within organization or society* (Higley 2006). Such definition has two main advantages: first, it is sufficiently ‘neutral’ to have a descriptive, rather than normatively-charged stance; second, it’s broad enough to be applicable to different societies, regime typologies and organizations. Contemporary scholars have also developed and refined the contemporary principles of elite theories: i. power is generally concentrated into a small network of actors who occupy the most pivotal role in most modern societies; ii. the relation of power between elites and non-elites is a top-down one; iii. the characteristics and relations of elite actors exert a significant influence on the social and political outcomes in societies - including the type of regime (Pakulski, 2018). Finally, the discipline has progressively evolved from studying *who* elites are (investigating the biographical background of those who hold power positions) to studying what elites *do* (Higley, 2016; Woods, 1998).

More specifically, there are two main conceptions of elite theory: i. neo-elitism and ii. Demo-elitism. The former, closer to the work of Mosca and Pareto, focuses on the necessity for ‘elites autonomy’ and the inevitability of power concentration, adopting a functional view of the democratic rule (Higley, 2018; Korosenyi, 2018). Neo-elitists, or “realists”, deem ‘authentic democracy’ - intended as the rule or deliberation of the people - as at best a mere ‘ideal type’ claiming a procedural interpretation of democracy, as a competition for power or policy between otherwise self-selected and self-sustaining elites (Higley 2018; Korosenyi 2018).

Demo-elitism, building on Schumpeter’s and Weber’s perspectives, stresses more the importance of the reciprocal relation between elites and non-elites, and individuates in elites “the guardian of democratic institutions and as competitive ‘polyarchies of merit’” (Pakulski 2018: 13). They stress the importance of competition for power between different elites, considered crucial for the safe-guarding of the democratic system itself (Volpe, 2019), and

especially in comparison a less tolerant ‘mass’ (Edinger, 2010). Among the others, Peffley & Rohrschneider (2009) leverage on political tolerance research to challenge the most controversial aspects of democratic elitism: namely the assumptions that not only elites agree on and are committed to democratic values and institutions, but that elites are, in a sense, *more* democratic than the non-elites, making them the real gatekeepers of democratic institutions. In this respect, they do not reject democratic institutions nor see citizens’ interests as opposed or irreconcilable with elites’ ones (Korosenyi 2018). They combine Schumpeter’s conception of democracy as a method of elites’ selection with a top-down view of political representation where elites adjust their actions based on expectations on citizens’ reactions, while maintaining a quite great deal of autonomy (Pakulski & Korosenyi 2012; Korosenyi 2018). In this respect, they conceptualize elections as a form of self-imposed checks by elites.

To a certain degree, contemporary conceptualizations also vary according to the sub-field of interest. In sociology, for instance, Howard & Kenway (2015) identify six “qualifiers” around which current conceptualizations of elites are built, underlying the importance of the ties and their relational nature (Thurlow & Jaworski, 2017). Each of this qualifier can be related to specific demographic or socioeconomic characteristics, serving as the distinction between belonging or not to a certain elite; for example, if we take the qualifier ‘space’, we can distinguish between local, national or global elite. By contrast, if we take the qualifier ‘visibility’, we will distinguish between ‘visible’, ‘hidden’, or ‘shadow’ elites, which may or may not overlap with the elites identified through other qualifiers. Thus, the identification of relevant elites and the definition of who belongs to them is, to some extent, always dependent on the research question and on the adopted perspective.

Conversely, in political science, as suggested by Hoffman-Lange (2018: see below) there is a general consensus about the key sectors to identify members of the elites, each with diverse relevance depending on society and on the time. Broadly speaking, at the basis of the

identification and study of the elites lies the assumption that there is a functional differentiation among different elites' groups. For instance, Best (2018) suggests that differentiation and specialization of elites are linked to increasingly complex societies, to increased efficiency and to the organization of power. Yet, at the same time, specialization can lead to barriers *between* elites, conflicts and, ultimately, to pose a threat to the very existence of a (mostly national) elite system (Best 2018: 332). Increasing specialization, together with other phenomena, i.e. globalization and the development of communication technologies and infrastructures, has led to a more supranational and global dimension to the composition of elites (Rotkoph 2008; Verzichelli 2012; Newell 2015; Kauppi and Madsen 2018). The increasing relevance and influence of supranational elites has several consequences both on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of elites and on their relations to non-elite members of society. Indeed, members of the global elites - sometimes referred to as “the Davos men”, in reference to the Suisse city that traditionally hosts the World Economic Forum - are increasingly characterized by i. international education and careers, ii. Being part of an international professional network. Furthermore, the relation between what we can call the ‘national’ and the ‘supranational’ elite is acquiring increasing importance in determining policy-making and international relations. In this respect, the Europe Union is paradigmatic (even though, Best et al. (2012) still recognize the pivotal role of national elites in building European, supranational, institutions).

Finally, scholars have studied the characteristics of elites’ members, despite the objective difficulties in selecting those actors. Indeed, regardless of the discipline and of the sub-field, elite studies are always characterized by a certain degree of arbitrariness in setting the line between those who are part of the elites and those who are not. It is, for example, quite reasonable to count the President of the United States as part of both the global and US national elites, but the task becomes significantly harder the more the horizon of action expands. For

instance, we can reasonably argue for the inclusion of the Head of Cabinet and the Secretary of State among the elites' ranks; we can make a convincing argument to include most of their staff and high-ranking functionaries as well. However, we will quickly reach an administrative level at which setting the demarcation line between elite and non-elite actors will never completely be bereft of arbitrariness.

Still, literature has also greatly investigated the typical social, demographic and even psychological characteristics of elite actors and the changes that have been observed in such traits - even though the debate is far from been concluded. Caprara and Silvester (2018) make a review of the literature concerning the psychological characteristics of elites, focusing on studies on i. personality trait(s), ii. intelligence, iii. motivation and iv. self-belief. Concerning the first type of studies, Caprara and Silvester (2018) divide them in those that focus on a single personality trait, in particular Machiavellianism (Deluga 2001)⁶ and those who deal with multi-trait research questions. Multi-traits studies instead focus on the whole personality, often relying on the well-established taxonomy of the "the Big Five": extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. For example, Hanania (2017) finds that, compared to the general population, American legislators are more extraverted, agreeable, emotionally stable and conscientious, but they are less open to experience. Furthermore, Democrats scored higher than Conservatives on neuroticism, intellect and agreeableness. Second, research has also widely investigated the connection between cognitive ability and performance in office; Silvester and Dykes (2007) detect a significant relationship between critical thinking, the number of votes and also the percentage of swing votes. Third, *motivation* (an umbrella-term including needs, values and motives) has also been explored as a defining psychological characteristic of elite actors (Caprara and Silvester 2018). Finally, beliefs about

⁶ In a very well-known study, Deluga (2001) finds support for the link between Machiavellism positively correlates with charismatic leadership and favourable judgement.

self and the construction of one's personality have been investigated in their connection to political efficacy: it is after all unlikely that someone will be successful or even willing to compete for office, unless they are reasonably confident in their ability to collect, mobilize and maintain consensus (Caprara and Silvester 2018). Indeed, confirming several theoretical expectations and preliminary findings, Caprara and Vecchione (2009) have detected higher self-esteem among Italian politicians with respect to the general population.

Concerning the socio-economic background of elite members, Higley (2018) maintains as true the long-term axiom of elites coming from a privileged social class and background. However, two streams of literature suggest that there might be some changes in the composition of the elites and their social background. First, as developed within sociology, signs of elite distinctions have been evolving and changing overtime: elite actors have stopped trying to conceal their elite distinction status and are instead trying to convert it in political power, by chasing mediatization, fame and celebrity status increasing the mutual dependency of political elites and the so-called 'pop culture' (Daloz 2010). Second, there is a growing literature exploring the long-term effects of the personal background and recruiting of political actors (Best and Cotta 2000; Cotta and Best 2007), suggesting that parliamentary elites are increasingly relying on public image to get elected, usually funding their PRs thanks to external actors.

According to Higley (2018), such theories call for a double set of questions about elites and, ultimately, the very destiny of a nation: if these two effects radically change the relation between popular culture, media and political elites. On the one hand, one might ask whether the growing importance of popular culture could lead to politicians ending up being celebrated despite any actual effort or achievement. On the other, whether progressively incompetent parliamentary members, selected mostly because of their media image, can explain the declining trust towards parliamentary elites, increasing the potential success of other elites'

members in the political arena. Elites' socio-economic background has also been explored in connection to policymaking. Just to quote an example among the many, Hayo & Neumeier (2016) find robust evidence that politicians with lower socio-economic status are more likely to prefer policies that increase debt-GDP ratio with respect to those with a higher status.

Finally, it should be noted that both theoretical conceptualizations and empirical studies of elites seem to suggest i. the co-existence of different elites with different characteristics determining their belonging to a certain elite or not; ii. The relational nature of elite network, both with respect to the non-elites (as elites are relationally defined as the opposite of non-elites); and within elites' network, with some tendency of integration or coordination through some form of interaction among them (Kadushin, 1995).

In the following chapters, I will first (in the first chapter) compile the initial dataset with the socio-demographic information on the members of the elites, by means of positional approach, building on and updating Carlo Carboni's work on Italian elites. In the second chapter, we will explore the elites' online behavior both in terms of adoption and activation on social media and in terms of the likelihood of forming ties within and between them. Finally, in the third chapter we test the technocratic attitudes of elites' actors, exploring the efficacy of adopting such rhetoric both in terms of engagement and positive engagement.

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I. Elites in Italy: La classe dirigente? The composition of Contemporary Elites

Introduction

In this first article, I revise the literature review concerning Elites in Italy. In particular, we discuss Carlo Carboni's studies on the evolution of elites since the 90's. Following and building on his approach, by means of positional approach, I collect extensive data on the composition of contemporary elites and we compile a rich dataset with 5245 members of the elites. Positional approach consists in a nutshell identifying the crucial positions within a society for all elites' category – i.e. Upper House of Parliament; National TV Broadcaster – and then identify the most important actors in each institution or organization – i.e. President of the Senate; Editor-in-Chief. The dataset was compiled starting and integrating from vanity publishing book, Who's Who in Italy 2013, the same publication that previous researchers had relied on to map and study Italian elites' members. As discussed, our final dataset is composed of 5245 actors, compared to the 8.000 (Carboni, 2008; Newell, 2015) and 5.500 (Carboni 2007) members estimated in previous research. I consider my final selection to be acceptable, although conservative. After briefly introducing and discussing the relevant literature I present the dataset, investigating the composition of Italian elites in 2020. While in general previous findings are confirmed, I find some differences in the composition of elites; in particular, women are more represented than in 2004, especially in the political elite – while they still represent a minority in other sectors, such as Armed Forces, Religious and Business Elites. Next, I also find that the political elite is the most heterogeneous in terms of gender and education and 'more similar' to the general population.

Theoretical Review

James Newell (2015) dedicates the first chapter of the Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics to “La Classe Dirigente”, the ruling class. While he first distinguishes between the two concepts (as he intends ‘elites’ in a strictly Paretian sense), he describes ‘la classe dirigente’ as a peculiar Italian specification of a broader conceptualization of elites. He identifies three main characteristics that provide membership to the ruling class: first, access to resources and privileges that are exclusionary – tangibles, such as wealth, or intangibles, such as academic and professional qualifications.

Second, members of the ruling class have access to this exclusionary means in such a great deal that they have public reputation (“actual or potential”, Newell 2015: 22): they are known in the media, talked on and given platform by the main national broadcasters. Third, members of the ruling class are “expected to conduct themselves in ways that are conducive to the maintenance of order even when that are advocating changes” (Newell 2015: 23). Thus, the Italian ruling class is not only characterized by actual power given by a specific standing or position, but also by the general expectation of maintaining the mediation and integration of the various segments and interests of society. Thus, the efforts to continuously preserve its ranks and the status quo leads actors of the ‘classe dirigente’ to balance other elites’ actors’ relative weakness or strength. Newell proposes the experiences of Mario Monti as a paradigmatic examples of such disposition, when, as an academic, he accepted the responsibility of, first, being appointed as a senator (“senatore a vita”) and, second, as prime minister, amidst the political and economic crisis.

Another striking characteristic of Italian elites is their inability, especially on part of the political elite, to inspire trust in citizens. While Newell writes in 2015, relying on 2013 data, trust in institutions in Italy does not seem to be particularly improved (See table 1 below).

Table 1: Trust in Institutions in Italy. Own elaboration on ESS 2018 data.

| Trust | N | Median | Mean | se(mean) |
|-------------------|------|--------|-----------|----------|
| Political parties | 2657 | 3 | 2.927.362 | .0450513 |
| Parliament | 2656 | 5 | 4.250.753 | .0489912 |
| Legal System | 2671 | 6 | 5.363.534 | .0472149 |
| Police | 2714 | 7 | 6.64.591 | .041319 |
| Politicians | 2666 | 3 | 3.043.136 | .0452505 |
| EU Parliament | 2579 | 5 | 4.347.034 | .0511579 |
| United Nations | 2471 | 5 | 4.854.715 | .0524819 |

Especially elective elites' actors (parties and politicians) are generally untrusted by the public opinion. The EU parliament and the United Nations are generally more trusted, as well as the legal system and the police. According to Newell, the principal reason for such low level of trust is the diffused lack of a sense of 'probity', as most of its members behave as 'amoral individualists' (Carboni, 2015:8). The striking comparison is with British *classe dirigente*, which is much more painfully aware of the necessity of 'probity', and actively acts to exclude and chastise any of its members that misbehaves⁷. Newell individuates in the post-Fascism vacuum of power the origin of this lack of probity, when parties were able to infiltrate every mechanism of power. However, because of the 'polarized pluralist' system parties had to heavily rely on clientele to cultivate the voters' base. Thus, they were vastly unable to promote a coherent policymaking, in turn pushing entrepreneurs and the financial elite to pursue personal relationship with local and national political leaders, creating the perfect environment for corruption to flourish. Other sources of power, the judicial system and the media, were also unable to emancipate themselves from the political power enough to accrue credibility and the trust of their fellow citizens.

⁷ The recent scandals concerning both the Royal Family and Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, suggests a change within the ranks of British elites as well.

Given such premises, and especially after two decades of crisis and rapid technological transformation that greatly affected the political system, centers of power, and Italian society in general, the following questions arise: Who are the members of the Italian elites? How many are they? What are their main socio-demographic characteristics? Did they change or evolve overtime?

There are several, all “correct”, ways of answering these questions, according to the chosen level of analysis and from the theoretical and operational definition of elites. The composition of the elites in Italy is discussed both by Carboni and Newell. They both rely on the vanity press publication *Who is Who in Italy* (1959-), that, employing positional approach, provides biographical information about the most important actors of Italian society. Despite its falls and evident limitations (see methods section for a detailed discussion), *Who is Who in Italy* has the advantage of comparing the composition of elites across time. Carlo Carboni (2007, 2008), in his extensive research and elaboration of *Who is Who in Italy* (1990, 1998, 2004) data, suggests imagining Italian elites as four concentric circles:

The inner circle is formed by the “number-ones” of all fields (economic, political, academic, religious etc.) and consists of around 2.000 individuals; consistently with Newell’s suggestion they are also characterized by being particularly known and ultra-mediatised. The second circle includes around 6.000 people and consists of those actors who are able to make decisions and detain the power to make or break agreements across elites. Carboni (2008) suggests that the inner circle consists of ‘lions’, those who occupy the very central power positions of society, and the larger one of ‘foxes’ in the Paretian sense, or those who control the resources of the country. The third circle consists of 17.000 to 50.000 individuals (depending on how stringently the requirements are interpreted): these actors represent the territorial and often corporative interests and administration at the local level.

The final, more inclusive, circle corresponds to the “bourgeois class” (Carboni, 2008:7-8): an estimated two and half million people and their families. This last circle is made of usually particularly successful professionals who do not exert power at the national level.

Carboni (2007) also offers a detailed insight on the general characteristics of Italian “power elites” and its changes from 1990 to 2005. For the most part, elites are in their 60s - and getting older since 1990; male - up to the 88% of the sample in 2004; and generally residing in Rome (more than one third) and Milan. Interestingly, Carboni and his research team find a correlation between provinces of residence - and also of birth- of elites and the distribution of wealth in Italy.

This reinforces the assumption that the distribution of power and resources has been traditionally exercised through clienteles and patronage (Newell, 2015:10). In 2004, the most diffused profession among elites is university professor (21%); followed by national and European elective careers (15%); private sector manager (9,5%); actor (4,4%); entrepreneur (4%); diplomat (4%); printed-press journalist (3,8%); clerical (3,6%); writer and/or poet (3,3%); institutional and bureaucratic career (3,1%). With respect to 1998, Carboni also finds that, in 2004, there has been a slight increase in the representation of women (from 9% to 12%). For what concerns education, in all the years analyzed, the portion of graduates in elites' circles was significantly higher compared to the total population and steadily increasing. Indeed, in 1990 around two thirds (66%) of the elite members had at least one university degree, a share which increased to the 87% in 2004.

On the other hand, the relative composition of the type of degrees among the elites changed overtime. Law is the most common degree path (from 15% in 1990 to 21,5% in 2004), followed by humanities (around 15% of the total). Decreasing from 1990 is the share of elites holding an economic or scientific degree (25% in 2004, compared to the one third of 1990). Carboni

identifies, in this specialization on law and humanities, one of the reasons why Italian elites are able to retain consensus but are lacking in terms of technical expertise. Newell (2015), building on the work conducted by Carboni and utilizing data from Eurispes research centre (2012), comes to similar conclusions and indicates around 8.000 actors with very similar background, social and economic characteristics - older, generally educated, males residing for the most part in Rome or Milan. Indeed, in 2012, the share of women in the elites has further increased to 15% of the total; while the share of graduates has decreased with respect to 2004, stopping at 83% of the total. Furthermore, the most represented field is politics (24,6%, including public administration and bureaucrats); followed by the cultural field (22,4% - including university professors and academics); and, finally, economics and business (19,2%). The same partition is reflected in the professional path of elites.

Hypotheses

The first and most important objective of this chapter is to identify the crucial actors within the Italian public life. Therefore, the analysis conducted in this chapter is predominantly exploratory and its purpose in its essence is descriptive and instrumental in view of the remaining part of the research (chapters 2 and 3).

Given this premise, it is possible to test some hypotheses about the composition of the elites and the expected changes with respect to previous research and analyses. With respect to 2012, and especially to 2004, we can reasonably expect some changes in the composition of the elites. Indeed, political elites in particular have seen a shift in terms of demographics. The parliament elected in 2018 is both the one with the most women (35%) and the 'youngest' one ever, with an average age of 44 years at the Lower Chamber and 52 years at the Senate - compared to 2006's respectively 51 and 57 years of average age of MPs. Members of the media elite, and especially the youngest one, can be also expected to have followed a different *cursus honorum*

compared to their precursors, given the disruptive technological changes in the entertainment and news industries. The high social economic status of elites' members, whether in terms of income, wealth, social status or education, with respect to the general population, can be taken as an axiom of elites' study. In the next section, I will present two main hypothesis and one, more general, research question.



Thus:

Hp1. Given the tendencies identified by Carboni and Newell, we expect 2020 elites' composition to confirm previous trends in terms of representation. In particular, we expect a higher share of women within the ranks of elite actors, both because of the introduction of laws to ensure a more equal representation in public life and in the private sector and because of the slow but steady reduction of sex discrimination in society⁸. Based on the same line of thought, we expect elite members to be more educated than elites identified in previous research, mirroring the higher level of education of society at large.

Hp2. We expect the political elite to be more diversified and diverse with respect to the other elites in terms of age, level of education, institution of education, occupation and general socio-economic condition. Previous research (see for example Hayward 1996; Salvati 2009; Fabbrini 2010) has for example documented the peculiarity of the Italian system compared to other Western European countries, where the absence of a more or less established system of selecting political elites through 'grande école' makes the case for a more heterogeneous political class. At the same time, economic crises and social difficulties have promoted a fast political turnover of parliamentary and governing elites that has simply not been possible in other sector of societies.

Hp3 (Exploratory). Carboni individuates in the predominance of law and humanities' degrees within the political elites their ability to retain consensus but also the lack of technical expertise to govern successfully. Is this still the case? Are elites' actors predominantly pursuing law and humanities subjects instead of technical ones?

⁸ Global Gender Gap Report, available at World Economic Forum: <https://www.weforum.org/reports>

Data & Methods

For what concerns the mapping of elites there are several and consolidated options available. In the Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites (2018), Hoffmann-Lange discusses the most reliable methods of identifying elites. All three methods present both advantages and limitations (see table 2 below for further details), some general and some specific to a research design based on social media data. Of all three, positional method is the most apt for our proposed research design. First, it is the only method that is indicated to study elites at the national level. Second, Carboni's and Newell's previous research rely on the same approach (they both consult the data originally collected by *Who is Who in Italy* to make their analyses who in turn relies on positional approach for elite identification). Third, positional method allows researchers to select elite members from different segments of society and thus to assess not only the differences between elite and non-elite members, but also between different elites. Conversely, reputational method is at high risk of incurring into a circular argument, which would be further aggravated by the subsequent analysis on social media data and heavily relies on the availability and intentions of the initial sample of elite members to assist with the first step of research. Likewise, decisional method for selection is more apt at identifying elites able to directly influence decision-making, thus, potentially excluding those elites that are within most immediate focus of our research (i.e. academics; media elites) and that were considered in Carboni's and Newell's research.

Table 2: Comparison of Different Methods of Elite Identification

| Methods of Elite Members Identification | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| | Description | Main Advantages | Main Disadvantages |
| Decisional Approach | <p>Decisional approach considers elite those members who participate actively to the decision making process of important policies. It is based on the distinction between top leaders (those who are directly involved in the decision) and "sub"-leaders. It follows several steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identify which policy is deemed "important" for the scope of the research. Identify those members who actively participate to the decision making process, thus excluding positional elites who are not directly involved. Alternatively, researchers can rely on snowballing sampling, interviewing the members already identified in the first step. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> It allows to take into account non-individual elites, but organizations or corporations, as decision makers and lobbyists. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Decisional approach is very ill-suited for national application, as decisions at the central level are substantially complex and difficult to be applied. Decisional approach only considers those policies that reach the decision-making status and not those who don't. Thus, there is the risk of excluding those influential actors that are able to kill, rather than pass, policies. |
| Positional Approach | <p>It assumes that the distribution of power is pluralistic and its exercise is located in different strata of the population. Its application consists of three main steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Decide on an estimated number of elite members to identify. Identify the sectors that are to be investigated. Identify the most relevant positions within these sectors. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Positional Approach is a sound way to investigate elites and their characteristics, backgrounds and behaviour. It allows to identify historical elites, making a longitudinal approach more feasible compared to the other approaches. It offers the possibility to compare elite members' characteristics with those of non-elite members of society | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Positional Approach does not provide any indication on the vertical and horizontal delimitation of the selection. Both the sample size and the selection of the sectors have to rely on previous research. It faces the risk of overestimating the dispersion of power, and, at the same time, underestimating the centralized concentration of power. It overlooks forms of power and resources that are not granted by the position (i.e. celebrity status). |
| Reputational Approach | <p>Reputational approach relies on the opinion of experts to identify the most important members of society. It takes several steps based on a snowballing approach:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Select influential members within one or more sectors, relying on positional approach. Interview these starting actors, asking them who they would consider the most important members of society. Identify those names that are the most recurrent as the top influential leaders of society. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> In combination with either (or both) positional and decisional approaches it completes the research effort of both methods. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Reputational approach is only applicable to communities where the number of political influential is limited, or it faces the risk of underestimating the number of elite members. Reputational approach requires the starting opinion of experts from a vast number of policy making sectors |

I, thus, chose to rely on positional approach to identify elite members in the Italian society. The first step consists of selecting the desired sample size of the final sample to be identified. As I organize the present work in close relation to Carboni's previous research, I set the first sample to consist between 5.500 (Carboni 2007) to 8.000 (Carboni 2008; Newell 2015) elite members – consistent with the fact that this number is estimated to be around 5000 members in other, similar, countries (Burklin, W., & Rebenstorf, 1997; Dye, 2014). As discussed in further detail below, my final sample consists of 5245 members, thus closer to the more conservative estimations.

The second step is to identify the most relevant sectors on which to rely to identify the members of elites. Hoffmann-Lange (2018:81) identifies seven positions generally investigated by political scientists to identify elites through the positional approach and that are widely accepted as the most relevant ones by scholars:

- Politics: those members that have authority granted by rule of law of taking binding decisions
- Public Administration: those members that contribute to the implementation of legislation and the functioning of the state apparatus.
- Armed Forces: those members that are tasked with the defense of the country from domestic and external threats.
- Private Businesses: those who are part of the private productive system.
- Mass Media: production and dissemination of news.
- Academia and Education: members that are tasked with the production and distribution of knowledge.
- Voluntary associations: including labor unions.

As the data were present in the original analyses carried out by Carboni (2007, 2008) I also included two categories that are often taken into consideration in the classification of elites within political science: influential members of cultural institutions and religious movements or churches.

More in detail, I relied on a mixture of the methods adopted by Carboni - relying on the Who's Who data – and on a further 'round' of positional approach as described in Hoffmann-Lange (2018). The rationale relies on a number of reasons: first, following only Carboni provides the double advantage of longitudinal comparison over more than thirty years (but even dating back to 1959) and opens the possibility for future comparative studies (as the publication of Who's Who series is available for many countries). At the same time, however, the most-recent available copy of the Who's Who in Italy dates back to 2013 (with the fieldwork conducted in 2012), urging for a re-evaluation of all the data and biographical information provided in the book. Second, despite the flexibility of the instrument and the fact that the inclusion of some crucial actors in the counting of the elites is not only reasonable but also obvious, Who's Who is what has been deemed a 'vanity publication' which makes the accuracy of the selection of the more fringe names debatable.

Thus, the data were collected as follows:

- i) A first manual collection of all the names and biographical information contained in the Who's Who in Italy 2013.
- ii) The exclusion of elite athletes and so-called 'influencers' from the dataset which are generally not included in analysis of elites in political science and would be at odds with both the definition of elites I adopt and the chosen method of selection.
- iii) A new round of checks of all the crucial sectors deemed crucial to identifying all those actors that may have been excluded from the original data collection for a

number of reasons. Namely, those who declined to participate in the original data-collection promoted by *Who's Who*; actors who came to occupy power positions *after* the publication of book we relied on.

- iv.) A check on all the names and relative information entered in the database; first, in terms of the actual position of each person - i.e. whether they still hold the position indicated in the book or if it had changed. This step was conducted especially in relation to the relative elite the actor belongs to; from manager to politicians or from academic to civil servant and so on. Second, in terms of life-cycle; if an elite member died, was imprisoned, become irrelevant or simply retired from the public scene her name was taken out from the dataset. Third, in terms of veracity of the information provided (for example, around 2.5% of the actors in the dataset reported verifiable false information on their studies or about having a degree or not). Fourth, when the book did not provide the information deemed important for the research, we relied again on external datasets to find the information⁹.

As follows, we provide a (partial) list of all the additional dataset used to investigate other information and complete our final dataset.

⁹ Below, there is a complete lists of all the external datasets that were used to check such data. It should be noted that given the public persona of most of the actors and the information available in the book (i.e. date, place of birth) retrieving and/or correcting the data was time-consuming but relatively easy to do.

Table 3: Additional Sources to Identify Elite Members

| | Source |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <i>Politics</i> ¹⁰ | Senate of the Republic website. Lower Chamber ‘Camera’ of the Republic website. Dataset with the names of mayors of major cities, governors of regions, members of the European Parliament Major parties’ websites to identify organigrams. |
| <i>Public Administration</i> | All the ministries websites and relevant main institutions to identify/verify the names of bureaucrats. |
| <i>Corporate business elites</i> | Bank of Italy ‘Bankitalia’ website. Websites and organigrams of the 30 more important businesses/non-financial institutions in Italy (in terms of revenues). Websites and organigrams of the 30 biggest banks or other financial institutions operating in Italy. |
| <i>Academic elites</i> | ‘Accademia dei Lincei’ website and related biographies of all members. Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane, dataset and websites |
| <i>Military and Armed Force</i> | Websites of Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior. The website and organigram of all the ‘official’ military and police organizations. |
| <i>Media elites</i> | Websites and organigrams of the Principal private and public TVs. Websites and organigrams of the printed press or online publications with the higher circulation (first 30). |
| <i>Voluntary elites</i> | Websites and organigrams of the most relevant ONGs operating in Italy. |
| <i>Religious elites</i> | Vatican City datasets about highest ranking ministers operating in Italy, as well as the ministers operating in the Santa Sede. Osservatorio sul Pluralismo Religioso. As the original book contained only references to Catholic religion, the most important actors in other major religions practiced in Italy (Non Catholic Christianity, Islam, Hebraism) were identified and data about them collected. |

¹⁰ For the first part of the analysis, the following two categories (politics and public administration) were merged to make the comparison with Carboni (2007, 2008) data.

Finally, for each of the names inserted in the dataset, we collected and verified the following data (common to all the diverse elites): date of birth, place of birth, level of education, subject¹¹ of education/specialization (only for high school or higher education), the institution where the actor received the degree (only for tertiary education)¹², gender, occupation, place of residence. It should be noted that current laws were taken into consideration in order to classify various diploma and degrees; for example, an actor with a diploma from a *Conservatorio* would be considered a University's graduate. Additional information included regarded whether the actor was retired, deceased, in prison or had otherwise left the public scene – as specified above, those actors were then removed from the analysis. Furthermore, for each typology of elites different information were collected:

- *Political elite*: party, group and role (i.e. prime minister; member of the Lower Chamber etc.).
- *Media elite*: the name main of the media the actor works for. The role (i.e. director, editor-in-chief, etc.). Afterwards the information was completed by inferring the type of media (i.e. printed press, radio, TV).
- *Academic elite*: the role the actor has within the academia; for which institution she works; whether she is or not a member of the professional world and, in case, in which role, i.e. a full-professor in law who also practices as a lawyer privately.

¹¹ To simplify the data collection, in case the actor was educated in more than one subject, I only considered the subject where she received her highest level of qualification (i.e. the subject of a Master's Degree instead of Bachelor's would be considered); when the degrees were equivalent, the subject she more recently specialized on was indicated.

¹² To simplify the data collection, in case the actor was educated in more than one institution, I only considered the institution where she received her highest level of qualification (i.e. the subject of a Master's Degree instead of Bachelor's would be considered); when the degrees were equivalent, the subject she more recently specialized on was indicated.

- *(Private) Business elites*: the role she occupies (entrepreneur, CEO, CFO); the name of the institution she works for and/or she owns; at which level the business operates (industrial, company, bank); the field in which the company operates (i.e. pharmaceutical, electronics, etc.).
- *Public Administration*: the role of the actor and the institution the actor works for (i.e. President, INPS).
- *Armed forces*: (i.e. General, Army; Chief of Staff, Police, etc.).
- *Voluntary organizations*: only the role within the organization was documented and no other information was collected.

After the collection was completed, the dataset was completely anonymized by assigning a unique random numeric identifier to each actor.

Table 4: Overview of the Codified Variables (only the variables common to all the elites' types)

| Variable Name | Variable Description | Variable Type | Additional Information |
|---|--|----------------------|--|
| ID | A random number assigned to every member in the dataset | Numeric | Calculated ex-post |
| <i>Demographics</i> | | | |
| Gender | Gender | Categorical | |
| Date of Birth | Date of Birth | Numeric | Variable Age was then generated from Date of Birth |
| Place of Birth | Place of Birth | Categorical - String | |
| Place of Residence | Place of Residence | Categorical - String | |
| <i>Social Characteristics</i> | | | |
| Level of Education | Highest level of Education Achieved | Categorical | |
| Subject of Education | Subject studied (i.e. Economics) | Categorical - String | If more than a subject was studied the most recent or the one studied at the highest level was selected |
| Name of Institution where highest level of education was received | Name of the Institution where the Actor Studied (University only) | Categorical - String | If the actor studied in more than one institution the most recent or the one studied at the highest level was selected |
| Experience Abroad | Whether the actor has at least one experience (work or study) abroad | Categorical | |
| <i>Elite Characteristics</i> | | | |
| Elite Type | Elite Type (i.e. Academia) | Categorical | |
| Position Occupied | Official Position Occupied (i.e. President of the Lower House) | | |
| Name of Institution of place of work | Name of the Institution where the Actor works (i.e. Corriere della Sera) | | |

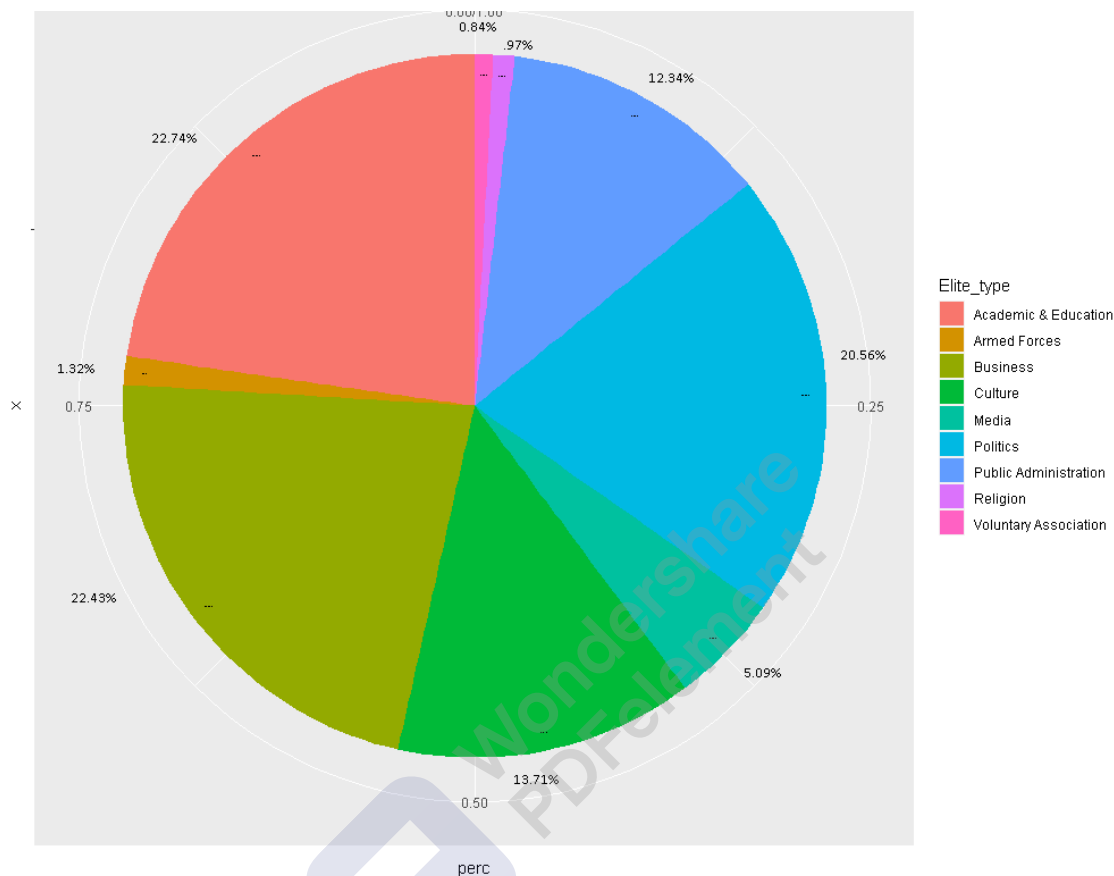
Elites in Italy in the 2020s

After all the operations of transformation and substitution described above, a total 6.124 names were considered to be reasonably close to the definition of elites, i.e. “of being able to influence continually and substantially” public life. The second round of checks further reduced the size of the dataset to 5245 actors. This is in part due to the exclusion of certain categories (i.e. ‘influencers’ and names for whom no additional information were reasonably retrievable outside the publication, for a 5% of the initial selections) and in part due to the exclusion of deceased (7% of the initial selection); retired or otherwise not anymore part of the influential elites (5.6% of the initial selection). It should be noted that for all the selection process a *conservative* approach was adopted (i.e. excluding rather than including actors when in doubt), in order to ensure the collection of truly influential actors in the Italian panorama.

Such a preliminary result suggests that my final dataset captures the inner, most powerful circle of 2.000 actors identified in Carboni’s analysis. However, I likely underestimate the ranks of the ‘broader’ circle of collaborators, executives and otherwise influential but not all-powerful 6.000 additional actors, ‘the foxes’, that he postulates in his analysis in 2008. As discussed, considering that other sources (including Carboni 2007) estimate the number of elites in Italy or in comparable countries to be around 5.000-5.500, I suggest that my selection is acceptable, albeit conservative. Confronting mine with Carboni’s composition of elites I find a general confirmation of the trends highlighted by Carboni; the importance of the cultural and Academic elite (which in figure 1 are presented as separate) still stands (35% compared to the 43% of 2004). I also observe a comparable relevance of the political and public administration elites that shifts from the 28% to the 32%, confirming the slow but steady growth of such actors. Businesses appear to be more relevant (from 6% to 22%), but it should be underlined that part of the elite members that in Carboni’s analysis were considered under ‘entertainment’ are likely business actors in the entertainment industry – which were then re-classified in our formulation.

Armed Forces, Religion and Voluntary Associations, on the other hand, all count around 1% of the total dataset.

Figure 1: Distribution of Elite Members per Category



As discussed, my investigation assumes the axiom of elites' actors representing the upper echelon of society, in terms of education, wealth, income and prestige. Yet, it is still possible to observe some changes in the composition of the elites over time. In particular, 2020 elite appears to be more educated with respect to 2004, with 91% of the dataset having obtained at least one university degree. However, tertiary education among elite members grew less (+4%) compared to the general population (+10% of graduates across the general population).

Table 5: Distribution of Education per Elite type

| Elite | Education | | | | | Total |
|-----------------------|---------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|--------|---------|
| | Middle School | High School | University | MBA's and Other | PhD | |
| Politics | 17 | 251 | 702 | - | 40 | 1,010 |
| | 1.68% | 24.85% | 69.50% | - | 3.96% | 100.00% |
| Media | - | 52 | 175 | - | 5 | 232 |
| | - | 22.41% | 75.43% | - | 2.16% | 100.00% |
| Business | - | 127 | 756 | 80 | 24 | 987 |
| | - | 12.87% | 76.60% | 8.11% | 2.43% | 100.00 |
| Public Administration | - | 2 | 546 | 2 | 34 | 584 |
| | - | 0.34% | 93.49% | 0.34% | 5.82% | 100.00 |
| Academic & Education | - | 2 | 877 | 12 | 161 | 1,052 |
| | - | 0.19% | 83.37% | 1.14% | 15.30% | 100.00 |
| Voluntary Association | - | - | 23 | 9 | 3 | 35 |
| | - | - | 65.71% | 25.71% | 8.57% | 100.00 |
| Armed Forces | - | - | 68 | - | - | 68 |
| | - | - | 100.00% | - | - | 100.00 |
| Religion | - | 7 | 38 | - | 6 | 51 |
| | - | 13.73% | 74.51% | - | 11.76% | 100.00 |
| Culture | - | 173 | 277 | 1 | 1 | 452 |
| | - | 38.27% | 61.28% | 0.22% | 0.22% | 100.00 |
| Total | 17 | 614 | 3,462 | 104 | 274 | 4,471 |
| | 0.38% | 13.73% | 77.43% | 2.33% | 6.13% | 100.00 |

Looking more into details: around 25% of the political elites, the 22% of the media elites, and 13% of the business elite have a secondary education or less -while almost the totality of the academic and professional world has at least a university degree or equivalent. If we add the more extended cultural world (artists and those in positions of power within cultural institutions) the share of graduates lowers to 83% on average. This datum, taken together with the relative composition of the elites discussed above, suggests that, except for the political

elites, on average elites appear to be more educated with respect to what was suggested in previous research.

Relatedly, our first hypothesis (Hp1) regarded the share of women present within ‘the circle of power’; as discussed, we expected the number of women to have increased in all crucial sectors of society with respect to 2004 (which registered a 12% of the elites being women). In the last 16 years, the percentage of women almost doubled (almost touching the 22%). The highest representation of women is in the political and institutional sector (35% of the political elite is composed by females), while women are still significantly underrepresented within the business elites (11.5%), Armed Forces (a mere 5% of the total) and a strikingly, but not surprising, 0% of Religion top influential members. For what concerns the remaining sectors, women represent around the 34% of Voluntary Association members, almost 30% of the Cultural elite and 28% of Public Administration. Interestingly, there is not a significant difference between men and women in terms of education, but women are on average 7 years younger than men (a mean age of 57 vs 64 years), confirming the slow but steady change in the equal representation of sexes, as generations change.

Table 6: Elites' Characteristics

| | Politics | Media | Business | PA | Academic | Voluntary Association | Armed Forces | Religion | Culture | Total |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|------------|---------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------------------|---------|--------|
| Female | 377 | 62 | 135 | 182 | 162 | 15 | 3 | - | 213 | 1,149 |
| | 34.97% | 23.31% | 11.48% | 28.17% | 13.59% | 34.09% | 4.35% | - | 29.62% | 21.92 |
| Mean Age | 50.14 | 61.59 | 64.33 | 59.49 | 72.81 | 56.72 | 63.45 | 77.88 | 68.32 | 63.08 |
| No University Degree | 268 | 52 | 126 | 2 | 2 | - | - | 7 | 173 | 631 |
| | 26.53% | 22.41% | 13.4- | 0.36% | 0.19% | - | - | 13.73% | 38.27% | 14.11% |
| Subject | | | | | | | | | | |
| Law | 249 | 48 | 91 | 297 | 220 | 3 | 15 | 12¹³ | 14 | 944 |
| | 49.65% | 28.24% | 11.36% | 55% | 21.01% | 9.9% | 30.61% | 27.91% | 5.3- | 25.99% |
| Social Sciences - Economics | 106 | 8 | 423 | 69 | 149 | 8 | - | - | 11 | 772 |
| | 14.83% | 4.71% | 52,81% | 12.78% | 14.23% | 24.24% | - | - | 4.17% | 21.26% |
| Social Sciences - Political Sciences | 76 | 25 | 35 | 115 | 27 | 5 | 5 | - | 3 | 289 |
| | 10.63% | 14.71% | 4.35% | 21.3- | 2.58% | 15.15% | 10.20% | - | 1.14% | 7.96% |
| STEM - Engineering | 43 | - | 153 | 22 | 61 | 2 | - | 1 | 4 | 285 |
| | 6.01% | - | 19.10 | 4.07% | 5.83% | 6.06% | - | 2.33% | 1.52% | 7.85% |
| Humanities - Literature | 24 | 34 | 8 | 3 | 83 | 1 | - | 2 | 54 | 208 |
| | 3.36% | 2% | 1% | 0.56% | 7.93% | 3.03% | - | 4.65% | 20.45% | 5.73% |
| Medical Field | 43 | 2 | - | 6 | 144 | 6 | - | - | 2 | 1 |
| | 6.01% | 1.18% | - | 1.11% | 14.23% | 18.18% | - | - | 0.76% | 0.03% |
| Humanities - Philosophy | 33 | 24 | 12 | 3 | 58 | 1 | - | 9 | 22 | 161 |
| | 2.52% | 14.12% | 1.5- | 0.56% | 5.54% | 3.03% | - | 20.23% | 8.33% | 4.43% |
| Architecture & Arts | 17 | 6 | - | - | 54 | - | - | - | 54 | 143 |

¹³ It should be noted that the most frequent subject taken by the religious elite is, expectedly, theology (37.21%).

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| | 2.38% | 3.53% | - | - | 5.16% | - | - | - | 20.45% | 3.94% |
| Music Dance Theatre | - | 2 | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 92 | 95 |
| | - | 1.18% | - | - | 0.19% | - | - | - | 34.85% | 2.92% |
| STEM - Physics | 5 | - | 11 | - | 71 | 1 | - | - | - | 88 |
| | 0.7- | - | 1.37% | - | 6.78% | 3.03% | - | - | - | 2.42% |
| Humanities - History | 3 | 7 | - | - | 51 | 1 | - | 1 | 3 | 64 |
| | 0.42% | 4.12% | - | - | 4.87% | 3.03% | - | 2.33% | 1.14% | 1.76% |
| STEM - Biology | 10 | - | 3 | 1 | 36 | - | - | - | - | 50 |
| | 1.4- | - | 0.37% | 0.19% | 3.44% | - | - | - | - | 1.38% |
| Social Sciences - Sociology | 9 | 4 | 3 | - | 15 | - | - | 1 | - | 32 |
| | 1.26% | 2.35% | 0.37% | - | 1.53% | - | - | 2.33% | - | 0.88% |
| Military Academy | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 28 | - | - | - |
| | - | - | - | 0.19% | - | - | 57.14% | - | - | - |
| Humanities - Languages | 18 | 2 | 2 | - | 5 | - | - | - | 1 | 28 |
| | 2.52% | 1.18% | 0.25% | - | 0.48% | - | - | - | 0.38% | 0.77% |
| STEM - Agriculture | - | - | 7 | 8 | 3 | - | - | - | - | 27 |
| | - | - | 0.87% | 1.48% | 0.29% | - | - | - | - | 0.74% |
| STEM - Chemistry | - | - | 6 | - | 15 | - | - | - | - | 27 |
| | - | - | 0.75% | - | 1.43% | - | - | - | - | 0.74% |

For what concerns our second hypothesis (Hp2), we suggested a more heterogeneous composition of the political and institutional elites with respect to the other, reputed more stable, elites. Elites appear to be significantly different in terms of gender distribution and level education. Indeed, we tested, by means of the Chi-Square test, the differences between the political elite and other elites' actors in terms of both education (recoded as having no degree and having a degree) and gender. The political and institutional elite, indeed, appears to be the most diverse and more representative of the general population, being on average younger, with higher percentage of women and with more diverse level of education, as shown in Table 6.

Deepening the analysis, we explored which university members of the Elites attended. As summarized in Table 7¹⁴, over 50% attended the same 8 universities. Rome and Milan appear to be the most able to attract elite members as students – both universities are the *alma mater* of well over 500 actors in our dataset. Other historical colleges, such as Università di Napoli Federico II and Università di Bologna, were also particularly popular among elite members. Interestingly, most members seem to have preferred attending public, rather than private, institutions, with the most notable exception being Università Commerciale L. Bocconi. Furthermore, while the vast majority of elite actors attended Italian Universities, foreign institutions attracted some as well: most notably Harvard University (1%), MIT (0.5%) and INSEAD (0.5%).

¹⁴ Table 7 presents only the most common universities as the tail of the distribution becomes quickly very long

Table 7: Most attended Universities

| University | Freq. | Percent | Cum. |
|--|-------|---------|-------|
| Università la Sapienza (Roma) | 501 | 16.59 | 16.59 |
| Università Commerciale L. Bocconi (Milano) | 195 | 6.46 | 23.05 |
| Università degli Studi di Milano | 192 | 6.36 | 29.40 |
| Università di Napoli Federico II | 180 | 5.96 | 35.36 |
| Università di Bologna | 133 | 4.40 | 39.77 |
| Università di Torino | 119 | 3.94 | 43.71 |
| Università di Firenze | 108 | 3.58 | 47.28 |
| Politecnico di Milano | 83 | 2.75 | 50.03 |
| Università di Padova | 80 | 2.65 | 52.68 |
| Università di Genova | 69 | 2.28 | 54.97 |
| LUISS (Roma) | 66 | 2.19 | 57.15 |
| Università di Pisa | 59 | 1.95 | 59.11 |
| Università di Pavia | 57 | 1.89 | 60.99 |
| Università di Bari Aldo Moro | 55 | 1.82 | 62.81 |
| Politecnico di Torino | 45 | 1.49 | 64.30 |
| Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano | 43 | 1.42 | 65.73 |
| Università di Palermo | 40 | 1.32 | 67.05 |
| Università di Catania | 32 | 1.06 | 68.11 |
| Harvard University | 29 | 0.96 | 69.07 |
| Università di Messina | 27 | 0.89 | 69.97 |
| Università di Venezia Ca' Foscari | 27 | 0.89 | 70.86 |
| Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Roma | 26 | 0.86 | 71.72 |
| Università di Trieste | 25 | 0.83 | 72.55 |
| Università di Perugia | 23 | 0.76 | 73.31 |
| Accademia Militare (Modena, Livorno, Roma) | 20 | 0.66 | 73.97 |
| Conservatorio di Milano | 20 | 0.66 | 74.64 |
| Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa | 20 | 0.66 | 75.30 |
| Accademia di Arte Drammatica di Roma | 18 | 0.60 | 75.89 |
| Università di Siena | 18 | 0.60 | 76.49 |
| Accademia Militare di Modena | 17 | 0.56 | 77.05 |
| Università di Parma | 16 | 0.53 | 77.58 |
| INSEAD (France) | 15 | 0.50 | 78.08 |
| MIT (Usa) | 15 | 0.50 | 78.58 |

Lastly, I tackle the exploratory hypothesis (Hp3) about the elites' studies. With respect to Carboni (2007; 2008) we can still observe the prevalence of law in all different elites - from the over 50% of public administration, to the almost 50% of the political elite's members with a degree, to the low, but still relevant, 5% in the cultural world. Humanities still dominate the cultural (40%) and the mass media world (34%, more than one third of the media elite members with a degree) vastly confirm Carboni's analyses. Furthermore, we see a greater representation of economics (20%) and hard sciences' degree (around 15%), which goes in contradiction with some of Carboni's arguments. In particular, the linking of several flaws of the elite class to their education: specialized in subject useful to maintain consensus but lacking the technical competence and knowledge to mobilize it towards innovation. Quite the opposite, from these preliminary results, such inability seems to be more linked with i. the (still) relevant, but closing, differences between the political elite and the general population, in terms of gender, education, level of specialization and overall life experience¹⁵; ii. the growing differences between the political elite (that has to gain and maintain consensus) and other elites, whose level of education, internationalization and specialization increase as generations change.

¹⁵ Among the others, about the half the elite actors has had at least one work or education experience abroad.

Conclusion

This first chapter explores and updates the research on elite actors in Italy. Taking our cues from Carlo Carboni's efforts in mapping and analysing elite members, we identify, by means of positional approach, 5245 people at the top of the main elite sectors commonly identified in political science: politics, public administration, armed forces, private businesses, mass media, academia and education and voluntary association. To these main sectors, we add those actors who are part of the religious and cultural elite (i.e. museums' director) as established by the literature. Thus, compared to Carboni's works, we identify the 2.000 core members of the elites, I underestimate the "second circle" of 6.000 of important, but not all-powerful, actors in the Italian society. We also collect socio-demographic information about these actors, including date and place of birth, gender, level of education, type of education, subject of specialization, position held and institution the actor works for.

Such information allows us to test two confirmatory hypothesis that vastly support Carboni's analysis and interpretation, plus an exploratory one concerning elites' studies. First, elites' members appear to be, on average, more educated than the average population and more educated with respect to the actors identified in 2004. Second, while elite actors became increasingly diverse in all sectors (the percentage of women is almost doubled compared to 2004), the political elite appears to be most heterogeneous also in terms of education and gender. Conversely, we do find a greater representation of economic (20%) and hard sciences' degrees (around 15%), which goes in contradiction with some of Carboni's arguments. In particular, there is little support for linking several of the flaws of the elite class to their education: specialized in subject useful to maintain consensus (i.e. literature and law) but lacking the technical competence and knowledge to mobilize it towards innovation.

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II. Elites and Where to Find Them (on Social Media). Elites' Propensity of Adoption, Activation and Networking on Social Media

Introduction

One of the most debated issue of the last decade has been the impact that social media had on the public sphere. In particular, with respect to elites and their relation with non-elite members, three phenomena: disintermediation (Chircu & Kauffman, 1999; Jallat & Capek, 2001; Parisi & Rega, 2011; McLennan, 2016; Van Aelst, 2017; Adriani, 2019), celebrification (Cashmore, 2019; Fahy & Lewenstein, 2020) and incivility (Rheault et al., 2019; Theocharis et al., 2020; Beltran et al., 2021).

What is often overlooked in the literature in the exploration of such phenomena is the relation within and between elite members on social media. For this purpose, I test several hypotheses about the probability of elite members of adopting and being active on (Twitter). Among the most relevant results, we find that politicians are significantly more likely, compared to other elite members, to both adopt and be active on social media. On the other hand, they are not significantly more likely to be early adopters, suggesting that, while members of the political elite consider social media to be useful tools compared to other elites' members, such consideration was not as spread as it is today. Likewise, we find that characteristics that are often considered to be crucial in explaining behaviour on social media (i.e. education and gender) do not have an effect. Furthermore, we explore the following network of elite members: we find varying network density across different elites, with media and religious elite members being more closely connected than the others. Furthermore, by means of exponential random graph model (ergm), we find that being members of the same elite increases the likelihood of being connected.

Theoretical Review

In the centuries-long debate about power, and its concealed or manifest displays, the advent of Internet and social media has been revolutionary. The possibility of interactions between (and within) elite members and the lay-public has reached a never-before-touched peak. Not only politicians and journalists, but also academic experts, international bankers, and even religious leaders (Cheong, 2014) are, at least in theory, only a tweet away. The focus of the present chapter is, thus, to investigate elites' behaviour on social media and in particular on Twitter.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will rely on the same definition of elites used for the previous chapter. Thus: *persons who are able, by virtue of their authoritative positions in powerful organizations and movements of whatever kind, to affect national political outcomes regularly and substantially [...] top position-holders in the largest or most resource-rich political, governmental, economic, military, professional, communications, and cultural organizations and movements in a society*' (Highley & Burton, 1989:18). Political scientists in particular have identified the specific areas in which to map elite members in modern societies: politics, public administration, armed forces, private business, mass media, academia and education, voluntary association (Hoffman-Lange, 2018: 81). Other than these core sectors, scholars sometimes also take into consideration the heads of other important institutions, organizations or other influential segment of societies including important cultural institutions, religious organizations, and professional associations (Hoffmann-Lange, 2018). In what follows, I provide a general introduction of the most relevant phenomena that the introduction of the Internet and social media entail for elites' studies. In the next section, I focus more precisely about the behaviour of elites' actors on social media.

This process of removing the existing barriers between actors that otherwise would not be able to 'connect', broadly known as *disintermediation* (Chircu & Kauffman, 1999; Jallat & Capek, 2001; Parisi & Rega, 2011; McLennan, 2016; Van Aelst, 2017; Adriani, 2019), has determined a number of different, and sometimes opposite, phenomena. Among these, scholars have identified in the advent of Internet and, in particular, of social media several positive and negative consequences for what regards elites' communication. On the one hand, social media have been saluted as democratising and liberating tools, through which common citizens and grassroots movements could organize and hold their leaders accountable (Khamis & Vaughn, 2012; De Choudhury et al., 2016; Mundt et al., 2018): indeed, 'theoretically, this direct communication can foster transparency, accountability and responsiveness' (Ceron, 2017:13). On the other hand, social media have been identified as the perfect breeding ground for populist parties and leaders to spread their message (see for example Gerbaudo 2018; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018; Serrano et al., 2019); to have fuelled hate-speech related phenomena, against politicians (Theocharis et al., 2020), journalists (Ferrier et al., 2018; Obemaier et al., 2018; Waisbord, 2020), and other 'under the spot light' actors (Jung et al., 2020; Noakes, 2021); and, in general, to have opened the gates for disinformation and fake news to freely circulate to the benefit of few actors (Farhall et al., 2019; Persily & Tucker, 2020) and to the detriment of democratic systems themselves (Tucker et al., 2017).

Besides the positive versus negative consequences of social media platforms, an alternative line of investigation in the debate of elites and non-elites' presence and activities on social media is the relative shift of 'power' of the two categories. In particular, whether the elites exploit their social media presence to strengthen their relative position of power or ability to influence society or, on the other hand, if the *ecology*¹⁶ of social media platforms has

16 (Social) media ecology refers to a theoretical framework developed in the early 60's and reprised with the advent of social media and the Internet. It relies on the assumption that what we can meaningfully say or do is

determined such changes in the communication environment that the non-elite public has gained more possibility to influence their elite counterpart.

The presence of elite members (from different segments of society) on social media is generally connected with two broader phenomena. First, the phenomenon of *celebrification* and the conflation of the public with the private sphere (Cashmore, 2019). Leslie (2011), for example, claims that, despite the fact that celebrities and ‘celebrity culture’ are usually connected to the entertainment industry, we have to re-conceptualize the process of celebrification in a broader, more complex context¹⁷.

For example, Mellado & Hermida (2021) employ Goffmann’s (1959) framework of the continuous representation of the self to argue that social media have transformed the rigid structure of traditional media, changing and making more complex and layered the roles that actors in the media elite perform. Likewise, from the vast array of aphorisms inaccurately attributed to Albert Einstein, to the fascination and romanticization of brilliant minds overcoming the difficulties of lives while reaching incredible scientific results and discoveries (Krauss, 2015), scientists have been to a certain extent ‘glamourized’ as celebrities and as thought leaders beyond their specific subfield. As insightfully described in Fahy & Lewenstein (in press, 2020), the Covid-19 induced pandemic has dramatically accelerated such

shaped by the media environment we are immersed into and the specific characteristics of the medium we are using to convey our messages (Postman, 1970); thus, the objective of media ecology is to uncover these patterns and strategies that shape and constraint the formation of meaningful messages (Scolari, 2012). Affordance is a related concept: developed within ecological psychology, the term is used to characterise the relational nature of animals’ reactions with the environment. Affordances are the cues, structures or more broadly, the characteristics of the environment we are immersed into and the possibilities for action that it offers (Gibson, 2015; Bucher & Helmond, 2017). In social media studies, affordances are the feature of the social and the possibility for action the platform offers (Caliandro & Gandini, 2017).

¹⁷ Driessens (2013) proposes a framework distinguishing celebrization (the dispersed, societal meta-process characterized by the changing of the qualitative dimension of celebrity in society at broad) from celebrityization (the individual level transformation of ordinary people as well as public figures into celebrities).

representations of experts and scientists, to the point that almost overnight they become ‘scientific stars’ (Fahy & Lewenstein, 2020: 138).

This process of celebrification is generally recognized as the shift from presenting experts and scientists in their role as public figures to also presenting private details of their appearance, lives and beliefs (Turner, 2004; Browne, 2003). Sometimes this shift occurs because of the fascination that extraordinary lives exert on the general public (Krauss, 2015) as in the case of Alan Turing, John Nash and Stephen Hawking. Other times scientific merit or an institutional appointment is enough to shift the attention of the public – through the media –, to shift the attention from the public to the private sphere (North, 2019), as in the case of Neil deGrasse Tyson or, more recently, Anthony Fauci himself. Both traditional media, popular culture and social media have accelerated such process of celebrification in particular among hard sciences experts; for example, Bucchi (2009) suggests a paradigm shift from contacts with the media being ‘grudgingly’ conceded, and “communication to non-experts dismissed with the pejorative term ‘popularization’” (Bucchi, 2009: 37) to post-academic scientists willingly engaging with the media.

For what concerns political elites, social media are usually indicated as both facilitators and amplifiers of well-studied, yet contested, phenomena, i.e. the so-called ‘celebrity politics’ and ‘identity politics’. The concept of celebrity politics has received major media and especially academic attention, even if the literature is seldom systematic (Marsh et al., 2010). Without dwelling on the details of why the concept is contested, under the simpler approach to the term, there are two main types of celebrity politicians¹⁸: i. politicians with a background in showbusiness or entertainment, as Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger or, more recently, Donald Trump; ii. celebrities who leverage on their fame to influence political

¹⁸ Such a simple distinction has been criticised and other, more complex, classifications have been introduced (Marsh et al. 2010).

decisions, without having the explicit intentions of entering the political arena themselves (Street, 2004; 2012), such as, for instance, artists the likes of Beyoncé Knowles (Duvall & Heckemeyer, 2018) and Lady Gaga (Bennett, 2013).

Celebrity politicians are, thus, distinguishable from ‘traditional politicians’ because of their high media presence, and often unconventional communication strategies (Street, 2019). Scholars also make the connection with social media explicit: for instance, Manning et al. (2017) reiterates that through social media, politicians overcome the public/private divide to reach a diverse audience. The advent of social media has also been strongly connected to the rising phenomenon of identity politics. For instance, Bennett (2012) attributes to new technologies part of the evolution of late ‘60s identity politics into its contemporary formulation, in which individuals are mobilized through their lifestyles. Furthermore, Lim (2020; 2021)¹⁹ builds on Akerlof and Kranton’s (2011) model of *identity economics* to highlight how social media, and in particular Facebook, both enhances and exploitatively commodifies minorities’ identity.

Another aspect that is frequently debated when discussing the presence of elite actors on social media is incivility²⁰ (Theocharis et al., 2020). In this respect, scholars have focused especially on the political elite, discussing incivility both spread by political actors (see for example, Kreis, 2017; Bustan, 2020; Bratslavsky et al., 2020) and directed at them (Gorrell et al., 2018; Theocharis et al., 2020; Ward, 2020; Hua et al., 2020). Theocharis et al. (2016) in particular suggest that the incivility they experience on Twitter is the reason why politicians use the social media mainly as a broadcasting tool. Hua et al. (2020) instead focus on the characteristics of

19 It should be noted that Lim advances the debate within the framework of Critical Race Theory and Intersectional Feminism. Neither such frameworks nor their normative implications are adopted in the present paper.

20 We use the term hostility broadly to broadly include harassment, hate speech, and bullying.

the *uncivil* people that harass politicians on social media, finding that those who are more uncivil towards candidates from opposing parties are also less likely to show support for their own candidates. Demographic characteristics also shape the likelihood of attacking politicians online: for example, while male candidates or politicians are more likely to be the subject of direct attacks on social media, high-ranking political women (party leaders or holding institutional position) are more likely to experience abuse online (Rheault et al., 2019; Beltran et al., 2021).

Concerning journalists and the media elite, we find comparable conclusions in existing literature. For instance, as presented in several reports and accounts (see, for example, Reporters Without Borders 2020), almost the totality of the interviewed journalists has experienced some form of incivility or harassment in their presence online.

However, as explained in Lewis et al. (2020) there are some factors that increase the likelihood of being attacked on social media; *gender*, with female journalists more likely to experience harassment with respect to males, as also highlighted by Stahel & Schoen (2020) and Chen et al. (2020). *Visibility* contributes as well, as more visible journalists, even from more obscure newsroom, are more likely to be attacked when on social media. Turning to the intellectual and academic elite, Donelan (2016) details the increasing rates, among academics, of adoption of social media to disseminate their work, highlighting the positive incentives that they have: visibility, networking opportunities and exchange with peers. Barlow & Awan (2016), on the other hand, stress the negative effects of such exposure for members in academia, and especially for those representing ‘marginalized’ identities. Jordan & Weller (2018), conversely, do not quote harassment among the disincentivizing issues in adopting social media. Another interesting perspective is provided by Noakes & Noakes (2021) who analyse “online academic bullying”, or “drawn-out situation in which its recipient experiences critique online by employees in higher education that is excessive, one-sided and located outside of typical

scholarly debate and accepted standards for its field” (Noakes & Noakes, 2021:1). Focusing on the case of an Emeritus Professor who was cyber-bullied for shifting his view on dietary advices, they provide an exploratory study on the still understudied dynamics of receiving attacks *from* members of academia online; indeed, while practices of bullying and harassment in academia have been extensively researched (see, among the others: McKay et al., 2008 or, for a more personal perspective, Pyke, 2018), it has not been extended to online and social media domains.

Below, we provide a review of the literature of elites’ social media adoption and activities focusing on each subset of elites. In particular, I revise i. the varying incentives that elites’ members have in adopting social media ii. The use they make of social media iii. The incentives they might have to connect and interact with other elites’ actors and non-elite members.



Political Elite

We can systematize the literature on the way politicians adopt web-based communication around three main dates. The first crucial date is 2004, when Howard Dean was the first U.S.A. presidential candidate to exploit Internet during his campaign, by building an interactive website where constituents could actually engage with (Hindman, 2005). Consistent with the demographics of Internet adoption and usage by the general population, scholars expressed mixed positions candidates exploiting Internet for campaigning: on the one hand, literature praised as innovative and especially effective for dark horse candidates to employ alternative communication channel (Hindman, 2005). On the other hand, scholars focused on the digital divide and how the Internet, and especially political communication on Internet, had a very specific public, which for the most reflected the most affluent and educated segments of Western society (Herrnson et al., 2007; Nam, 2011). The second pivotal date can be roughly to the Barack Obama 2008 and 2012 campaigns, where Internet and social media were not only considered to be useful communication tools and means to generate engagement and political participation (Cogburn et al., 2011), but also as sources of information on potential voters (Bimber, 2014; Tufekci, 2014). The final date that we can advance to roughly identify a shift in the literature paradigm is 2016, coinciding with the election of Donald Trump and the surge of populist movements in Western Europe; this stream of literature focused on the ‘dark side’ of social media exploitation by politicians as tools for spreading misinformation, disinformation and fake news, and the perfect ground for polarization and radicalization to spread (Hong & Kim, 2016; Spohr, 2017; Persily & Tucker, 2020; for a review of the more general debates on these phenomena: Tucker et al., 2018).

As of now, the fact that politicians and political actors at various levels make extensive use of social media to promote themselves, spread their messages and advance their platform can be considered a truism. As such, the discussion about *how* politicians engage with social media is

generally more nuanced and more connected to the specific platform they choose to adopt and whether they strategically employ the different eco-system and affordances provided by the different social media. Thus, the following section will be organized as follows: first, we will briefly present data and discuss the levels of adoption and activation among politicians of different social media. Second, we will hint at the *usage* politicians make of social, providing a review of the literature, and, in particular, i. whether they integrate social media in a more established top-down communication by using social media or, conversely, if they use them to engage with their followers and potential voters; ii. whether such approach *changes* with the platform used; iii., and whether the demographic characteristics of politicians (age, gender, level of education), their role within the party (leader, senior or junior member), the level at which they operate (local, national, supra-national), or even the characteristics of the party itself or the political style can affect political actors' engagement with social media. Finally, iv. Whether these two latter elements combine, i.e. whether the characteristics of the platform and the characteristics of the actor combined affect the communication style and usage. Third, we will assess whether politicians also strategically decide the engage with other actors, political or otherwise.

The most recent and complete source of data on the adoption and activation on social media is provided by an extensive dataset compiled by Haman and Školník (2021) which comprises detailed information about the MPs who have a Twitter account and compares the level of adoption and activation between the politicians and the general population. Table 1, an exact replica of the original table presented in Haman and Školník's original paper, presents a summary of the data for 32 European countries. Despite the many variations across countries, in all countries with the sole exception of Bulgaria, the average level of adoption among MPs surpasses the adoption rate among the general population, suggesting that at least to some degree, politicians consider Twitter to be an instrumental tool for communication. Furthermore,

Haman and Školník (2021) shows how there is a correlation between the general population's adoption of Twitter and the propensity of politicians to also adopt it. Concerning activation²¹, the rate of active politicians on Twitter diminishes, compared to the high level of adoption. On average, 11% of the general population has a Twitter account, with a 7% standard deviation among countries; with Slovakia accounting for the lowest share of adoption (3%) and Ireland with the highest one (27% of the total population). In comparison, 57% of MPs have a Twitter account and 25% are considered to be active on the platform. At the same time, the standard deviation is much higher for both indicators (29% and 20% respectively for adoption and activation) compared to the general population; indeed, Croatia has the lowest level of adoption (2,5%), and the Netherlands presents the highest rate of adoption (95%). Concerning activation (calculated as the percentage of MPs on Twitter that are active), none of Liechtenstein's MPs are considered to be active, while up to the 74% of Spanish MPs have sent at least 32 tweets. Finally, countries that show the absolute highest level of adoption and activation are Spain, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and France, respectively with 67%, 68%, 54%, 50% of active MPs on Twitter.

²¹ Haman and Školník (2021) use a conservative approach for their definition of activation, considering an account to be active when it has sent at least 32 tweets from the initial adoption of the social.

Table 2.1: Adoption Rate of Twitter of MPs in Europe²²

| Country | Number of MPs | % of People on Twitter | % MPs on Twitter | % MPs on Twitter that sent at least 32 tweets |
|----------------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------|---|
| Austria | 183 | 6,4 | 42,1 | 18,6 |
| Belgium | 150 | 10,3 | 93,3 | 33,3 |
| Bulgaria | 240 | 3,3 | 2,5 | 0 |
| Croatia | 151 | 3,6 | 24,5 | 5,3 |
| Cyprus | 54 | 9,6 | 55,6 | 11,1 |
| Czech Republic | 200 | 6,1 | 54,5 | 17,5 |
| Denmark | 186 | 10 | 86 | 37,6 |
| Estonia | 101 | 6,9 | 16,8 | 5 |
| Finland | 200 | 11,7 | 86 | 38 |
| France | 575 | 14,4 | 93 | 54,4 |
| Germany | 709 | 7,9 | 71,5 | 36,8 |
| Greece | 300 | 5,6 | 64 | 24 |
| Hungary | 199 | 3,3 | 9 | 0,5 |
| Iceland | 63 | 21,7 | 50,8 | 11,1 |
| Ireland | 160 | 26,9 | 94,4 | 68,8 |
| Italy | 629 | 5,2 | 75,7 | 22,1 |
| Latvia | 100 | 6,4 | 58 | 26 |
| Liechtenstein | 25 | 9,5 | 16 | 0 |
| Lithuania | 141 | 4,9 | 19,9 | 2,8 |
| Luxembourg | 60 | 25,1 | 66,7 | 10 |
| Malta | 67 | 26 | 77,6 | 13,4 |
| Netherlands | 149 | 21,2 | 95,3 | 57 |
| Norway | 169 | 13,9 | 54,4 | 16 |
| Poland | 459 | 4,1 | 79,5 | 44 |
| Portugal | 230 | 12,1 | 41,3 | 14,3 |
| Romania | 329 | 4 | 7 | 0 |
| Slovakia | 150 | 3 | 6,7 | 0,7 |
| Slovenia | 90 | 5,5 | 65,6 | 33,3 |
| Spain | 350 | 18,3 | 91,1 | 74,3 |
| Sweden | 349 | 13,4 | 61,9 | 26,4 |
| Switzerland | 200 | 9,9 | 69,5 | 19,5 |
| United Kingdom | 650 | 28,6 | 91,4 | 72,8 |
| Mean | 238 | 11% | 57% | 25% |
| St. Deviation | 167 | 7% | 29% | 20% |
| Min. | 25 | 3% | 2,5% | 0 |
| Max. | 709 | 27% | 95% | 74% |

²² Own elaboration on Haman, M.; Školník, M. (2021). "Politicians on Social Media. The online database of members of national parliaments on Twitter". Profesional de la información, v. 30, n. 2

Turning to the United States, according to a five-years long study conducted by the Pew Research Center, analysed Facebook's and Twitter adoption and activation on social media by members of the United States Congress from 2015 to 2020. Among the 715 politicians that served in Congress since 2015, an astonishing 711 (99.5%) had at least one Twitter account and 712 (99.6%) had at least one Facebook account.

One stream of the recent literature on the usage of social media by politicians suggest that, far from being the dystopic exploiting of the public's worse instincts that is often depicted in the media, political actors seem to be under-using the potential offered by social media (Gil de Zúñiga, 2009; Guerrero-Solé, 2018). Indeed, as Grant et al. (2010) point out, politicians seem to be adopting social media only as a broadcasting tool, rather than engaging with their potential voters. For instance, Hoffmann et al. (2016) highlight how personal evaluations do impact political actors' decision to adopt and/or to be active on social media. There are a number of reasons that might explain such choice; first, the vast employment of spin-doctors for political communication, that oftentimes exploit social media as part of a multi-mediatic strategy (Hobbs, 2016). Second, the already mentioned phenomenon of incivility (Theocharis et al., 2020) that might hinder politicians' willingness to use social media more interactively. Finally, personal and demographic characteristics, as well as the characteristics of the parties they belong affect how politicians use social media.

On the other hand, scholars have suggested a more interactive use (Guerrero-Solé, 2018) of social media platforms from the part of politicians. For example, Graham et al. (2013) show that as early as 2010, a sound 22% of UK national elections' candidates fully exploited the potential offered by Twitter, and that 26% of their dataset was made of 'reciprocal tweets'; of these, the vast majority consisted of politicians interacting with the lay-public and partly (10%) with journalists, while the interaction within the political elite was mainly done among

members of the same party. Furthermore, they assessed both the interactive and broadcasting behaviours of politicians on Twitter, highlighting several attitudes. Among broadcasting, they included Updating, Promoting, Critiquing, Information Disseminating, Own or Party Stance. Conversely, among interactive behaviour they included Debating or Position taking, Acknowledging, Organizing Mobilizing, Advice Giving Helping, Consulting (Graham et al., 2013: 703-4). In a subsequent study, Graham et al. (2014) further ground such findings by exploring Dutch national elections; not only the Dutch candidates adopt Twitter and widely exploit its interactive features, but they are also even more prone to do so, due both to cultural and political factors and to an earlier impact with social media platform.

Concerning the incentives or disincentives that influence the likelihood of adoption of politicians of social media; in this case, we can distinguish between (dis-)incentives that regard the demographics of politicians and those that regard the political arena per se, i.e. career advancement, ideology, party of belonging, position, and electoral cycle. Previous studies on the likelihood of adoption of Twitter for political communication by politicians have reached similar conclusions (Jungherr, 2016). Among the demographic factors, scholars find age to be a diriment factor. Unsurprisingly, younger politicians are more likely to adopt Twitter compared to older ones (Lassen, 2011; Peterson, 2012; Straus et al., 2013). Such finding is further confirmed by more recent papers, focusing on years where Twitter's usage was more vastly used both by the general population and by the political elite; for instance, in a study on elected Members of the European Parliament, Scherpereel et al. (2017) collect data for 2015 and find that younger politicians are not only more likely to adopt Twitter, but also to engage with the platform more interactively. Gender, on the other hand, offers more puzzling results; studies have both found male candidates and elected to be more likely to adopt Twitter (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Lassen and Brown, 2011; Peterson, 2012; Ausserhoffer & Maireder, 2013; Straus et al., 2013; Vergeer and Hermans, 2013;), while others (Jackson and Lilleker, 2011;

Evans, Cordova and Sipole, 2014; Larsson and Kalsnes, 2014) suggest female politicians to be more likely to adopt social media in general. Scherpereel et al. (2017) don't find any significant difference on the likelihood of adoption based on sex, while they do find that women are early adopters with respect to their male colleagues. Such finding also sheds light on the different results previous studies had provided; furthermore, as the studies focused on different countries, with different political culture and systems, different set of incentives to adopt social media might be at play for women and man in such diverse contexts. Level of education is seldomly the focus of the factors influencing politicians' decision to adopt Twitter or social media in general; one the hand, because politicians usually have on average a higher level of education with respect to the general population; on the other hand, education tends to strongly correlate with age (Marcinkowski & Metag, 2014). Unsurprisingly, the general demographic characteristics of the district the politicians represent influence both the likelihood of adoption and the *way* they employ them; scholars (Cook, 2017) generally suggest that candidates coming from high-income, mostly white (in the case of the United States), younger and urban districts were significantly more likely to adopt social media, and in particularly Twitter.

For what concerns the (dis-)incentives that politicians have in adopting (and be active) on social media that pertains to the political arena, the vast scholarly literature presents different results. Among the others, Vaccari (2008) and Gibson & McAllister (2011) suggest that candidates from small or fringe parties are more likely to adopt social media to overcome the lack of attention from traditional media. Such view is corroborated by the vast literature detailing the connection between extremist (Jungherr, 2014) or 'underdog' politicians' adoption and use of social media for avoid traditional media and journalists' gatekeeping effects (Van Kessel et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2019). Conversely, some studies suggest that better-financed (Gulati & Williams, 2010), incumbents (Lorenzo-Rodríguez & Madariaga, 2015) and mainstream leaders are more likely to use social media.

Such (apparently) contradictory results are mainly due to the *focus* of these studies; there are differences in terms of country and year(s) under investigation, thus, affecting the level of Internet penetration and the adoption of social media in the general population; the electoral cycle under investigation, whether the study was conducted during an electoral campaign or not; and, especially, the *platform* under investigation. Indeed, there are evidence that politicians (and other elites' actors) adopt different social media for different reasons, successfully exploiting the various platforms' characteristics and affordances. For example, Jacobs et al. (2020) focusing on populist leaders and parties suggest that Facebook is exploited to avoid the already mentioned gatekeeping effect of traditional media, - thus, making it a particularly helpful tool for fringe parties who often perceive hostility from mainstream news (see for example: Haller & Holt, 2019). Conversely, (populist) politicians adopt and use Twitter to single out and shame political opponents and journalists (Jacobs et al. 2020). Bossetta (2018) for instance suggests that incredibly vast public present on Facebook, makes it the ideal tool for broadcasting political communication; conversely, underdog and lower polling candidates showed high level of use of Instagram and Snapchat, likely to avoid the gatekeeping effects of the more popular platforms. Relatedly, Farkas & Bene (2020) find that privatization is predominant on Instagram, while personalization is more prevalent on Facebook, further suggesting a distinctive use of the functionalities of the platforms. Thus, in light of high level of adoption and activation among political actors, and especially of the most popular platforms (i.e. Facebook and Twitter) for political communication, we expect demographics and party characteristics' differences to influence the *early* adoption and activation on social media.

Finally, the likelihood of connection with other politicians, other elites' members and the general population can be considered as well to be the consequence of a specific strategy. Social media platforms present different functionalities that allow their users to form connections in different fashions (Bossetta, 2018) and, thus, can effectively shape both the other accounts an

actor might choose to connect with and, as discussed, the communication style and content shared through that particular channel. Being one of the most ‘open’ platforms for academic research to collect data, the vast majority of existing literature focuses on the ‘following’ or ‘friendship’ networks on Twitter.

In particular, scholars have focused on the network formed on the micro-blogging platform either *within* the political elite or between the political and the media elites. Concerning the former stream of research, scholars have vastly found that connections run along party lines, with intra-party connections being significantly stronger than inter-party connections (Grant et al., 2010, Hsu & Park, 2012; Yoon & Park, 2014; Perl et al., 2015; Del Valle & Bravo, 2018), and highlighting homophily within the networks (Mousavi & Gu, 2015; Korainen et al., 2019).

For instance, Perl et al. (2015), studying the following and unfollowing behaviour of German politicians test well-known sociological antecedents of network ties formation. *Activity*, i.e. how active an actor is within a given social network will affect the likelihood others may wish to connect with her. *Popularity*, i.e. the number of new links an actor is likely to receive is proportional to the in-degree number of existing ties. *Similarity*, i.e. in line with the homophily theory, the more similar two actors are the more they are likely to connect. *Reciprocity*, i.e. in the case of bi-directional network, reciprocity is usually a distinguish feature of most social networks. *Social embeddedness*, i.e. Two actors with high cross-density (the rate of the two social network overlap) are less likely to cut the tie. *Attraction*, i.e. actors that engage in positive exchange with another actor’s close ties are more likely to form a connection. *Support*, i.e. if the friends of an actor j interact positively with actor i , it is more likely for j and i to form and to maintain a tie.

Interestingly, they find support for their positive expectations on the formation of ties conditional on peers' behaviour; specifically, 'a politician is likelier to create a tie with j if more of his party colleagues also have established a tie with j ' (Perl et al., 2015: 2). Conversely, they do not find any substantial evidence for claiming that above-mentioned antecedents influence the likelihood of *severing* a tie between two actors. Yoon & Park (2014) studying South Korean National Assembly members' behaviour on Twitter reach similar conclusions; in particular, they find substantive ground for the reciprocity hypothesis, with MPs more likely to reciprocate the following behaviour of their peers, with dyadic relationship more prominent with respect to unidirectional ones. Furthermore, they highlight how MPs exploit Twitter's mentioning feature to express support and agreement to like-minded politicians, regardless of their connection. Esteve del Valle & Bravo (2018), investigating Catalan politicians' behaviour on Twitter, find that the likelihood of following other members of the Catalan parliament is determined both by network features (in this case, popularity and reciprocity, further confirming the conclusions of Perl and colleagues) and by the personal characteristics of political actors. Indeed, politicians that were younger, male and held leadership position were significantly more likely to form connections. Likewise, Haußner & Klika (2019) analyse the Twitter following-friendship network of European Parliament members; their results suggest once again that political actors tend to connect (in this case, follow) individuals from the same political group, rather than the most popular actors in the assembly; the authors interpret such result as an indication of political polarization within parliaments, supra-national or otherwise. Furthermore, they find that left-right network groups showed higher density compared to the two centrist groups. At the individual level, centrality within the network is not considered to be a sufficient condition to be actually influential in the European Parliament, with the exception of eigen-vector centrality where the most prominent and formally influential politicians show the highest degree.

While the following-friendship network seems to replicate the party divisions and roughly confirms sociological assumptions regarding *reciprocity* and *popularity*, communication and interaction networks seem to be based on different logic. Indeed, Esteve Del Valle et al. (2021) in recent study on the *mentioning* (in this case we consider a tie to be the act of mention, rather than the following-friendship connection) network among Dutch politicians, investigate the structural characteristics of the network itself and isolate the actors' features that determine the likelihood of tie formation between two actors in the network. Their results refute the 'echo-chamber' hypothesis, finding several cross-interactions between members of different parties, conversely supporting that social media act as open spaces, increasing the exchange of otherwise fragmented political arena. Likewise, McLoughlin et al. (2020) analyse British MPs communication network on Brexit vote, a subject so polarizing that one could even expect the debate to go beyond partisanship. Indeed, they find what they call 'three tribes': the Remainers following party division, almost resulting into two separate sub-networks. On the other hand, the Leavers network was found to be more cohesive, suggesting that for them the opportunity to leave the EU was more important than party divisions.

Mass Media Elite

The introduction of social media was particularly significant for journalists and in general what in this paper we refer to as the mass (or traditional) media elite. Not only for the well-documented effects of industry disruption they determined, or for the revolution in terms of professional practice and ethics, or for the exacerbation of phenomena such as hoaxes and fake news that, among the other effects, increase the scrutiny on traditional as well as social media; but, more than anything, because as much as politicians are, star-journalists, editor-in-chiefs, broadcasters, anchor-men and women, and publishers are themselves on social media. The following section will then be organized as follows: i. we will present the available data on the rates of adoption and activation among journalists, focusing in particular on European countries. Second, ii., we will discuss the demographic antecedents as well as the external incentives (i.e. career advancement) that might influence the choice to adopt or not social media. Third, iii., we will focus on the ties journalists and media actors form on social media (and, as discussed, in particular on Twitter), analysing whether they tend to connect with actors from within the same elite (i.e. anchor-men and editors) or they tend to form between-elites connection as easily (i.e. political reporters and politicians).

As in the case of the political elite, pinpointing an exact figure on the presence of media actors on social media (Hanusch, 2018), scholars have provided some estimates. For example, a report by Cision (2015) finds that in 2014 up to 75% of UK journalists had at least one social media account and more than half reported they would not be able to conduct their daily job without having access to them. Twitter was found to be the most popular platform, with 75% of journalists reporting having at least one account, followed by Facebook (57%), the now-deceased Google + (41%), Instagram (25%) and, finally, Hootsuite (25%). In a comparative study between four European countries, Gulyas (2013) reports higher levels of (early) adoption among journalists as well; 70% of UK journalists adopted micro-blogging platforms such as

Twitter, followed by 40% of their Swedish counterparts. German and Finnish journalists showed lower rates of adoption, respectively with 30% and 17.5% of adoption rates. In a study focusing on the Swedish case as well, Hedman (2015) finds that 86% of the interviewed journalists used social networking sites at least weekly and 39%²³, in particular, used Twitter at least once a week. Likewise, Willnat & Weaver (2014) estimates that a high portion of U.S.A. journalists not only adopt Twitter or other micro-blogging websites, but are substantially active on them, as 50% of the interviewee reports using such platforms regularly. Furthermore, even if does not directly shed light on the rates of adoption and activation of social media by media actors, a recent report divulges that journalists and media accounts for 25% of total verified users on Twitter; a datum that is even more relevant if we consider that news outlet accounts were not included in this category, adding a 6% of total verified users themselves.

Such high rates of adoption among journalists, that Hanusch (2018) estimates around 70-80% in Western countries, can be explained by a number of reasons: demographic and psychological characteristics (i.e. among the five personality traits openness to experience and extraversion are found to be connected both with propensity to adopt social media and to choose journalism as a career path), external set of incentives and outright pressure from news organizations and editorial boards. Indeed, as mentioned by Barnard (2014), media actors are increasingly under news organizations' pressure to expand their professional presence from the printed press and the television screen into social media's feeds and like buttons: in the words of former BBC Global News director, Peter Horrocks: "Tweet or be sacked" (Barnard, 2014: 191). The push from news organizations and outlets to make journalists promote their work on social media

23 Considering that, despite the two years between the two studies, the Gulyas (2013) and Hedman (2015) conducted their data collection more or less at the same time, their results on Swedish journalists' rate of Twitter adoption are perfectly consistent.

has also determined an acceleration of 'brand' journalism, with individual journalists emancipating from the relative anonymity that characterised their professional practice in a pre-Internet era (Duff & Schwartz, 2017; Holton & Molyneux, 2017).

Among the external factors that influence the high rate of adoption (and activation) of social media of journalists and media actors in general, economic incentives play a significant role (Molyneux et al., 2019). While uncertainty and precarious careers have always characterised the media industry at large, the 21st century technological revolution has exacerbated such phenomena, making professional journalists even more incentivized to adopt social media to build a personal brand in order to 'stay relevant' in order to achieve and maintain job security (Molyneux et al., 2019). Such pressure and need to have an 'online persona' is particularly significant for what Molyneux et al. (2019) define 'self-made' journalists - professionals who seek to promote themselves, striving for a self-made career rather than a company oriented one. The personal branding process that journalists carry out on social media has been analysed in several context and in different media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). There are two main lines of investigation; on the one hand, social media are considered as 'new arenas' (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2014) where journalists can advance their professional identity as theorized by Deuze (2005). In her theoretical framework, indeed, Deuze (2005) defines journalism as a 'professional ideology' (Deuze, 2005: 444) with specific norms and values that define what is and what is not 'real journalism': 'public service ideal, credibility, autonomy, immediacy and legitimacy' (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2014: 369). On the other hand, social media can as well represent a threat to these very values and norms. In an early study on journalist bloggers, Singer (2005) debates this possibility, suggesting that 'j-bloggers', as she calls them, both incorporate blogging in their professional practice and use them as channels for expressing their professional opinions.

Lasorsa et al. (2012) further explores the trade-offs between established professional norms and the emerging practices determined by new media; analysing 22.000 tweets, they argue that journalists ‘appear to be normalizing microblogs to fit into their existing norms and practices but, at the same time, they appear to be adjusting these professional norms and practices to the evolving norms and practices of Twitter’ (Lasorsa et al., 2012: 31). Interestingly, ‘elite’ journalists – those occupying a prominent position in major newspapers and broadcasts - appear to be less inclined to let go of their role as ‘gatekeepers’ and more seldomly use Twitter to provide transparency and accountability, by interacting with other users and by tweeting about the ‘behind-the-scenes’ of their job. Focusing on the Italian case, Bentivegna & Marchetti (2017) investigate the normalization of Twitter among Italian journalists. Their study is of particular interest as they focus on a country characterised by the Pluralistic-Polarized model, characterised by low professionalism, high political parallelism and partisanship (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); thus, it is reasonable to suggest that the advent of social media might have had a different impact in terms of modification of professional norms, compared to countries with different media and political systems. Their results, though, generally confirms a ‘normalizing hybridization’ trend among Italian journalists, where the ‘opening the gate’ of gatekeeping was only at the advantage of fellow journalists and other media actors (Bentivegna & Marchetti, 2017: 287).

Scholars, especially in sociology, have also argued that social media and, in particular Twitter, also contribute to the reinforcement - in a way, they certify - of status and legitimation of power dynamics that exist outside of the platforms’ ecology. Barnard (2014), for example, analyses journalism through the lenses of Bourdieu’s field theory and suggests that through Twitter interactions journalists are able to build and maintain their reputation. Relatedly, according to Usher et al. (2018), Mourão’s (2015) assessment of journalists’ behaviours on Twitter implies that Twitter act as a tool through which journalists build their ‘own sense of hierarchy and

prestige' by interacting among themselves and with non-journalist actors on the platform (Usher et al., 2018: 327). Such conclusions are generally supported by the findings of studies on homophily on social media; for example, Fincham (2019) for instance investigates U.S.A. and U.K. journalists' practices on Twitter. His findings suggest the emergence of micro-bubbles, with journalists and, especially political journalists, overwhelmingly interacting with each other. Interestingly, journalists tend to re-tweet more colleagues *outside* of their own news company, but *types* of organizations influenced the likelihood of connection and interaction, especially for broadcasting in the U.S.A. and printed press in the U.K.; such findings suggest a 'linkage between political bias and Twitter homophily' (Fincham, 2019: 221). Given such framework, the strategic adoption of Twitter on part of journalists may not only be the result of the necessity to build and advance their personal brand, but to achieve and maintain public peer-recognition and legitimation.

Concerning demographic (dis-)incentives to adopt and be active on social media, *age* should not be particularly influential per se, if not in correlation with the career stage, i.e. older journalists might have more secure job position and a more established reputation that might as well reduce the incentive of being active on social media. At the same time, as the broader scope of the present paper is to investigate elites' members rates of adoption and activation, we suppose that all the actors under investigation will have a secure enough position to have more or less the same incentive. Conversely, *gender* might influence, if not the likelihood of creating a social media account, the decision to become active, post regularly and the content shared on social media, for a number of reasons. As already mentioned, female journalists are more likely to be harassed on social media compared to their male counterparts (Stahel & Schoen, 2020; Chen et al., 2020); this might suggest lower levels of activation on social media, in order to reduce their exposure to hostility. Quite the opposite, Molyneux (2019) argues that women adopt a more personal communication style on social media, by sharing details from their

private lives and by sharing more pictures that imply inter-personal exchange. While there is a vast literature detailing gender differences in terms of communication approaches that are strongly reinforced by social media affordances (Abidin, 2016; Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017), Molyneux (2019) concludes that ‘female journalists are not well served by male-dominated news organizations, and so turn to a more personalized self-image in their branding efforts’ Molyneux (2019: 8). Usher et al. (2018) investigates the behaviour of ‘beltway’ political journalists on Twitter – thus, quite akin to the present definition of elite journalists – and find substantive differences between women and men. Male journalists, indeed, seem to both exploit and benefit more from the platform’s features; they are more likely to have ‘verified’ accounts, which in Usher et al. (2018) framework, translates into a further legitimization of their elite status as ‘public figures’. Male beltway journalists also have on average more followers and tweet more, two elements that despite being highly correlated (tweeting more is generally a driver of increasing the number of followers), further indicate that women tend to be less active on the platform. Finally, the men in their sample tend to interact and mention each other more than they do with women – furthering the cycle of reciprocal legitimization of reciprocal status.

In short, journalists have strong economic and career incentives to adopt social media; and especially those pursuing a self-centred are particularly incentivised to build a personal brand online, while company-oriented journalists might as well receive direct pressures from their bosses and editors-in-chief. However, despite the vast adoption (and almost automatic activation) of journalists on social media, and in particular, Twitter, the advent of social media does not seem to have affected the most established professional norms and values, having rather determined a process of ‘normalization’ of social media for most media actors. Furthermore, legitimization seeking from peers and maintaining reputation act as strong incentives to adopt social media for journalists.

Concerning demographic characteristics, we suggest age to have marginal effect on the likelihood of adoption – if not in the case of early adoption, as older journalists are likely to have reached a secure and established status and might have felt less pressure or incentive to adopt social media in the early stage of the platforms’ lives. Conversely, gender might affect both adoption and activation on social media, as they are more likely to face harassment and are more likely to be excluded by peers’ communication exchange.

Some of the above-mentioned literatures already provide some cues about the likelihood of forming ties within the journalists and media elite and between the media and other elites’ or non-elite actors. Indeed, Usher et al. (2018), Fincham (2019) and Molyneux (2019)’ findings suggest that *gender* might be an influential factor in determining the connection among actors, with male members of the media elite more likely to connect with each other and female actors displaying more heterogeneous following networks. At the same time, Fincham (2019) results also suggest that i. journalist and media elite might be particularly cohesive, with a higher number of connections among them, and that ii. homophily within such network might run along ideological lines, with actors with similar ideological slant more likely to connect with each other with respect to actors with different ideological position.

Considering the first aspect, scholars (Verweij, 2012; Verweij & Van Noort, 2015; Nuernbergk, 2016) focusing on different case studies about media actors on Twitter, (i.e. the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Germany) indicate that journalists tend to vastly follow media actors, their networks show low density, indicating that they seldomly follow each other. Furthermore, journalists’ networks have low degree of reciprocity, further suggesting a power distribution, or ‘long tail’, in the network; thus, networks characterised by few particularly popular actors (with high in-degree connections) and a majority of actors with many following (out-degree connections) and a limited number of followers. At the same time,

however, metrics regarding the average distance between nodes in journalists' networks suggest that actors are generally few steps away from each other.

Concerning ideology, Wihbey & Lazer (2019) investigate the relations between the ideological positions of journalists and their following network. In particular, they further confirm survey studies that demonstrate how journalists tend to be left leaning in general (Willnat et al., 2013), something that is heavily reflected in their following networks. At the same time, the content and topic of journalists' tweets might not be as indicative of their ideological leaning. Johnson et al. (2019) and Van Leuven & Deprez (2017) both focus on Belgian journalists' following network on Twitter, respectively on economic and health professionals. Their results are widely consistent and resonate with Fincham (2019)'s suggestion of a cohesive network among media actors. Indeed, journalists for the vast part follow colleagues or other media workers; in addition, they follow actors that might serve as sources of valuable information and news. In particular, health journalists tend to follow other media members as well as experts and academics, and especially those who are relevant for their topics (Van Leuven & Deprez, 2017). Economic journalists, even if there are embedded in a cohesive *media* network, do not explicitly follow each other on social media; a result that is only an apparent contradiction if we consider that the average geodesic distance in the network is 1.75, meaning that each economic journalist can reach a colleague in less than two steps (Johnson et al., 2019: 324).

Relatedly, research has also focused on the connections between members of the media elites and journalists in general and other actors, focusing in particular on the ties between journalists and politicians, but also on the ones between journalists and experts and other influential actors, such as celebrities, sportspeople or particularly successful business workers. The reason why journalists might want to follow members of other elites is generally connected to the importance of networking, and 'being able to immediately connect with the right people' (Hedman & Djerf-Pierre, 2020: 419), to the point that van der Haak et al. (2012) identify the

figure of the ‘networked journalist’. Djerf-Pierre et al. (2016) for example suggest that while the perceived usefulness of social media decreased over time among journalists, in 2014, 45% of their interviewees still considered social media to be crucial for networking, and one third of them reported relying on social media for finding sources. For instance, journalists heavily include politicians in their social media contacts, effectively transposing online existing social media (Nuernbergk, 2016, Maurer & Beiler, 2017). Furthermore, find that in their connection’s behaviours, journalists repropose existing practices of agenda setting in traditional media, being the most relevant actors in the information and news network (Laor, 2021). Literature on the relationships between media and other elites’ members on Twitter also focuses on interactions (generally using proxies such as mentions and retweet networks) rather than simply relying on the following-followers network. For example, Molyneux & Mourão (2019) explore how actors employ Twitter’s affordances, finding that journalists exploit the retweet function to promote their work and their organizations. Likewise, Chadwick (2011) uses the ‘bullygate’ scandal of Gordon Brown administration, to show how journalists exploited Twitter (and other online platforms, such as blogs and personal websites) to diffuse news content, anticipating the traditional news cycle, and interacted both with each other and with members of the lay-public.

Academia and Education

Data on the actual adoption and usage of social media or networks²⁴ by academics and intellectual public figures report very different percentages, with estimates ranging from 30% to 70% of academics that employ social media in their activities (Veletsianos et al., 2019: 1714). Moran et al. (2011) for example finds that an astonishing 90% of faculty members adopts social networks, a result that is even more significant considering the year in which the study was published; likewise, Lupton (2014) finds, as well, a rate of adoption of 97% among faculty members. Such high rates of adoption and activation, however, can be biased for a number of reasons; first, the interviewees were selected through advertisements on social network (Lupton, 2014); second, such studies take into consideration a vast array of social media platforms, from Wikipedia to websites explicitly directed at scholars, i.e. ResearchGate and Academia. Indeed, Costas et al. (2017), despite some limitations presented by the methodology they employed, estimate that the presence of scholars on Twitter between 1% and 5% of the total scholar population.

The *reasons* why academics adopt and make active use of social media have been more vastly addressed. Scholars have indicated two found two main set of incentives that propel intellectuals, and especially academics to adopt and be active on social media: dissemination of one's work and career perspective. Dissemination on social media is connected to the broader debate on the relation between academia and the public and how to present one's knowledge to peers and non-experts²⁵. Chikoore et al. (2016) found a difference in the propensity of adopting social media for dissemination purposes between different disciplines.

²⁴ Despite being often used interchangeably, social media and social network are not synonym. Social media are media, thus channel used to broadcast some message. Whereas, social networks require a two-way connection, being platforms that allow communication between users. Even if most platforms are social network in essence as they allow their users to interact, for the purpose of this paper we use 'social media' to include both types of online communication.

²⁵ In Italy was also introduced the institution of "Terza Missione" whose main scope is both to strengthen the relation between industry and academics and the social and cultural impact of knowledge production.

Building on well-established classifications (Biglan, 1973a; Biglan, 1973b; Becher, 1987, 1989; Becher & Trowler, 2001) of subjects (hard v. soft and pure v. applied), they found that scholars from hard/pure sciences expressed less availability to engage in conversations on social media. In particular, one of their respondents, a professor in computer sciences, declared that “we do not do communicate our research like this” (Chikoore et al., 2016: 160). Conversely, scholars from soft/applied fields expressed more enthusiasm for using social media to disseminate their research – to the point that one academic from media and cultural studies referred to their research community as “very digitally engaged” (Chikoore et al., 2016: 161). Relatedly, a management professor who explicitly talked about “having a Twitter network consisting of journalists, politicians and trade unionists” (Chikoore et al., 2016: 161), suggesting even stronger incentives for adoption and usage in terms of career perspective. Holmberg (2014) further refines such findings suggesting that the way scholars behave on Twitter change across discipline domains; for instance, while all the sampled scholars use retweets at a significantly higher rate compared to the general population (an average of 3% of the total messages sent compared to the 27% of academics), hard scientists such as biochemists seemed particularly inclined to so. On the other hand, social scientists and humanities scholars seem more prone to engage in conversation either among themselves or with the lay-public.

Another stream of the literature has tried to connect social media adoption to career advancement and, even, to increase visualizations and citations (Han & Ziaiaen, 2019). The mechanism underlying such results is quite straightforward: free access articles, shared on social media immediately increase the visibility of the article, expanding the likelihood of being read and, therefore, cited. If this was the case, the most-straightforward incentive for scholars would be to predominately connect with colleagues and other scholars.

Conversely, social media's success and impact factors might be both the result of the underlying quality of the article itself (Eysenbach, 2011). In such case, social media become a simple tool to further disseminate one's work.

Ke et al. (2017) conducted one of the most extensive research on experts' adoption of social media and especially their networks. Focusing on the most used social media among scholars, Twitter, they find that adoption rates were generally diffused across the disciplinary spectrum. Social scientists appear to be overrepresented, while mathematicians and hard sciences scholars are the less represented ones (Ke et al., 2017; Costas et al., 2020), in line with Chikoore et al. (2016). They further analyse the retweet, followers and mentions network among scientific communities; while they adopt only descriptive approaches to Social Network Analysis (SNA), their results generally suggest that different disciplines display different degree of centralities, with hard and life sciences' scholars dominating the network and social scientists and humanities' experts being more isolated and less central to the network, especially compared to their number. In general, research finds that scholars and academics tend to connect and interact among themselves (Priem & Costello, 2010; Collins & Rock, 2016); furthermore, the lower the number of followers the more likely they are to be scientists rather than non-scientists, while among those with more than 1000 followers, the presence of non-scientific followers increase (Coté & Darling, 2018). Insularity within the subject or subfield is also detected (Jünger & Fähnrich, 2020). Furthermore, among the non-scientists followers only a few were politicians or policymakers (Bombaci et al., 2016; Coté & Darling, 2018). In a recent paper, Della Giusta et al. (2021) explicitly compare hard scientists and economists' usage of Twitter and their respective communication styles; according to their framework, hard sciences scholars are more advanced in their ability to exploit social media to engage with the public with respect to economists.

Focusing on the most followed representatives of their respective sub-fields, Della Giusta et al. (2021) find substantive differences in their communication styles and exploitation of the platform's affordances. In particular, economists are in general less active on Twitter, and make less use of mentions, and mentions a lower number of users. Furthermore, analysing the pronouns' usage (i.e. 'I', 'me' vs. 'we', 'our'), they suggest that hard scientists use a more inclusive language, allowing them to increase reach and accessibility for the wider public (Della Giusta et al., 2021). In a nutshell, experts and scholars seem to be adopting social media and, especially, to be active on them, to network and engage with fellow academics, while the extent to which they reach the general public through their social media use is yet unclear (Coté & Darling, 2018).



Public Administration

Compared to the already reviewed elites, scholars have dedicated relatively scant attention to the presence and behaviour of members of public administration and bureaucrats' elite. There are several reasons for such void in the literature; first, oftentimes, the focus is on the official government ministries or agencies' social media accounts, rather than on the individual members that hold a position of power within those agencies and organizations. Second, the very same institutions might impose rules, preventing or otherwise regulating public social media accounts, and especially of elite actors (Mergel, 2013). Finally, self-selection effects might be at play, compared to members of other elites, who have a more evident set of incentives (if not the need) to be as present as possible in the public life and, thus, on social media. As discussed, indeed, almost the totality of politicians integrates social media in their communication strategies; likewise, journalists make vast use of social media, both because of newsrooms' pressures and for building a personal brand that, in turn, provides significant advantages for career advancement prospects; finally, academics find advantages and incentives to build networks with colleagues and disseminate their works, reaching if not the general public, other scholars.

Information about the rate of adoptions of individual actors belonging to the public administration elites is thus very limited; official institutional accounts, instead, have much more explored. Mossberger et al. (2013) for instance document the early adoption of social media accounts on part of 75 large cities in the United States. Comparing data, they find that the rate of adoption of Facebook skyrockets from 13% in 2009 to 87% in 2011 of municipalities having an official account; likewise, the rate of adoption of Twitter among American cities, increased from 25% to 85% between 2009 and 2011.

Guillamón et al. (2016) conduct a study on the factors influencing Facebook usage of local governments focusing on Italy and Spain: they find that adoption is correlated with transparency and that larger cities tend to both use and adopt Facebook more. Conversely, they find that citizens' income negatively influences the likelihood of adoption and use, suggesting that while other forms of online communication tools are used and engaged with by early Internet adopters, usually citizens on the high end of income distribution; quite the opposite, Facebook is perceived and exploited as a cheap and popular platform that is more often adopted by lower-income citizens. In a slightly related paper, Campbell et al. (2014) investigate the adoption of social media by non-profit organizations, founders and county department that offered welfare service; results for the latter indicate low level of adoption, with only 6% of the sample adopting Facebook and another 6% adopting YouTube.

In general, the debate on bureaucrats and public administration's adoption of social media and other online tools is connected to two main phenomena: the so-called e-government and transparency and the co-production of policies (Ceron & Negri, 2016). In particular, disseminating information about policies, and the public sector activities, has been linked to an increase in both transparency and accountability and a reduction of both transaction costs and information asymmetries (Alcaide Muñoz et al., 2017), by increasing politicians and bureaucrats' interactions with citizens and other stakeholders (Ceron & Negri, 2016). Wukich & Mergel (2015) further argue that the open nature of social media platforms such as Twitter 'create the foundation for an information exchange network and the basis for online government-citizen relationships' (Wukich & Mergel, 2015: 724). Exploring such relations analysing data from a three months' observation of crisis management on Twitter, they find that while the vast majority of government accounts adopt a one-to-many communication style, 5% of messages consisted of direct replies to other stakeholders.

Of these, almost one third were directed at citizens, 9% to non-profit organizations' accounts, 9% to media actors and 50% to other government accounts. Similar results are found in Mossberger et al. (2013); municipalities exploit their official social media accounts with a 'push', top-down, communication strategy, for the major part. Still, they find some bases to suggest the emergence of 'pull' strategies and detect some efforts in terms of networking strategies both with citizens and other stakeholders as well.

In his extensive review of U.S.A. high-level public administration and diplomacy, Cull (2013) details the 'long road' that lead the public sector and single diplomats and experts to adopt and use first the internet ('Public Diplomacy 1.0') and social media later ('Public Diplomacy 2.0'). Cull (2013) notes a resistance on part of the American public sector and especially the Department of State to adopt and exploit new technologies and in particular social media. Furthermore, he finds a 'bias' within the state bureaucracy to limit their digital strategy to 'broadcasting and advocacy' (Cull, 2013: 136), rather than adopting a more networked and engaging approach. Thus, despite the efforts made to become more digitally engaged, Cull concludes by stressing the importance for the Department of State 'to strain against habits of advocacy and remind itself of the need to open two-way channels of discussion and to relax rigid message control if it is to succeed in using social media to the fullest extent' (Cull, 2013: 138). Likewise, Dodd & Collins (2016) analyses the Twitter network of embassies of Western and Center-Eastern Europe countries. They find that Western embassies are more likely to adopt Twitter, but that one Eastern Europe country (Poland) was the most influential in terms of centrality. Furthermore, analysing the content of a sub-sample of the message, they also find a prevalence of advocacy and cultural communication rather than a listening approach, suggesting the usage of Twitter as a broadcasting tool rather than exploiting the network's more engaging features, similarly to what Cull (2013) finds for the United States.

Concerning more explicitly the connections and interactions on social media, Ingenhoff et al., (2021) explore the mentions, replies and retweets' Twitter networks of three countries, developing a communication model for what they call 'public diplomacy 2.0' following the already mentioned Cull (2013). Their analysis of influential actors within the networks includes accounts from different elite segments of society as well as ordinary citizens which they coded as follows: governmental and intergovernmental organizations; NGOs and corporations, thus both no-profit and for-profit businesses; political users, thus elected officials as well as diplomats bureaucrats and diplomats as well; and, finally, they distinguished between prominent users - i.e. celebrities or journalists alike – and ordinary users (Ingenhoff et al., 2021: 5). Comparing the Austrian, Dutch and Suisse networks they found similar patterns of influence, with individual (rather than organizations actors) being more central and engaged with public debate; conversely, they found that while Suisse and Austrian influential actors relied more on the aesthetic dimension for their communication, the Dutch privileged a functional approach.



Private Business Elite

Concerning adoption rate, businesses in general appear to be among the earlier adopters compared to other categories and sectors – possibly implying that their owners and managers were more likely as well. Pookulangara & Koesler (2011) find that among the top 100 retailers in the United States, 80% had a Facebook account and 70% a Twitter one as early as 2011. Likewise, Guinan et al. (2014) reports that 87% of Fortune 100 adopt at least one social media platform to engage with stakeholders. Relatedly, Vachvey & Notta (2014) find that on average more than half of Greek businesses had either a Twitter or a Facebook account; furthering their analysis to the likelihood of managers adopting one or more social media, they found that gender had not a significant impact, while both education and age positively correlated with the likelihood of adoption. Shifting more the attention to the use of social media, Lacoste (2016) explores sales and key account managers' usage of social media, to enlarge and engage their network (made of customers or otherwise) and, especially, to build and maintain their personal and professional 'brand' and uplift their reputation.

Olanrewaju et al. (2020) provide an extensive literature review on the connections between entrepreneurs and businesspeople and social media. They identify two main streams in the literature: the management entrepreneurship and behavioural studies' framework. Concerning the first, the adoption and usage of social media was connected, in particular, to investigate the possible (dis-)advantages, and consequent (dis-)incentives, to adopt social media as a communication tool; for instance, to help establish legitimacy, especially through professional social network (Kacker & Perrigot, 2016) and to solidify their branding strategies (Cliquet, 2012). Drawing from behavioural theory, Odoom et al. (2017) explore the factors that explain the adoption and usage of social media, finding that cost-effectiveness, interactivity and compatibility were key predictors. In particular, the effects were amplified for firms with emerging markets and need to engage with and receive immediate feedbacks from customers.

Sasatanun & Charoensukmongkol (2016) explores the antecedents of social media adoption and usage in connection with the strategy adopted by businesses to position themselves: they find that high social media intensity is prevalent among businesses that adopt differentiation strategies (i.e. aiming at distinguishing themselves creating an unique brand), but low for those who adopt a cost leadership strategy (i.e. aiming at cutting the costs as much as possible in order to lower prices for consumers). Brink (2017) adds that a collaborative business model is necessary to adopt and effectively exploit the advantages of social media, as well as a central and distributed leadership, i.e. leadership practices are diffused beyond customers and partners.

Finally, social media were explicitly studied as a way through which entrepreneurs establish and nurture network relationship (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Sigfusson & Chetty (2013), for instance, adopt a social network analysis (SNA) to form and maintain weak ties, who provide well-known advantage to establish social capital and to acquire resources (Granovetter, 1973). Sigfusson & Chetty (2013) also finds that social media (and in particular LinkedIn) allow the formation and maintaining of social relations and possible collaborations among entrepreneurs that would be unthinkable otherwise.

Armed Forces

There is scant literature on the adoption and activation of military or police members (with a few notable exceptions that we briefly discuss below: Matthews-Juarez, 2013 Fajardo, 2014; Wlinski, 2015; Stern & Shalom, 2019), let alone the high-ranking ones that are the main target of the present investigation. Indeed, most of the literature regarding the relation between armed forces and social media, regards how users speak of the military, not how the military members themselves (if they do) adopt or speak on social media (Hoffman & Suphan, 2017). As in the case of the Public Administration elite, the focus is also rather on the organizations' official accounts, rather on individual actors. The (dis-)incentives to adopt or not social media are indeed also similar. First, organizational practices have a strong influence: research on military mediatisation, for example, has vastly documented how states exert control over the media representation of war and their military members, not only through censorship practices, but also by pushing their own representation and messages (Kaempf, 2013) and, more often than not, they do so by exploiting social media tools (Seo & Ebrahim 2016; Shim & Stengel, 2017) - and, not unlike other segments, in order to avoid the 'gatekeeping' effect of traditional media. At the same time, however, the very need to control the media representation of Armed Forces, can lead to military or police institutions to prohibit to their members' the adoption of social media (Norri-Sederholm et al., 2020).

Self-selection strategies might be at work as well, that might incentivize the desire for anonymity. Indeed, the social media that are more exploited for research, notably Twitter, might pose a clear disincentive for adoption on part of military members and police officers. Notably, there are numerous communities ('sub-reddits'), for example r/Military, dedicated to military and police, where members (active members, veterans and civilians alike) discuss their jobs, their superiors, and engage with each other, more often than not debating controversial topics and opinions.

For instance, Maltby et al. (2018) particularly discuss the affordance of *pseudonymity* and how it interacts with the discussions and the creation of identities and communities in military forums. Likewise, Stern & Shalom (2021) explores two private and closed Facebook groups dedicated to members of the Israel Defence Force (IDF) where the anonymity is used by military members to discuss topics that would be likely reprimanded if the same conversations took place in a public forum: from inappropriate sexual relations between officers and enlisted, to debating mental health issues, to expressing frustrations against the organization itself and its high ranking members, and to the contemplation of the moral dilemmas they face. Kuntzman & Stein (2015) find that the digital sphere is used by military members to disseminate controversial content without fear of facing sanctions.

At the same time, early literature has detailed how the organizations (military organizations and police departments alike) themselves discuss how to exploit social media to improve their service and better communicate with citizens (Crump, 2012; Norri-Sederholm et al., 2020), and especially in countries where the communication of war and military operations are a sensitive issue, (Parry & Thumim, 2016); to engage with the local communities (Perin, 2009); and to increase their perceived legitimacy in the eyes of citizens (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015). Mangat (2018a; 2018b) explicitly makes the argument for an increase in the adoption of social media on part of military members, as a strategic communication tool to both engage with the public and discuss security with citizens. Finally, among the few studies published, both De Angelis et al. (2020) Elson et al. (2020) find significant differences between civilian students and cadets, both in terms of social media usage and the *type* of platforms chosen to communicate. In particular, cadets appeared to use the instant-messaging App *Yodel* which is generally unknown to civilians of the same age. Furthermore, cadets appeared to be using social media at a less rate than their civilian counterparts, but to share similar feelings in terms of fear of cyber-bullying or future repercussion.

Voluntary Association

References to NGOs and other Voluntary Associations as actors within the digital arena have been hinted to in the previous subsections (see in particular, *Public Administration* and *Armed Forces*). As it is the case with other sectors, there is not a systematic literature on the adoption and usage of social media on part Voluntary Association elite, and even fewer references to *individual* actors within the sector. There are two main reasons for this lack of specific focus: first, as in the case of armed force, the public sector and also (in part) the private businesses elites. Second, literature deals with specific cases, such as the Syrian war and the subsequent refugee crisis of 2015 (see, for example, Siapera et al., 2018; Yang & Saffer, 2018; del Mar et al., 2019) or philanthropy in general, where elite and non-elite actors exploit social media to engage the public for specific awareness campaigns or episodes (Jacobson & Mascaro, 2016; Lukito et al., 2021), but do not necessarily entail the participation of members of the Voluntary Association elite. Siapera et al. (2018) for example conduct a study on the most influential actors in the debate over the refugee crisis on Twitter. While their findings focus on the narrative construction and confirm the existence of a power distribution on Twitter, they also briefly discuss the role that NGOs and humanitarian organizations have in shaping the discussion on refugee and immigrants in general, finding they are among the most influential actors, but mostly interacting within themselves and accounts with similar slant, remaining somewhat separated from the retweet and mentions sub-network of right-leaning accounts.

Among the few papers exploring the digital engagement of non-profit actors, Greenberg & MacAulay (2009) examined a sample of environmental non-profit organizations (ENPOs) and their usage of digital technologies. Despite the small number of cases analysed (43 websites in total) they found that the vast majority of ENPOs had a website, which was for the most part used for political activities (51%) and in part for socio-cultural initiatives (30%). However, they also found low level of disclosure about the organizations' presence on 'new media': only

9 out of 43 advertised their presence on Facebook, despite 12 of them having adopted it – and all of them failed to mention their presence on Twitter. In general, Greenberg & MacAulay (2009) detail the early adoption of digital tools for communication and networking on part of non-profit organizations, highlighting initial efforts on their part to exploit the features and affordances platforms provide. Bortree & Seltzer (2009) further explore advocacy organizations and find that most of them exploit social media to engage with stakeholders but fail to fully exploit their features to effectively build a dialogic relationship with them. Duo & Saxton (2013) build on their research to investigate not only if NGOs adopt and exploit new technologies but why and how. They conclude that new technologies and especially Twitter are influencing the way social advocacy is conducted; in particular, that the platform is exploited both for engagement and networking, both by sharing information for possible stakeholders and by making an effort to build an online community. Nah & Saxton (2013) collect Twitter and Facebook data for 100 large non-profit organizations to evaluate their behaviour in terms of adoption, intensity of use and dialogic efforts in the digital arena. In particular, they find that non-profit organization that relied more on market-based revenues, rather than on public grants or donations, were more likely to adopt social media and engage with them, possibly suggesting a more resonating parallel with their behaviour and for-profit organizations.

A more recent stream of literature (Ihm, 2019; Xu & Saxton, 2019; Bhati & McDonnell, 2020) updates and further refines the debate. Ihm (2019) analyses in detail the social media strategy of non-profit organizations, finding robust evidence of a dialogic exchange between these organizations and their stakeholders that goes well beyond simply broadcasting updates and sharing information. Likewise, Xu & Saxton (2019) find that the network connections (and engagement efforts) with stakeholders are crucial to determine the acquisition of social capital on part of non-profit organizations.

Finally, Bhati & McDonnell (2020) explicitly focus on the effectiveness of social media for fundraising; despite focusing on relatively old case (the ‘Omaha Gives’ event of 2015) they still find substantive evidence that both the position within the network (i.e. degree centrality) and the activities (in terms of both the sheer quantity of posts, and ability to engage stakeholders) are crucial to predict the success of a non-profit organization in raising funds.



Others

As discussed, there are ‘residual’ categories and segment of society where it is possible to locate elite members of society. *Cultural institutions elites*: the presence of cultural institutions and their curators on social media has been usually investigated in relation to two main aspects:

- i. as a communicative strategy to expand audiences, for instance by attracting younger generations (Pett, 2012; Lazaridou et al., 2017; Mahony et al., 2017);
- ii. as a novel tool to produce, distribute and create cultural products (Bertacchini & Morando, 2013).

In general, most of the research has focused specifically on museums, but comparable results emerge from the research on performing arts institutions and similar organizations. In terms of adoption, much has changed in the last decade (as with many sectors of society); for instance, Lopez et al. (2010) find relatively low levels of exploitation of new technologies on part of museums, and especially so in Europe compared with the United States. Conversely, in a more recent study on top 52 museums in Europe, Zafiropoulos et al. (2015) find that 45 have a Facebook account, 42 adopt Twitter and 35 employ both platforms to integrate their communication strategy. They further find that the most effective nine museums on both platforms employ refined strategies of communication. Exploring Instagram – the visual platform par excellence – Vrana et al. (2021) analyse the 65 most visited museums in the World, finding high rates of adoption with 53 institutions having an Instagram account. Focusing on the network analysis among these 53 institutions, they find evidence of both hierarchical relations, with small museums following major museums without such ties being reciprocated, and further evidence of a ‘small world network’ where the institutions are unlikely to be directly connected to each other, but where every institution is reachable within few steps.

Religious elites: the presence of religion leaders on social media is broadly conceptualized as part of a larger phenomenon, i.e. the developing construction of religious actors as “celebrities”. On such a note, Cheong (2012; 2014; 2016), perhaps the most cited scholar writing on religious leaders and their social media adoption and strategies, suggest that the relation between new technologies and religious leaders might be at the same time disruptive *and* complementary. On the one hand, indeed, Internet in general and social media platforms offer a free, decentralized, arena that clashes with the typical top-down hierarchal approach of most religious authorities. On the other hand, stressing the (already) relational construction of authority between religious leaders and their followers, social media may act as a tool to reinforce such relationship. Taking another perspective, Mikuláš & Chalányová (2017) explicitly connect the advent of social media with the process of celebrification and personalization of religious figures, focusing on the case of the Pope Francis I and Pope Benedict the XVI. Burge & Williams (2019) focus on evangelical leaders, finding that they employ social media both as a broadcasting tool – for example, to promote upcoming events - but also to explicitly engage and interact with their followers.

Case Selection

Italy

Several reasons back the choice to focus the present paper on Italy and Italian elites. First, the Italian case presents several interesting aspects in terms of the interaction of elite members among them. Historically, Italy has been characterized by political instability and fragmentation (Di Virgilio & Kato, 2001; Cotta & Verzichelli, 2007; Ippolito & Cicatiello, 2019); it has been considered to be a ‘political laboratory’ (Vassallo & Passarelli, 2015; Maccaferri, 2019); and, more recently, has been characterized to be a fertile ground for populist parties and movements to flourish (Tarchi, 2015). All these characteristics make Italy a paradigmatic case study to explore the relations between political elite actors and between them and members of other elites.

Second, Italy is marked by a widespread mistrust towards the political and media elites (Torcal, 2015; Newman et al., 2020). Research usually individuates such low levels of trust (among the lowest in the European Union) in the perceived corruption of the political system and on the ideological distance between journalists and public opinion (Splendore & Curini, 2020). Furthermore, such mistrust is reinforced by the hostility that political actors show to one another; in particular, research shows that populist parties are particularly prone to rely on friendly, insular, media, while dismissing the other as part of the governing elite (Giglietto, Valeriani, & Righetti, 2019). Conversely, Italians appear to have more trust – even compared to other European countries – in impartial, National and European, institutions possibly influencing the propensity of different actors to interact with each other.

Third, and more substantially, the individuation of elite members through positional approach (see the previous article for further details) which constitute the first dataset of the present work was focused on the Italian case to facilitate both communication with the actors and the selection itself.

Twitter

As briefly mentioned in the theoretical review, research has extensively argued that every social networking site is characterized by specific structure and features that determine a specific set of affordances, which distinguishes the different platforms. On the one hand, affordances shape the way users adapt their posts or content depending on the ‘constraints’ of the different algorithm. Likewise, elite actors (or their spin-doctors) may adapt their communication style to the platform they are using (Stier et al., 2018). While this is particularly true for politicians – as for whom communication on social media is crucial – other actors may as well be actively shaping their usage of social media. On the other hand, the audience is also *affectively* aware of the functioning of the algorithm; for example, Bucher (2017) demonstrates how people engage with the Facebook algorithm and the wide range of emotions it elicits from them, effectively mediating how they interact with the platform. Thus, we select Twitter for three main reasons. First, Twitter is vastly used by members of the elite. In particular, data shows that journalists and members of the media elite, as well as politicians at any level, are particularly present and active on the platform. Second, following relations on Twitter can be unidirectional and not necessarily reciprocated. This allows us to test a directed network of following between different members of the elites, thus capturing asymmetrical relationships among them. Finally, and again more substantially, Twitter is open in a double sense. On the one hand, tweets, retweets, comments or replies are rarely protected by the authors, making the content on the platform available to anyone. On the other hand, Twitter’s A.P.I. allows researchers to collect a vast amount of data with minimal limitations and expenditures; other platforms, and especially Instagram and TikTok, have much more restrictive policies even for what concerns academic research.

Hypotheses

Given the theoretical review provided above, we formulate our hypotheses accordingly. In particular, focusing on the Italian case, we will follow a two-step approach; first, we will test what are the factors influencing the adoption and activation on social media of elites' actors. Second, we will explore the connections between such actors, leveraging on the following network of each individual actors.

Adoption & Activation

RQ1: What are the factors that correlate elites' members to adopt and be active on social media, and in particular Twitter?

Hp1: We expect political elites' socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, level of education), the ideological position (approximated through the party they belong to), and the characteristics of the party they belong to (how much populist is their party) to influence the rate of *early* adoption and activation on social media. In particular, we expect men to be more likely to be early adopters; younger people and those with a higher level of education to be as well.

Hp2: We expect media elites' socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, level of education). In particular, we expect men to be more likely to be early adopters; younger people and those with a higher level of education to be as well.

Hp3: As the incentives to adopt and be active on social media for the *academic and intellectual elites* are less evident compared to the political and media elite, we expect demographics characteristics to influence the adoption and activation on social media. In particular, we expect age to be the most relevant factor. Second, we expect the field of expertise to be a significant

factor as well: in particular, we expect experts and academics in hard/pure fields to be significantly less likely to adopt and be active on social media compared to experts from soft/applied subjects.

Hp4: As the incentives to adopt and be active on social media for the *business elites* are less evident compared to the political and media elite, we expect demographics characteristics to be a determining factor in explaining the adoption and activation on social media. In particular, we expect age and education to have a significant impact on the likelihood of adoption and activation on social media. Second, we expect BtC businesspeople to be significantly more incentivised to adopt and be active on Twitter compared to BtB businesspeople.

Hp5: We expect actors from *armed force, religious and public administration elites* to have strong disincentive to adopt and be active on social media; as such, we expect members of these elites to be significantly less likely than other actors to adopt and be active on Twitter.



Networks of Following

RQ2: What are the factors influencing the likelihood of elites' actors following other elite members? Given the network, who are the most central and influencing actors? Do the factors influencing the likelihood of forming a following connection change within elites?

Hp7: We expect a number of factors to influence the likelihood of forming relations (ties) among members of the elites' network. In particular, we expect elites to be more cohesive within each other, with respect to interact with members of other elites.

Likewise, we formulate additional hypotheses focusing in particular on the relation within the political and media elites.

Hp8: Within the political elite network, we have two main expectations: first, the likelihood of connection will be influenced by belonging to the same party. Second, we expect real life hierarchies to be reflected in the Twitter network, with party leaders being more central actors with respect to other political actors.

Hp9: Within the media elite network, we have two main expectations: first, the network will show high density. Second, we expect real life hierarchies to be reflected in the Twitter network, with editor-in-chiefs and directors being more central actors with respect to other media actors.

Data & Methods

The Datasets

The present chapter relies on two original datasets, both of them manually compiled. The first one is described in great detail in the first chapter (pp. 38-64) and comprises all the members of the ‘elites’ in the Italian society, identified through positional approach and subsequently refined through snow-balling questionnaires proposed to the already identified members. As discussed, it comprises politicians, academics, bureaucrats, journalists and editors, businesspeople, armed forces’ members, and voluntary associations’ actors that occupy the most key positions in each, respective, field.

The dataset contains several information about the identified actors: other than personal information (which were subsequently anonymized), demographic information, such as age, gender, place of birth; academic and professional information, such as level of education, institution of (higher) education, specialization of education and subfield; further information were added about the position held and the specific level of career advancement, i.e. editor-in-chief, CFO, President of the Senate etc. Furthermore, specific information about each elite were added, i.e. in the case of the political elite, for instance, the party, the European Parliament group, as well as indicators at the party level. Likewise, for the media elite, further data on the type of media (if any) the actor worked for, the name and other organization-level information.

The second dataset was compiled by manually searching for these elite actors, by name and surname, on the micro-blogging platform Twitter. The search was then validated by a second coder, who was able to identify one more member of such elites on the social media; thus, the original coder once again revised the mapping, finding no additional names to be added. While using inductive approaches (i.e. through machine learning techniques) was a viable possibility as well, the manual approach was considered the most suitable; on the one hand, because most members are particularly under the spotlight (i.e. the case par excellence: party leaders) and,

thus, immediately recognizable and most of the times with a so-called ‘verified’ account. On the other hand, because a manual approach conducted by a human coder is much more reliable in terms of distinguishing ‘real accounts’ from parodies, impersonations or mere homonymous. In total 1573 accounts were identified.

Additional information was collected for the second dataset as well, including username, number of followers, number of friends, year of joining and number of tweets posted, and whether the account was set to private or not (the default on Twitter is not). Then, the REST Twitter API (Application Programming Interface) was used to retrieve the following network. Thus, relying on the R free software and programming language a directed matrix was created; each row and column representing one of the identified accounts. Each cell was then programmed to display value 1 if the actor in the row *follows* the actor in the column and 0 otherwise; the diagonal was, thus, automatically excluded from the analysis.

Network Analysis (NA)

Network Analysis (NA) refers to a number of methods that allow describing and making inferences about relations between different actors, starting from the intuition that certain phenomena are better understood through them. Given this framework, network analysis has vastly been employed by social sciences (Chiesi, 2001). NA builds on the theory of graphs, a mathematical branch describing the relations between objects. A graph $G(V, E)$ consists of a set of *nodes* V (also called ‘vertices’) and by a set of edges E , ‘ties’ that connects dyads of nodes, describing a certain (i.e. mathematical or social) relationship. Finite graphs can be represented mathematically in *adjacency matrixes* and graphically through geometrical shapes connected by lines. Table 2.2 presents an overview of the main concepts and metrics pertaining (social) network analysis.

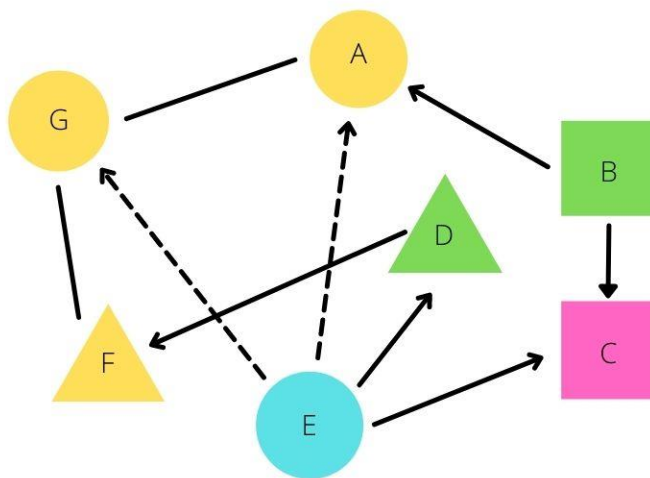
Table 2.2: Main Concepts and Characteristics of Network Analysis

| Main Concepts | |
|---|--|
| <i>Graph</i> | A Graph G is a mathematical object that consists of a set of Vertexes V and Edges E |
| <i>Vertexes</i> | Vertexes (nodes) represent the entities (or actors) whose relationships are of interest |
| <i>Edges</i> | Edges represent the relationships between the vertexes |
| <i>Adjacency Matrix</i> | Adjacency Matrices are squared $N \times N$ matrices that can be used to represent finite graph. They are always one mode matrices, as rows and columns represent the same entities. |
| <i>Affiliation Matrix</i> | Affiliation Matrices are non-squared (if not accidentally) matrices that can be two or more mode matrices. A graph describing women attending events can be represented in an affiliation matrix. |
| <i>Ways</i> | Ways are a characteristic of Affiliation Matrices representing the dimensions (usually two, rows and columns) of the matrix. For example, a graph describing pupils (rows) attending or not specific schools (columns) can be represented in a two-way matrix. |
| <i>Modes</i> | Modes are a characteristic of Affiliation Matrices representing the kinds of entities or actors being represented. |
| Main Characteristics of Networks | |
| <i>Homophily</i> | Homophily is a crucial concept for network analysis in social sciences. It refers to the likelihood of vertexes with similar attributes to be connected compared to dissimilar ones. |
| <i>Density</i> | Density is a characteristic of the network defined as the ratio between the observed number of edges and the number of the total possible edges. |
| <i>Distance</i> | For any given two edges, the geodesic distance refers to the shortest path connecting the edges. |
| <i>Structural Holes</i> | Structural holes represent the lack of a connection or a tie between two or more entities. |
| <i>Bridges</i> | Bridges are direct ties between two vertexes that would be otherwise disconnected. |
| <i>Centrality</i> | Centrality refers to a family of measures that describe the structural position of a given node. The simplest measure of centrality is degree centrality, which is simply the number of ties a node has. |
| <i>Cliques</i> | A clique is a subset of actors that is adjacent to every other actor in the clique and it is impossible to add any more actor without violating this condition. |

In figure 2.1, we present a simple example to illustrate the most basic characteristics of nodes, ties and networks. Nodes usually have a set of characteristics, ‘attributes’, that can be categorical (i.e. being unemployed), or numeric, either discrete or continuous, (i.e. being a 25 year old, having thirty thousand euros of disposable income). In our example below, we can graphically represent these attributes through the different shapes and colours of the geometric figures.

For example, let us suppose the network below represents the relations between employees in a firm; shapes can represent the department the worker is in (i.e. sales, finance or R&D) and colours can represent the role (i.e. director, manager, intern and external consultant). Likewise, ties can or not have ‘a direction’, depending on the type of relationship and such direction can be reciprocal or not. Furthermore, ties can be characterised according to their ‘strength’; depending on the research question, we might consider the relation between two best friends to be a strong tie, while the one between two acquaintances to be weak. In our graphical representation, we have several example of ties. Building on the firm example, we might suppose that the tie represents the work relation i.e. ‘can assign tasks’; for example, we might suppose that E (blue) is the director and thus can assign tasks to A, F and G who are all interns (yellow), while the interns cannot assign tasks to their boss, and thus, the relation is ‘directed’. Conversely, the relations between the interns (F and G and G and A) do not have a direction as we can consider their work relation to be symmetrical. Furthermore, we can explore the depth of the relationship, or its importance: the typical distinction is between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ ties that are conventionally indicated respectively with the solid and dotted lines. For example, we can differentiate between work relations that are more or less frequent considering the first to be stronger than the second; for example, the dotted – directed – tie connecting E to A would signify that the work relation is less frequent than the one connecting D to F.

Figure 2.1: Example of a Network - Own Elaboration



Lastly, the network itself can be analysed through several and comparisons among between different network configurations or different networks can be thus be advanced. Among the most commonly used in social science, at the connection level, *homophily* – to which extent nodes with the same characteristics are likely to form a tie. Concerning the distribution of the ties, *density* – how close tight a network is, or how many direct ties there are over the possible number ties (Borgatti et al., 2020). In our example above, the network density is 0.43, which is the ratio between the number of actual direct ties (9) and the number of potential direct ties (21). Measures of centrality are also vastly employed to explore the relative importance of actors in given groups: the most common ones are ‘betweenness centrality’ – for a given node, the number of shortest paths connecting every dyad that pass through that node. ‘Closeness centrality’ – how ‘close’ in terms of paths a node is to every other node in the graph. ‘Degree centrality’ or the number of ties a node has. ‘Eigen-vector centrality’, or how ‘popular’ or influential a node is within the network, calculated as how well connected a node is to other influential scores (Gandini & Caliandro, 2019).

Exponential Random Graph Models (ERGMs)

Exponential Random Graph Models (ERGMs) are a family of network models, so-called P^* models, that are empirical estimates of the likelihood of the formation of a tie, by “by making many draws from a set of random networks based on principles of Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC)” (Esteve del Valle et al., 2021: 7). At its core, the underlying idea behind such model is to assess the probability of random networks to occur compared to the actual network under investigation - which also has a fixed probability distribution -, given a set of parameters. Robins et al. (2007) make a simple and very effective example: suppose we expect *reciprocity* as a determining parameter for the formation of the observed network (e.g. we expect that account *a* following account *b* on Twitter is influenced by whether account *b* follows *a* and vice versa). We compare the observed network to sample draw from random network sets that share given characteristics with the observed network (at the very least the number of nodes to be fit in the network). We thus employ maximum likelihood criterion to select parameters so that the most likely degree of reciprocity is the same of the observed network. “If we estimate a reciprocity parameter for the observed network, and if we can be confident that this parameter is positive, we may infer that there is more reciprocity in the observed network than expected by chance” (Robins et al., 2007: 176). Thus, for a selected set of parameters, ERGMs allow to estimate the probability of the entire (observed) network as a function of a set of parameters that we expect to increase the likelihood of the observed model to occur than it would by chance. The general model²⁶ can be formally written as:

$$P(Y = y) = \frac{\exp(\theta' g(y))}{k(\theta)}$$

²⁶ The following description of ERGMs Models is based on the RStudio ‘ergm’ package’s Reference Manual.

Where:

- Y is a random variable for the state of the network, with realization y (the actual network under inspection)
- $g(y)$ is a vector of model statistics
- θ is the vector of coefficients for those statistics (the parameters that affect the likelihood of the observed network to occur)
- $k(\theta)$ represents the quantity in the numerator summed over all possible networks – limited, however, to all networks with the same node set as the observed network, (y)

The extended notation is a more straightforward interpretation, as it is more clearly represented as a traditional maximum likelihood model. The right part of the equation represents the impact and significance of the fitted parameters on the likelihood of the observed network, as opposed to the occurrence of a network from the random network set.

$$\log(\exp(\theta'g(y))) = \theta_1g_1(y) + \theta_2g_2(y) + \dots + \theta_pg_p(y)$$

Results & Discussion

As discussed above, the first set of hypotheses, regards the Adoption, Early Adoption and Activation on social media on part of the elite members in general, and with specific expectations for each singular elite. Table 2.3 presents a summary of the main hypotheses.

Table 2.3: Hypotheses on Adoption, Activation, and Early Adoption

Hp1: We expect political elites' socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, level of education), the ideological position (approximated through the party they belong to), and the characteristics of the party they belong to (populist v. mainstream) to influence the rate of *early* adoption and activation on social media. In particular, we expect men to be more likely to be early adopters; younger people and those with a higher level of education to be as well.

Hp2: We expect media elites' socio-demographic characteristics (i.e. age, gender, level of education). In particular, we expect men to be more likely to be early adopters; younger people and those with a higher level of education to be as well.

Hp3: As the incentives to adopt and be active on social media for the academic and intellectual elites are less evident compared to the political and media elite, we expect demographics characteristics to influence the adoption and activation on social media. In particular, we expect age to be the most relevant factor. Second, we expect the field of expertise to be a significant factor as well: in particular, we expect experts and academics in hard/pure fields to be significantly less likely to adopt and be active on social media compared to experts from soft/applied subjects.

Hp4: As the incentives to adopt and be active on social media for the business elites are less evident compared to the political and media elite, we expect demographics characteristics to be a determining factor in explaining the adoption and activation on social media. In particular, we expect age and education to have a significant impact on the likelihood of adoption and activation on social media. Second, we expect BtC businesspeople to be significantly more incentivised to adopt and be active on Twitter compared to BtB businesspeople.

Hp5: We expect actors from armed force, religious and public administration elites to have strong disincentive to adopt and be active on social media; as such, we expect members of these elites to be significantly less likely than other actors to adopt and be active on Twitter.

Adoption & Activation

Before tackling and commenting on the results for each independent elite, we fit a general model to explore the macro-effects of elite category, and the general effects of age, gender, level and type of education.

In order to do so, we fit four models (Model 1 to Model 4). Models 1 and 2 explore the predictors that influence the likelihood of respectively adopting social media usage and be active on it. As the dependent variable is a dummy variable taking value 1 'yes' and 0 'no' in both Model 1 and 2 we fit a Logistic Regression Model. Models 3 and 4, on the other hand, explore the predictors that affect the likelihood of being an Early adopter of the social media. Model 3's dependent variable is numeric, as it captures the number of years (0-13) since the Actor has adopted Twitter. Thus, a simple Multivariate Regression Analysis was fit. Conversely, the dependent variable in Model 4 takes value one if the actor had adopted Twitter for more than 9 years (the median value of the variable) and 0 otherwise.



Table 2.4: Results of Models predicting Adoption Activation and Early Adoption

| VARIABLES | Adoption | Activation | Date Join | Early Join |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Media | -0.398*** (0.121) | -0.309 (0.218) | 1.639*** (0.341) | 0.655*** (0.166) |
| Business | -1.716*** (0.0897) | -1.240*** (0.175) | 0.359 (0.321) | -0.109 (0.141) |
| PA | -2.129*** (0.103) | -0.617** (0.264) | -0.459 (0.484) | -0.335 (0.210) |
| Academics | -1.283*** (0.0949) | -0.943*** (0.180) | 0.310 (0.327) | -0.0411 (0.144) |
| Voluntary | -1.119*** (0.332) | -0.568 (0.680) | 1.005 (1.198) | 0.737 (0.639) |
| Military | -2.644*** (0.562) | - | -3.295 (2.117) | - |
| Religion | -1.418*** (0.282) | - | 0.0649 (1.494) | 0.456 (0.717) |
| Culture | -1.049*** (0.131) | -1.106*** (0.251) | 1.087** (0.467) | 0.274 (0.210) |
| Female | -0.0744 (0.0680) | -0.0531 (0.135) | -1.015*** (0.215) | -0.436*** (0.0947) |
| Age | -0.0281*** (0.00268) | -0.0253*** (0.00580) | -0.000749 (0.00942) | -0.00179 (0.00417) |
| Degree | -0.0325 (0.542) | -0.200 (0.175) | -0.490 (1.466) | 0.237 (0.657) |
| More Qualification | 0.0645 (0.548) | - | -0.773 (1.494) | 0.194 (0.669) |
| Humanities | 0.0450 (0.135) | -0.207 (0.300) | -0.420 (0.491) | -0.166 (0.222) |
| Law | 0.107 (0.137) | -0.295 (0.299) | -1.145** (0.483) | -0.472** (0.218) |
| Military | 0.471 (0.599) | - | - | - |
| STEM | 0.122 (0.144) | -0.701** (0.312) | -0.747 (0.520) | -0.438* (0.233) |
| Social Sciences | 0.366*** (0.136) | -0.367 (0.296) | -0.248 (0.481) | -0.0879 (0.217) |
| Constant | 2.196*** (0.562) | 3.574*** (0.448) | 9.336*** (1.595) | 0.398 (0.715) |
| Observations | 3,345 | 970 | 1,007 | 1,005 |
| R-squared | | | 0.080 | |

Starting with Adoption (Model 1), we notice that members of different elites adopt Twitter at significantly diverse rates. In particular, politicians (the reference category) adopts Twitter at significantly higher rates compared to other elites. Furthermore, while media are closer (but still significantly lower) to politicians' adoption rate, we clearly see that members of the Armed Forces are substantially less likely to adopt Twitter. *Age* is also significant and in the expected direction: a unit increase in age, one year more, decreases the likelihood of adopting social media. Conversely, neither gender, nor the level of education affects the likelihood of having a Twitter account. The subject of specialization, however, has an impact, with people graduated from social sciences more likely, compared to those with a degree in creative arts (the reference category), to adopt Twitter. In a nutshell, the profile of a member of the elite who are present on Twitter is a politician, younger than the average, and with a degree in social science.

Next, we investigate the level of Activation (Model 2) on social media. Again, politicians are more likely to be active on Twitter compared to members of the business elite, academics and members of Public Administration, but not significantly so compared to Media Elite²⁷ members. Again, level of Education and gender are not significant; an interesting result considering that women, and especially women in power, are more likely to be subjected to harassment on social media and less likely to benefit from the branding opportunities platforms offer. At least in this case, however, increased harassment and lower return on the investment does not translate into self-censorship. Finally, having a STEM degree decreases the likelihood of being active on social media, compared with those who specialized in Creative subjects.

²⁷ The effects for Armed Forces and Religion members are omitted, likely as a result of the low levels of both adoption and activation in these two categories.

Finally, we test the same variables on the likelihood of being early adopters of Twitter. As discussed, we tested this hypothesis in two ways, with the (numeric, discrete) dependent variable expressed as number of years active on Twitter (Model 3), and with the (dummy) dependent variable taking value 1 if the actor had been on Twitter for more years than the median value and 0 otherwise (Model 4).

A first remark is that there are few significant variables both in Model 3 and in Model 4. In particular, we observe that members of the Media and Cultural elites are more likely to have been on Twitter for long compared to politicians, meaning that even if they are present at (slightly) lower rates compared they have been among the first categories to join social media. Next, we do observe that, in this case, gender is significant, with women less likely to have been on Twitter for a long time compared to men.

Next, we focus on Model 4. Here, we observe that only members of the media elite were more likely to be early adopters compared to politicians, while no other elites' actors were significantly more or less likely to be an early adopter. This possibly suggests two interpretations. First, that while initially politicians were not incentivized to adopt social, they did join at higher rate when they realized the potential for campaigning and communicate directly with their constituents. On the other hand, they might have decided to join because of and when they decided to run for an elective position, feeling pressured to join social media to increase their exposure.

Next, age is not significant. Finally, gender is as well significant and, again, negative, meaning that women are less likely to have been early adopters of social media. In a nutshell, we have seen that different elites behave differently in terms of adopting and be active on social media and that membership to diverse elite is the most discriminating factor, even if some socio-demographic (i.e. age, gender, subject of education) have an effect too.

Next, we analyse the Hypothesis (Hp1) pertaining specifically to the political elite. In particular, we test the two opposing hypotheses of whether the rate of adoption, activation and early adoption is spread across all parties or is somehow dependent on ideology and typology of party.

Table 8.5: Adoption, Early Adoption and Activation within Political Elite

| VARIABLES | Adoption | Activation | Date Join | Early Join |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Age | -0.0322*** (0.00434) | -0.00665 (0.00819) | -0.00694 (0.0117) | -0.00699 (0.00595) |
| Female | -0.180* (0.0964) | 0.164 (0.177) | -0.916*** (0.237) | -0.460*** (0.125) |
| Degree ²⁸ | 0.0747 (0.103) | 0.0174 (0.179) | 0.0594 (0.255) | - - |
| Populism | -0.0368** (0.0184) | -0.00302 (0.0327) | -0.219*** (0.0440) | -0.118*** (0.0226) |
| Ideology | -0.0307 (0.0222) | -0.0412 (0.0385) | -0.214*** (0.0543) | -0.00986 (0.0283) |
| Constant | 2.840*** (0.313) | 2.230*** (0.547) | 10.87*** (0.768) | 1.216** (0.546) |
| Observations | 1,010 | 787 | 789 | 789 |
| R-squared | | | 0.091 | |

Table 2.5 presents the results regarding Hp1²⁹. We can refute Hp1a as populism (and partially ideology) has an effect both on early adoption, years on Twitter and adoption in general. In particular, I observe that while it does not affect Activation, being more populist *decreases* the likelihood of both adopting and being an early adopter. Ideology also has an effect: indeed, being more right wing decreases the likelihood of having been on Twitter for longer time (but not to be significantly an early adopter with respect to the median).

²⁸ Education was recoded to take only two value, 1 if the politician has a degree and 0 otherwise. This was due to the lower number of observations.

²⁹ Ideology and Populism were taken from Chapel Hill dataset 2019. Ideology was taken from the value of “Irgen” (left-right position in general, from 0 to 10). Populism was calculated as the salience of the people versus the elite rhetoric from 0 to 10.

We can conclude that, in the case of politicians, being right wing and populist actually decreases the likelihood of adoption and early adoption.

Thus, despite the affinity that is often postulated between populist parties and social media (Gerbaudo, 2018), we observe the opposite effect in this case. The explanations can be several: on the one hand, populist politicians (and especially M5S) may have entered the political arena later than members of other parties, and thus have had later incentives to adopt social media. On the other hand, populist parties may have been selecting different social media, which would make Twitter a more liberal and mainstream social media.

Demographics also had a partial effect. Age decreases the likelihood of adopting Twitter, but has no effect on the likelihood of being an early adopter. Second, gender also has an effect: consistently with the literature, women in politics are less likely to adopt Twitter and to be early adopters.

Next, we test the hypothesis on the media elite (Hp2).

Table 2.6: Adoption, Early Adoption and Activation within Media Elite

| VARIABLES | Adoption | Activation | Date Join | Early Join |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Age | -0.0540*** (0.00903) | -0.0476** (0.0211) | -0.0478** (0.0206) | 0.00658 (0.0101) |
| Female | -0.591*** (0.221) | -0.172 (0.474) | -0.614 (0.518) | -0.158 (0.267) |
| Degree | -0.222 (0.223) | -0.492 (0.484) | 0.190 (0.463) | -0.108 (0.285) |
| Radio | -0.302 (0.472) | - | -0.235 (1.114) | -0.0339 (0.586) |
| TV | -0.262 (0.205) | -0.141 (0.420) | -0.401 (0.447) | 0.219 (0.268) |
| Other | 0.0537 (0.273) | -0.709 (0.450) | -0.176 (0.579) | -0.193 (0.317) |
| Constant | 3.878*** (0.624) | 4.832*** (1.473) | 12.41*** (1.304) | 0.922 (0.706) |
| Observations | 231 | 123 | 128 | 231 |
| R-squared | | | 0.062 | |

In the case of media elite, we observe the opposite effect. Instead of observing an effect in terms of type of media the actor works for, we see the influence of demographic characteristics. Indeed, age is significant and in the expected direction: older people are less likely to adopt and be present on Twitter. Women also appear to be less likely to adopt Twitter, even if gender is not significant in the following models. Indeed, the rates of adoption, activation and early adoption on part of the media elite appears to be generally homogenous.

Table 2.7: Adoption, Early Adoption and Activation within Academic Elite

| VARIABLES | Adoption | Activation | Date Join | Early Join |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Age | -0.0329*** (0.00473) | -0.0599*** (0.0126) | -0.0548** (0.0219) | -0.0279*** (0.0104) |
| Female | 0.134 (0.138) | -0.126 (0.291) | -0.724 (0.549) | -0.395 (0.254) |
| Humanities | 0.000830 (0.150) | 0.801** (0.358) | 0.249 (0.674) | 0.110 (0.317) |
| Law | 0.0988 (0.151) | 0.116 (0.332) | -0.573 (0.666) | -0.269 (0.307) |
| Social Sciences | 0.425*** (0.148) | 0.257 (0.313) | 0.0825 (0.623) | -0.0991 (0.290) |
| Constant | 1.220*** (0.347) | 4.188*** (0.875) | 12.07*** (1.520) | 2.123*** (0.721) |
| Observations | 894 | 152 | 154 | 154 |
| R-squared | | | 0.059 | |

Next, we test Hp3 on the Intellectual elite, which we can generally consider partially confirmed. In particular, we do observe the effects of age; it is significant and in the expected direction. Older actors are less likely to adopt and be active on Twitter. Second, we observe that the field of specialization has an impact: academics within social sciences are more likely to adopt Twitter, than those in the STEM (the reference category).

Table 2.8: Adoption, Early Adoption and Activation within Business Elite

| VARIABLES | Adoption | Activation | Date Join | Early Join |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Age | -0.0263*** (0.00534) | -0.0266** (0.0131) | -0.0454* (0.0247) | -0.0162 (0.0123) |
| Female | 0.224 (0.147) | -0.203 (0.296) | 0.272 (0.574) | -0.316 (0.282) |
| Degree | -0.143 (0.152) | -0.0251 (0.338) | -0.948 (0.620) | 0.511 (0.578) |
| Customer | 0.0100 (0.115) | 0.398 (0.254) | -0.598 (0.487) | -0.124 (0.243) |
| Constant | 0.721* (0.389) | 1.620* (0.887) | 12.58*** (1.681) | 0.831 (0.931) |
| Observations | 940 | 132 | 149 | 149 |
| R-squared | | | 0.049 | |

Next, we test our hypothesis on business elite. Again, we observe that age is the most relevant factor being negative and significant. From the results presented in Table 2.8, we can state that Hp4 is not supported; neither education nor the typology of the elites – whether they are modelled on a ‘Business to Customer’ or ‘Business to Business’ model - are significant. Conversely, Hp5 is supported. We tested the hypotheses by comparing the level of adoption and activation across the different elites. Indeed, armed forces, religious and public administration members are significantly less likely to adopt and to be active on social media. Finally, I present some exploratory results about Cultural and Voluntary elites.

In Table 2.9, we get a partial answer to our question over the cultural elite. Indeed, we observe very similar results compared to previous analyses. In particular, the demographic dimensions are particularly relevant for explaining their behaviour on Twitter. This is particularly true for age, which has very comparable effects with previous elites. Likewise, gender affects both Adoption and Activation: women, consistently with the literature, are less likely to both adopt and be active on Twitter.

Table 2.9: Adoption, Early Adoption and Activation within Cultural Elite

| VARIABLES | Adoption | Activation | Date Join | Early Join |
|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Age | -0.0334*** (0.00579) | -0.0322** (0.0129) | -0.0274 (0.0229) | -0.00684 (0.0117) |
| Female | -0.292** (0.148) | -0.502* (0.297) | -0.714 (0.535) | -0.440 (0.271) |
| Degree | -0.00304 (0.136) | -0.0134 (0.273) | -0.0115 (0.482) | 0.156 (0.249) |
| Constant | 1.587*** (0.393) | 2.768*** (0.843) | 10.77*** (1.462) | 0.962 (0.735) |
| Observations | 452 | 111 | 121 | 121 |
| R-squared | | | 0.022 | |

In the case of Voluntary associations, it was not possible to fit any inferential model as the number of observations is too low but relying on simply descriptive statistics, observe that such Elite is particularly homogeneous in terms of adoption and activation rate. Indeed, all its members appear to (not) be using social media in very comparable ways, regardless of gender, education or age.

Network Analysis

The second part of our discussion tackles hypotheses Hp7 to Hp9, (positing the likelihood of an actor being central due to demographic characteristics and to reflect real-life hierarchies within the political and media elite), and regards several questions pertaining the analysis of the ‘following’ network of elite actors on Twitter. All the statistical tests and visualizations were conducted in RStudio, version 4.1.2.

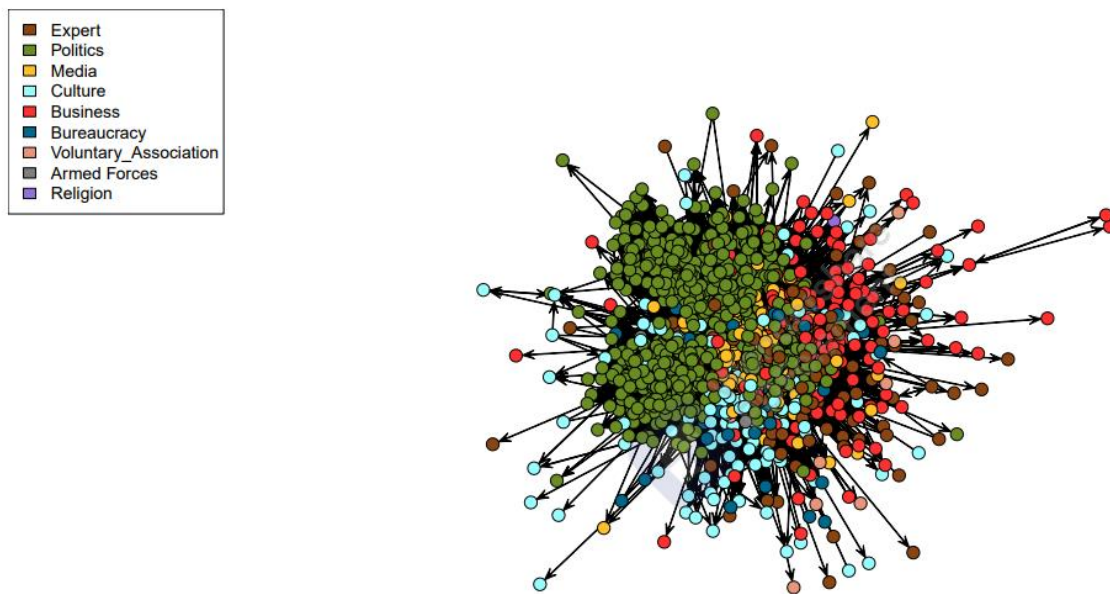
The general network presents a density of 0.04, suggesting that about 4% of the possible ties are observed. By comparison, Political elites’ network presents a density of 0.075, meaning that politicians are more likely to form ties compared to the total network. Religion appears to be the ‘most dense’ elite, with a density of 0.33. Next, Mass Media Elite, likewise, has a network density of 0.24, followed by Public Administration (0.1). Cultural elite also presents a less sparse network compared to the total (0.05). On the other hand, Intellectual, Voluntary Associations and Religion Elite all present an average density of 0.03, thus, lower than the average density of the general network. Business Elite and Armed Forces present, likewise, low density (0.02 and 0 respectively).

We thus observe quite a lot of variance between the different elite networks.

As discussed, we fit an *ergm* model to estimate the impact of attributes of the network (i.e. mutuality) and the attributes of the actors (i.e. elite type) in determining the network we observe, compared to a random network. We thus first calculate the random and the observed network and we find the latter to be significantly different and, thus, non- random. We then estimated several *ergm* models to gradually test, which characteristics influence the outcome of the observed network.

In Figure 2.2, we provide a graphical representation of the whole network.

Figure 2.2: Graphical Representation of the Complete Network Elite



As reported in the table below (table 2.10) we see that the factors influencing the formation of the observed network are both structural – the total number of ties and the rate of mutual relations – and attributes at the actor’s level – the type of elite the actor belongs to. The likelihood of forming a tie in the observed network is influenced by membership to a given elite; indeed, the log-odds ratio of forming a tie within the same Elite are 0.78 higher than across groups; after the exponentiation the ratios, we obtain an independent increased probability of 2.17 times.

Table 2.10: ERGM Model Total Network

Monte Carlo Maximum Likelihood Results:

| | Estimate | Std. Error | MCMC % | z value | Pr(> z) |
|----------------------|------------|------------|--------|---------|------------|
| Edges | -3.749.044 | 0.005012 | 0 | -748.0 | <1e-04 *** |
| Mutual | 2.600.145 | 0.010964 | 0 | 237.1 | <1e-04 *** |
| Nodematch Elite Type | 0.777568 | 0.006057 | 0 | 128.4 | <1e-04 *** |

Null Deviance: 2969210 on 2141832 degrees of freedom
Residual Deviance: 732923 on 2141829 degrees of freedom

AIC: 732929 BIC: 732967 (Smaller is better. MC Std. Err. = 28.42)

Thus, notwithstanding its simplicity – the estimation of ergm is very machine-intensive -, the model allows to confirm Hp7. Indeed, we observe that the probability of forming a tie is more likely within rather than between elites.

Next, we investigate the determinants of popularity (expressed as Betweenness Centrality³⁰ and Eigen Vector). First, the Elite an actor belongs to determines the likelihood of being central in the network. With respect to politicians, Bureaucracy, Culture, Experts are all significantly less likely to be central actors in the general network.

The same effect is present, and even more marked for Eigen Vector Centrality. With respect to Betweenness centrality, Eigen Vector is a measure that takes into account the quality of the ties a node is able to form (i.e. the popularity), and not only the quantity. In this case, all elites' members (with the exception of Media and Armed Forces³¹) were less likely to be as 'popular' as politicians.

³⁰ Other measures of centrality were tested, with consistent results to Betweenness Centrality.

³¹ It should be noted that the observations belonging to the Armed Forces' elite were so few that results pertaining to this category are likely biased.

Turning to the demographic characteristics of the actors, being female slightly *increases* the Eigen Vector centrality of the actor, despite the literature suggesting a lower relevance of women' voices in the context of social media communication.

Finally, we observe that both the Number of Follower and the Number of Tweets posted influence the likelihood of being a central actor. Likewise, years spent on Twitter increases the Eigen Vector centrality of the actor.

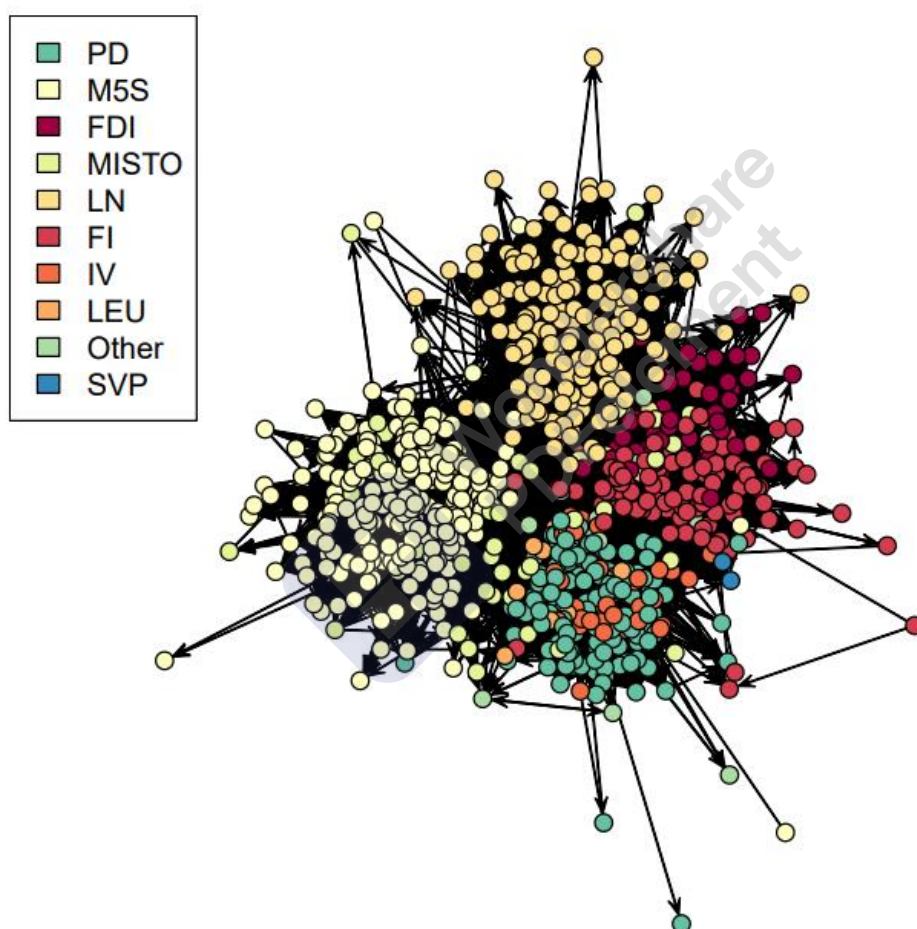


Table 2.11: Determinants of Centrality

| VARIABLES | Betweenness | Eigen Vector |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Armed Forces | -2,186 (5,279) | -0.0179 (0.0187) |
| Business | -1,229 (961.8) | -0.0114*** (0.00341) |
| Bureaucracy | -1,185** (563.2) | -0.0153*** (0.00200) |
| Culture | -2,032*** (587.9) | -0.0185*** (0.00208) |
| Experts | -1,132* (590.2) | -0.00866*** (0.00209) |
| Media | 737.6 (565.3) | -0.00112 (0.00200) |
| Religion | -11,172*** (2,793) | -0.0226** (0.00989) |
| Voluntary | -1,783 (2,367) | -0.0168** (0.00839) |
| Female | -0.834 (370.6) | 0.00238* (0.00131) |
| Degree | 75.51 (400.3) | 0.000699 (0.00142) |
| Age | -16.77 (16.10) | -0.000108* (5.70e-05) |
| Years on T. | 131.5 (92.76) | 0.00133*** (0.000329) |
| N Followers | 0.00792*** (0.000623) | 2.76e-09 (2.21e-09) |
| N Tweet | 0.0967*** (0.00976) | 1.59e-07*** (3.46e-08) |
| Constant | 266,893 (186,572) | 2.701*** (0.661) |
| Observations | 1,100 | 1,100 |
| R-squared | 0.253 | 0.187 |

Finally, we test the hypotheses regarding the networks of the Political and Media Elites. As to hypothesis Hp8, we expected ties within party to be more cohesive compared to the general political elite. This is generally confirmed for all the major parties (Lega Nord, M5S, PD, FdI and FI). Next, we expected real life hierarchies to be reflected in the network. In particular, we expected party leaders – and important political members to be more central with respect to other actors.

Figure 3: Graphical Representation of Political Elite



As reported below (Table 2.12), we present the results concerning the characteristics at the node level that influences the likelihood of being a central actor within the political elite network. Hp8 is clearly not supported as neither gender nor being a leader increase the likelihood of being a crucial actor in the network. On the other hand, the behaviour on Twitter on part of the actors; how many years the actor has been on Twitter, the number of Followers and the number of tweets the actor posted. Thus, expectedly, the more an actor can be considered active on Twitter (i.e. posting more) the more central or popular the actor is.

More interestingly, we find that the party they belong to influences the likelihood that an actor will be central within the network. With respect to Forza Italia (FI), that was taken as the reference category, almost all other parties' members are less likely to be central with respect to Eigen Vector centrality. The two notable exception are Partito Democratico (PD) and Italia Viva (IV), whose members are more likely to be "Eigen" central. Considering that the same is not true for Betweenness Centrality (in the case of PD the relationship is even reversed), the explanation is probably that FI's members are not significantly more central with respect to other actors, but they are more likely to be connected with a few, extremely popular, actors – likely members of FI elite as well. A similar situation likely describes both Italia Viva and Partito Democratico' networks.

Table 2.12: Determinants of Centrality within Political Elite

| VARIABLES | Betweenness | Eigen Vector |
|--------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| FdI | -1,140 (998.9) | -0.00697* (0.00378) |
| IV | -1,733 (1,052) | 0.0157*** (0.00398) |
| LeU | -1,202 (1,647) | 0.0138** (0.00624) |
| LN | -373.5 (777.4) | -0.0115*** (0.00294) |
| M5S | -819.2 (727.4) | -0.0135*** (0.00275) |
| Other | -2,231** (944.7) | -0.0107*** (0.00358) |
| PD | -1,439* (738.4) | 0.00925*** (0.00280) |
| SVP | -1,852 (3,626) | -0.0223 (0.0137) |
| Leader | 1,043 (792.3) | 0.00105 (0.00300) |
| Gender | 324.6 (460.5) | -0.00103 (0.00174) |
| Degree | 310.9 (482.2) | 0.00222 (0.00183) |
| Age | -41.29* (22.55) | -0.000323*** (8.54e-05) |
| Years on T. | 123.0 (123.8) | 0.00122*** (0.000469) |
| N Followers | 0.0219*** (0.00132) | 1.23e-09 (5.00e-09) |
| N Tweet | 0.0935*** (0.0125) | 1.53e-07*** (4.74e-08) |
| Constant | 2,458 (1,734) | 0.0321*** (0.00657) |
| Observations | 595 | 595 |
| R-squared | 0.450 | 0.242 |

Finally, we test hypothesis Hp9, pertaining the Mass Media elite. In figure 4, we provide a graphical representation of the network of Media Elite. As in the case of the political elite, we observe some pattern of clustering among actors that belong to the same Medium.

Figure 4: Graphical Representation of Media Elite

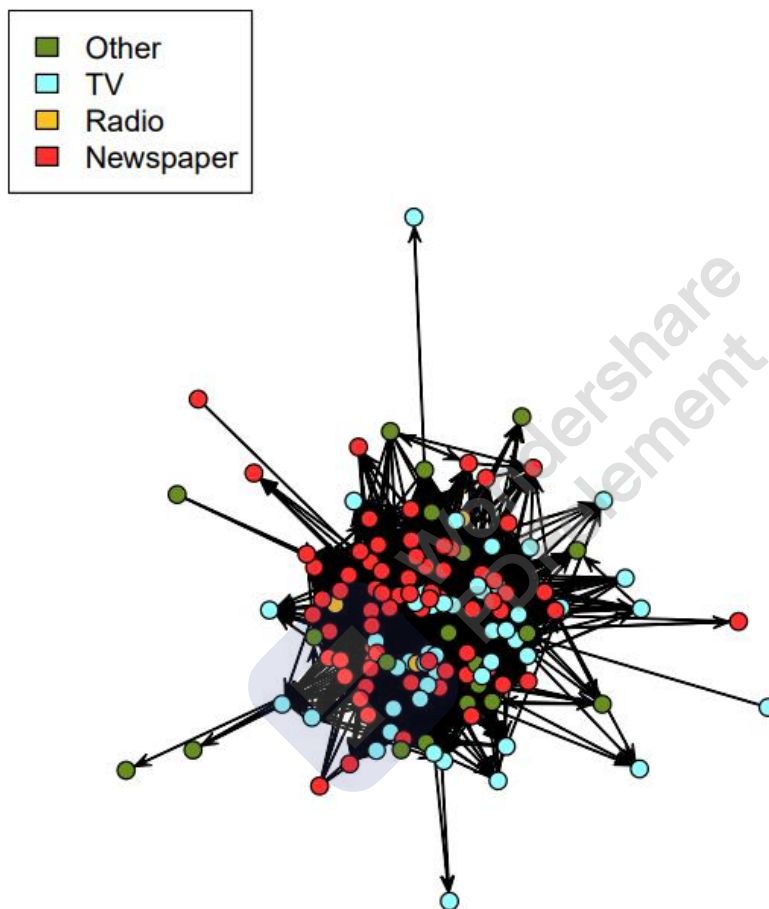


Table 9: Determinants of Centrality within Media Elite

| VARIABLES | Betweenness | Eigen Vector |
|--------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Radio | 2,037 (6,146) | 0.0145 (0.0140) |
| TV | 525.9 (2,633) | 0.00901 (0.00600) |
| Other | 3,216 (5,292) | 0.00834 (0.0121) |
| Leader | -1,233 (2,513) | -0.00353 (0.00572) |
| Female | 3,361 (3,042) | 0.0104 (0.00693) |
| Degree | 368.8 (3,083) | -0.00179 (0.00702) |
| Age | 89.02 (111.1) | -0.000672*** (0.000253) |
| Years on T. | 68.03 (805.4) | 0.000463 (0.00183) |
| N Followers | 0.00996*** (0.00369) | -2.83e-10 (8.40e-09) |
| N Tweet | 0.105** (0.0428) | 1.74e-07* (9.75e-08) |
| Constant | -3,887 (11,216) | 0.0561** (0.0255) |
| Observations | 91 | 91 |
| R-squared | 0.187 | 0.213 |

Finally, we examine the determinants of centrality for the Media Elite. Hp9 is only partially supported. Indeed, while, as investigated before, Media Elite presents one of the ‘denser’ network, meaning that Mass Media members are particularly likely to form connection among themselves on Twitter, real life hierarchies are not reflected in the network.

In particular, having a top position (director, editor-in-chief) does not translate into being more central. Conversely, the variables describing how active an actor is on Twitter (i.e. Number of Tweets and Number of Followers) are significant and in the expected direction, increasing the likelihood of being a central actor.

Conclusions

In this article, we explored the behaviour of elite members on social media, focusing in particular on Twitter for its particular openness in terms of data availability and because of the particular propensity of elite members to adopt this social network. We test several hypotheses regarding the behaviour of elites' members, both in terms of adoption and activation, and in terms of propensity to follow other members of the elites.

In terms of adoption and activation, the political elite is more likely to both adopt and being active. Interestingly, however, members of the mass media elite seem to have embraced social media before. Second, we observe some variations in terms of the field of specialization; in particular, and as posited by the literature, those specialized in Social Sciences appear to be more likely to adopt Twitter, while STEM graduates are less likely to be active on it – with respect to those with a Humanities degree. On the other hand, we test several hypotheses on the network itself, both in terms of the likelihood of forming ties and in terms of centrality of the actors. First, we find significant indications of homophily within elite members in the likelihood of forming a tie with another actor. Second, being a member of the political elite increases the likelihood of being a central actor. Likewise, specific characteristics of the Twitter account (the number of followers and the number of tweets posted since joining) increases the likelihood of being a popular actor.

This article explores an often overlooked aspect of the literature on elites' behaviour on social media. First, we analyse their behaviour in terms of adoption and activation with respect to other elites' members. Second, we test, as well, several hypotheses considering the network exploring the ties between and within elites. Additionally, we contribute to the existing literature by compiling an original dataset with several information regarding the elites' behaviour on Twitter.

Furthermore, we built an original adjacency matrix describing the following network on Twitter.

At the same time, this work presents several limitations that also offer the opportunity for further research. First, the analysis is limited to the Italian case, without exploring the differences among different countries. In particular, it would be crucial to observe whether the social (media) dynamics we observe among the Italian elites would be the same in other countries. Second, it is likewise limited to the analysis of Twitter, opening the possibility to explore the behaviour on other social media. For instance, the theory of affordances suggests that users adapt to the peculiar characteristics of the social medium they engage with, and it would be relevant to expand the research to elite actors' behaviour.

Third, it is limited to the time being without exploring the changes in the composition of the network overtime. Among the elements which would likely be among the most important, it would be relevant to test the evolution of the network in terms of density, cohesion and characteristics that determine the formation of a tie.

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III. The Return of the Experts? Technocratic, Technopopulist and Populist Attitudes of Elites' Members

Introduction

The question of the necessity of expert policy-making can be traced back to Plato's Republic and has permeated political philosophy ever since. Recently, however, the concept of technocracy and technocratic attitudes have received renovated attention from political scientists.

First, the rise of populism in Western Europe and the United States, in the second decade of the 21st century, led to investigating the rebuttal of experts and expertise in public opinion. Second, the financial and subsequent economic crises of 2008 that were blamed also on the inability to react of economists and financial analysts, have posed the question of *who* the experts are and how reliable their knowledge is.

At the same time, recent research has vastly documented the presence of technocratic attitudes in public opinion in several countries (Bušíková & Guasti 2019; Perottino & Guasti 2020). Such attitudes are often conceptualized in connection with populism, both as an opposing concept (Bickerton & Invernizzi-Accetti 2017; Moffit 2019; Foster 2021) and as the other side of the same coin, a phenomenon conceptualized as 'technocratic populism' (De La Torre 2013; Havlík 2019; Castaldo & Verzichelli 2020).

Research has thus vastly detailed the existence of such dispositions within public opinion, and has greatly investigated the many political actors that have relied on a techno-populism rhetoric to gain and maintain consensus. However, there is still little research concerning if and how other actors in public life express and exploit such views. The scope of this paper is thus to explore whether technocratic, populist and technocratic-populist attitudes are present in elites'

members communication strategy and whether such attitudes are rewarded in terms of engagement.

Furthermore, we expect some socio-demographic characteristics (education, which type of elite they belong to) and external factors (i.e. moments of crisis) to influence the propensity to adopt such attitudes. On the other hand, we expect the adoption of such attitudes to be rewarding in terms of both engagement and positive engagement.

In order to test our hypotheses, we collected via Resting API 60.000 tweets from 1.575 members of different elites. These members were previously identified through positional approach, and subsequently mapped on Twitter as part of an effort to build an original dataset (see Chapter I and Chapter II). Given the exploratory nature of this investigation, we first analyse the topics that are more often discussed by members of the elites, by means of topic modelling. We identify 40 topics, that range from entertainment to welfare and economics, to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Next, we manually coded a subset of the collected tweets, relying on the well-established methodology of quantitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2009). First, we explored whether the message contained references to populism, technocracy or techno-populism and subsequently whether such references were positive or negative. Second, we assessed whether the message itself displayed technocratic or populist attitudes.

Finally, we tested our analysis by means of several regression models, and we obtained mixed results. On the one hand, there are few differences in how members of different elites rely on populist or technocratic rhetoric, and how positively they characterise either populism, technocracy or techno-populism. Likewise, the moment of crisis does not increase the appreciation for such attitudes. On the other hand, we found that the moment of crisis generates more engagement (retweets), but not significantly more positive (likes) engagement. Likewise,

with some differences among different types of elites, adopting technocratic attitudes has a positive effect in terms of engagement, but a negative one in terms of positive engagement.

Theoretical Review

In the sixth book of *The Republic*, Plato carefully describes the moral and intellectual qualities, the duties, and the attitudes that make what he defines ‘the Philosopher King’. Among the others, intelligent, ‘in love with knowledge itself’ and with a ‘moderate’ and frugal disposal. In his formulation, only those with such characteristics would be fit to govern Kallipolis, the utopian city-state which is the objective of the dialogue. Famously, Karl Popper (1947) criticizes Plato’s ideal government as a totalitarian ‘closed’ society, and the product of the conflation of two attitudes, historicism, and social engineering. Furthermore, Popper also argues, against Plato’s ideal, “that personal superiority, whether racial or intellectual or moral or educational, can never establish a claim to political prerogatives, even if such superiority could be ascertained” (Popper, 2020: 41).

With opposite stances and almost twenty-four centuries apart, both Plato and Popper are debating a subject that is still very crucial, if not on the rise, to the political debate: technocracism and technocracy. One of the most relevant contributions to the empirical investigation of technocracy is provided by Putnam in 1977. At the very beginning of his *Elite Transformation in Advanced Industrial Societies: An Empirical Assessment of the Theory of Technocracy*, Putnam (1977) sketches the evolution of the debate on technocratic rule and attitudes, individuating its first proponent in Henri de Saint-Simon. The 18th-century French philosopher, indeed, suggests a mental experiment, where the increasingly industrial French society could very well survive without its ‘nobles, ministers, public officials, clergy, and wealthy rentiers, but would hardly pull through without ‘leading scientists, engineers, economic managers, and technicians’ (Putnam, 1977: 384). The ‘fundamental intuition’ of

Saint-Simon consists in acknowledging that the crucial resource for the following centuries would be competency and an “ability to maximize the highest utility for the highest number of people possible” (Redaelli, 2017: 14). This is also remarked as an empirical datum by Putnam, despite his efforts to discuss both ‘technocrat enthusiasts’ and more cynical approaches. All evidence, indeed, points towards an objective observation: “one of the most striking and consistent features of contemporary elite transformation in both the capitalist and communist worlds is the increasing importance of advanced educational credentials.” (Putnam, 1977: 385).

Forty-four years later, in an even more technologically advanced and specialized society, Putnam’s words and analysis are still particularly relevant to both academic empirical investigation and normative questions about the organizational structure of power. Three phenomena make the debate on technocratic attitudes particularly relevant to today’s debate: on the one hand, the recent rise in consensus for populist parties and leaders, which is often connected to a rejection of expertise and experts, in favour of people’s common sense (Das, 2018). Indeed, even if early formulations and discussions on populism all pertain, at least to a certain extent, to the rebuttal of the intellectual establishment, recent events - such as the economic crisis of 2008 for which economists and financial analysts were blamed (Mandelkern, 2019), the 2016 campaign in favour of ‘Brexit’ in opposition to most experts and institutions’ advice, and more recently the opposition to MDs and scientists’ prescriptions during the Covid-19 pandemic – have urged opinion makers and academics alike to devote a renovated attention to the phenomenon.

Thus, the first approach to technocracy and technocratic attitudes is to conceptualize it in opposition to populism. On the other hand, the rise in consensus for populist parties in connection with the crisis of traditional party systems in many countries (Invernizzi-Accetti & Wolkenstein, 2017) has led to the emergence of what has been conceptualized as *technocratic populism*. Finally, especially in connection with the process of Europeanization and

internationalization in general, scholars have argued for the emergence of a ‘New Class’ of technocratic experts (Burris, 1993; Redaelli, 2017) that privileges *competence*, and especially in hard sciences fields, over other more classic forms of power gaining. The next section provides a review of these three streams of literature.

Populism and Technocracy as Related Opposites

As often pointed out, populism and technocracy are usually considered as the two opposites in the political debate spectrum (see, for instance: Moffit, 2019; Foster, 2021) the two concepts also share some dimensions of commonality. On the one hand, from the theoretical point of view, elitism (which is usually considered a crucial component of the technocratic dimension) can be construed as the contrary rather than the opposite of populism. Schoor (2021) for instance develops a complex model based on three dimensions: ideational, social, and presentational. She writes:

“‘Ideational’: ideas, cognition, imagination. Here pluralism opposes a united populism-elitism in the opposition ‘seeing the people as heterogeneous’ or not. ‘Social’: group relations and power. Here elitism opposes a united populism-pluralism in the opposition ‘being part of the elite’ or not. ‘Presentational’: the way of presenting, performance, rhetoric. Here populism opposes a united pluralism-elitism in the opposition ‘identifying with (being) the people’ or not.” (Schoor, 2021: 234-235).

Adopting this framework, all three concepts, elitism, populism, and technocracy should be understood as relationally and strongly connected concepts rather than ‘standalone’ phenomena (Bickerton & Invernizzi, 2017). In particular, several scholars have investigated the relational nature of technocracy and populism, providing diverse formulations. Vivienne Schmidt (2006) connects the two concepts suggesting that while populism is ‘politics without policy’, technocracy is ‘policy without politics’. Rodrick (2018) further builds on her framework by pointing out the differences in economic policy proposals at the European and the member states’ national level; thus, while the policy is the focus in Brussels and Frankfurt, national

parliaments are more concerned with politics, making the former increasingly technocratic and the latter increasingly populist. In a similar fashion, taking once again the European Union as a case study, Reiner & Hebenstreit (2020) explore under which conditions populist parties react to the technocratic nature of the EU, finding that such parties oppose it specifically because it undercuts the link between decision-making and the people.

Müller (2016) more explicitly defines technocracy and populism to be ‘the mirror images of each other’, where technocracy is the belief that ‘there is only one correct policy solution’ while populism ‘holds that there is only one authentic will of the people, making them both anti-democratic’ (Müller, 2016: 76). Bickerton & Invernizzi-Accetti (2017) note that in the political debate both terms are employed rhetorically to accuse political opponents, rather than as descriptors (for the use of ‘populism’ for rhetorical contestation and weaponization in parliament debate see: Casiraghi, 2021). Furthermore, they point out several examples of political leaders using a combination of populist and technocratic attitudes; Barack Obama, for instance, adapted his style to meet the (supposed) attitudes of the public, speaking as a populist with the people and as a technocrat with the elites. Even more complex are the rhetorical strategies of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, Donald Trump in the U.S., and Emmanuel Macron in France, who all suggested the idea that countries can be governed as a firm (Buštková & Guasti, 2019) and made vast use of populist rhetoric by presenting themselves as capable entrepreneurs and managers (Bickerton & Invernizzi-Accetti, 2017)³².

Such cases point to a question generally overlooked by the literature: what are the conditions for the co-existence of populism and technocracy? Bickerton & Invernizzi-

³² Bickerton & Invernizzi-Accetti(2017) also report that some opinion makers such as Freeland (2010) and Ferguson (2015) have suggested that the opposition between technocracy and populism will substitute the left-right cleavage.

Accetti(2017) provide a theoretical framework - which is not far from the one provided by Schoor (2021) -, by identifying the two crucial concepts that allow for such co-existence. On the one hand, both populism and technocracy refute mediation as a political procedure, in favour of uncompromised decision-making. Most accounts and definitions of populism take such rebuttal into consideration, either explicitly or implicitly; likewise, technocracy generally dismisses mediation as inefficient. On the other hand, technocracy and populism both refute the conception of legitimation from higher values or concepts of justice or truth; the legitimation they both hold onto is procedural. Indeed, populism takes its core legitimation from ‘the will of the people’, while technocracy takes it from ‘the right policy’. Thus, such refusal of what is usually considered to be the core of liberal democracy constitutes the major point of interception between populism and technocracy, both defined as symptoms of ‘democratic disfiguration’ and, more broadly, as the crisis of (mostly) western liberal democracies (Urbinati, 2014). Likewise, Daniele Caramani (2017) suggests that technocracy and populism are two distinct, and yet with several similar characteristics, critiques of politics and parties. Populism criticizes politics, and more specifically parties, for their distance from the public, and their inability (or unwillingness) to interpret the will of the people; conversely, technocracy criticizes party governments for the opposite fault, that is of being too much invested in following public opinion’s ever-changing feelings and ideas to pursue the objective of the right policy (Caramani, 2017).

Furthermore, both populism and technocracy share four major ideas in the interpretation of government and society. First, the idea that there is a unique common good and that it is possible to identify it - even if they fundamentally disagree on how to. Second, they both share a non-pluralistic consideration of society, which is considered to be a monolithic group and this is exactly why it is possible to postulate a good-for-all policy proposition (whether it is the will of the people or the best policy outcomes). Third, Caramani (2017) maintains that both

technocracy and populism rely on an independent elite that knows what is best for the people; thus, despite their claims to be anti-elite and anti-establishment, populist parties are as elitist in this sense as party government. Fourth, both populism and technocracy refute vertical accountability, as for the former it would coincide with self-censorship and for the latter, citizens wouldn't anyway be able to judge the actions of the elites. Moreover, both technocracy and populism refute horizontal accountability as well, as they both hold that pursuing the ultimate good of society cannot be limited by procedures or constraints (Caramani, 2017). On the other hand, populism and technocracy present several differences. The most important one – which determines all the other ones – consists in the identification of the greater good for society: for populists, it is identifiable through the will of the people, while for technocrats through rational reasoning and the scientific method. As a consequence, populists maximise responsiveness while technocrats minimise it. Second, descriptive representation – the degree to which the socio-demographic characteristics of representatives and those they represent match – is crucial for populism, and, indeed, populist leaders often stress the fact that they are 'one of the people'. Conversely, technocrats try to distance themselves from the 'average Joe' as possible, through knowledge, technical skills and education. Finally, while at least in theory populism should maximise the 'delegate model', and technocracy the 'trustee model' - even if studies on populist governments suggest that they end up relying on the latter as well.

This section has highlighted the conceptualizations that, despite their similarities, have opposed populism and technocracy as two opposite concepts, in particular in connection to the value of expertise within advanced societies.

Technocratic Populism

A somewhat related but different interpretation of the relation between populism and technocracy is given by the phenomenon of technocratic populism, which has been both theoretically formulated (mostly following Caramani's conceptualization) and empirically postulated based on specific leaders and parties. Indeed, technocratic populism is usually connected to disruptive newcomers positioning themselves on moderate stances, such as the already mentioned Silvio Berlusconi and Emmanuel Macron.

Scholars have detailed the emergence and development of technocratic populism both in Central America (De La Torre, 2013) and in Eastern Europe (Havlík, 2019). Bušíková & Guasti (2019: 304) define technocratic populism as: "an anti-elite ideology that exploits competence to create the appearance of authenticity and proximity to ordinary people". Bickerton & Invernizzi-Accetti (2021) offer a similar interpretation, defining techno-populism specifically as a "organizing logic of political competition" (Bickerton & Invernizzi-Accetti, 2021: 20). In their framework, technocratic populism is the result of a set of incentives that politicians have to adopt such rhetoric.

Scholars have also offered insights on the strategy adopted by the technocratic populist once she is in power: avoid political debate in the name of technocratic stance and focus on short-term policies to keep the consensus up. Likewise, both Bušíková & Guasti (2019) and Perottino & Guasti (2020) suggest that the main strive of technocratic populism in power is to balance the responsiveness (which is maximised in populism and minimised in technocracy) and responsibility (which, to a certain extent, is absent in both technocracy and populism). Scholars, in general, agree that technocratic populism transcends the traditional left-right spectrum and rely on the concept of 'extreme centre' (Perottino & Guasti, 2020).

Such characterization is also related to Mattia Zulianello's concept of valence populism (Zulianello, 2019; 2020). Valence populist parties, in his formulation, cannot be classified as

right-wing or left-wing but position themselves on ‘valence’, ‘non-positional’ issues, like the fight against corruption.

Focusing on empirical analyses, very diverse parties and leaders, from several countries, have been classified and documented under the umbrella term of ‘technocratic populism’. Buščíková & Guasti (2019), for instance, analyse the Czech case, to suggest that technocratic populism (intended both as an ideology and as a strategy) can be successfully exploited to galvanize consensus, especially in times of disruption of previous political system or ideologies. Indeed, the first to successfully run on a technocratic populist platform was Václav Klaus, who used it against his opponents amidst the collapse of the communist regime. The second politician to successfully exploit such rhetoric was Andrej Babiš who focused in particular on efficiency, against the failing experiment of liberal democracy. De la Torre (2013) makes similar arguments for Rafael Correa’s Cabinets in Ecuador and his peculiar populist strategies. Indeed, while Correa is identified as a populist leader, not dissimilar from Hugo Chavez in Venezuela or Evo Morales in Bolivia, running on a predominantly left-wing platform and claiming to be willing to claim Ecuador back from the Bourgeoisies in the people, he also presents some distinguished technocratic characteristics. In particular, Correa has often selected his ministers and councillors from a class of ‘experts’, who exactly in virtue of their expertise, are the right people to govern a country, and, especially, can be considered above the partial interests of a normally-functioning pluralist society. To the point, that de la Torre (2013: 39) claims that in Correa’s Ecuador, ‘populism has transformed into elitism’, where technocrats’ rational society is considered more than enough to pursue society’s needs without the need to include citizens’ inputs or requests.

Likewise, Drápalová & Wegrich (2021) explore through two empirical cases (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S, in Rome and the Akce nespokojených občanů, ANO, in Prague) the specific application of technocratic populism to subnational governance. In particular, they argue that

politicians' application of the technocratic populist strategy at the administrative level consists of three main strategies: 1) the already mentioned, anti-politics and anti-pluralist stances; 2) a particular focus on efficiency rather than on political receipts, with a particularly favourable outlook on new technologies; 3) the leader's personalization and her distancing from the traditional administrative bureaucrats. The Italian case was thoroughly analysed by Castaldo & Verzichelli (2020); Silvio Berlusconi is identified as the first 'technocratic populist' of a long list of politicians and experts that embodied the 'technocratic populist' stance. Berlusconi is considered to be far from the 'ideal type' (Castaldo & Verzichelli, 2020: 489) of technocratic populist, but still close enough; he run on an anti-politics, outsider platform that glorified his self-made man and skilful manager and entrepreneur persona. After him, Matteo Renzi and Matteo Salvini share some of his populist stances, especially in relation to the outsider nature of their candidacy. Conversely, pure technocratic figures such as Mario Monti and, to a lesser extent, Lamberto Dini incarnate the 'impossible hero' ideal; their cases become strikingly remarkable exactly as they were unable to convert their popularity into electoral success, as they failed to exploit populism in connection with their technocratic stances in their political strategy. On the other hand, Emmanuel Macron appears to be closer to the 'ideal type' of technocratic populism. Perottino & Guasti (2020) argue that the French President of the Republic was exactly able to exploit the combination of his technocratic attitudes and his credentials as an expert, and the stances typical of populist communication: anti-elitism, the refusal of the left and right spectrum.

Finally, to some extent, even Greta Thunberg's 'ecocentrism' (Zulianello & Ceccobelli, 2020) shares some elements with technocratic populism, exactly because she positions herself at the intersection between populism and technocracy. Indeed, Thunberg's speeches often include anti-elitism and are often characterized by a moralizing and monistic, rather than pluralistic, view of society.

On the other hand, she also displays ideas that are typical of technocracies and in particular of technocratic populism by substituting the ‘Vox Populi’ with the ‘Vox Scientifica’ of the experts' elite of climate scientists (Zulianello & Ceccobelli, 2020: 627). On the other hand, Invernizzi-Accetti (2021) understands Thunberg’s environmentalism as an attempt at de-politicizing environmentalism, advancing purely technocratic stances, which are, in turn, opposed by actors who are considered purely populist. In this sense, environmentalism stands between technocratic appeals – which through the de-politicization of the issue contribute to reframing it as an administrative matter – and the attacks of populism.

Who are the experts?

Finally, the third stream of literature pertains to the characteristics of the 'technocratic' class and especially its relations with the lay public. In particular, recent events have shaped the debate over *who* are the relevant experts and what is their relationship with other elites' members and the non-elite public. As mentioned above, the debate about the relation between expertise and government is far from being new; yet, in recent times, three events, in particular, increased the attention dedicated to this debate and each has led to focus on a particular class of experts. First, the financial and economic crisis of 2008, which was partly blamed on economics experts and analysts who failed to predict it. Second, the somewhat unexpected vote for Brexit which happened against the opinion of the large part of individual experts, analysts, and institutional bodies, highlighting how, as effectively put by Michael Gove, a Tories' politician, 'people have had enough of experts' (Gove, 2016; reported in Clarke & Newman, 2017: 112). Finally, the Covid-19 induced pandemic determined a renovated interest in the role of expertise (in this case MDs and hard scientists from different sub-fields) during a crisis and, more in general, in policymaking.

Concerning the first, scholars have greatly detailed the prominence of economists in policymaking, both at the national and international level, compared to experts coming from other subfields (Christensen & Mandelkern, 2021). In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, such pivotal influence has been especially under scrutiny, even if economists and financial experts seem to have retained their influence *despite* the consequences of misguided advices and pronouncements (Mandelkern, 2019). On the one hand, Engelen et al. (2012) discuss the thesis that considers the financial crisis as the result of some kind of, accidental or intentional, 'experts' debacle'; if this was the case, they argue, the system would be easily fixable through technocratic intervention. In particular, Engelen and his co-authors refute the idea of a simple miscalculation on the experts' part that can be as easily corrected with additional information or controls and they suggest that this overestimation of the system's (as well as theirs) ability to manage financial markets is exactly what caused the crisis in the first place (Engelen et al., 2012). Likewise, Bryan et al. (2012) consider the financial crisis to be the direct result of different technocratic elites, both at fault in dealing with the emerging collapse. On the one hand, the practitioners (i.e. audits, controllers, etc.) who are considered to be hazardous – at least in the sense of often changing their opinion - in dealing with financial markets; on the other, experts and academics in the stricter sense whose unshakable faith in the power of knowledge and the mainstream of economics as a discipline.

In general, despite the recent drawbacks, scholars have underlined the crucial role that economists play in contemporary societies (Mandelkern, 2019). Fourcade (2006; 2009) and Fourcade et al. (2015) detail the internationalization of social sciences, and economics in particular as a direct consequence of the diffusion of universities and national bureaucracies in the 19th and 20th centuries. In particular, they argue, the establishment of social sciences served two purposes: first, they were crucial to the building of nations as a substitute of religion, by moralizing the people and establishing the technocratic elites.

Second, in this context, economics becomes central to the construction of a national bureaucracy. It has also been argued that economics has gained prominence in shaping policy proposals (Fourcade, 2006) and that economic knowledge in particular functions as a legitimization tool for policy proposals (Markoff & Montecinos, 1993).

Other, related, studies have underlined how the peculiarity of economists' approaches is also related to their relevance in policy-making (Christensen & Mandelkern, 2021). For instance, Berman (2017) identifies two main reasons why economists exert a stronger influence on policy-making: on the one hand, despite the various specializations within the discipline, economists tend to generally adhere to a certain standard approach, i.e. evaluating costs against benefit. On the other hand, even when economists are unable to affect policy outcomes in the short term, other phenomena such as the establishment of a bureaucratic class that is more prone to rely on other economists incentivize the circulation of similar curricula and ideas. Likewise, Christensen (2017) explores the reasons why some countries were more prone to adopt neo-liberal policies (i.e. deregulation, tax cuts, privatization of public goods). He finds that in those countries where the economics experts elite consisted of U.S. trained, neo-classical, professors there is a marked preference for such policies; through qualitative interviews with economists and other economic experts, he also finds out that they tend to have an 'activist' approach when called to provide policy advice. A similar conclusion is reached by other scholars. Economic mainstream, and especially neo-liberal ideas, have contributed both to the depoliticization of economic policies and to stabilize and enhance the importance of economists as crucial policy advisors (Mandelkern, 2019), and economic policy at different levels through networks of collaboration ((Helgadóttir, 2016). Moreover, Fourcade et al. (2015) that compared other experts, economists are found to be more likely to provide policy suggestions. Finally, economists are generally found to favour a more technocratic, expert-

lead, policymaking with respect to academics from other disciplines (Christensen & Mandelkern, 2021).

Turning to Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016, commentators have described both phenomena precisely as the defeat of expertise in general at the hands of the populist ‘common sense’ (Portes, 2017). In general, such attitudes are connected to the broader debate on post-truth politics, which characterises the advent of (right-wing) populism and populist attitudes as a sort of obscurantist trend against facts and knowledge (Edis, 2019). Rutledge (2020) explicitly interprets the presidential experience of Donald Trump as a disintermediating attack on the bureaucratic elite and key members of the administrative department of the United States. While this refusal of experts’ or bureaucrats’ advice precedes his candidacy, such attitudes became paradigmatic of the way the 45th President managed the Covid-19 induced pandemic, resulting in a delay in terms of measures adopted to contain the spread of the virus (Rutledge, 2020). Notwithstanding the judgment on Trump’s presidency, Rutledge’s research highlights another aspect of the debate on technocracy: the underlying tensions between the political and expert classes. Indeed, many commentators and academics have underlined this ‘backlash’ against both, in particular, the educated elite and, in general, knowledge. In this respect, Trump was found to be able to exploit the people’s ‘fears’ of ‘technocratic authority’, the rule of experts and the already-mentioned ‘policy without politics’ that characterizes one of the main criticisms towards the European Union (Luke, 2017: 508). Conversely, Grundmann (2018) challenges this very view, suggesting that the critique is politically exploited against specific issues (notably, climate change) and, more importantly, limited to the expertise that is somehow connected to the liberal elite. An approach that seems generally reflected and validated by polls, where ‘experts’ are found to be widely trusted by the lay public, and significantly more than the political or media elites.

A yet another characterization of experts and their relations with the lay public emerged during the recent Covid-19 induced pandemic. In connection with the precedent debate, (hard) scientists and experts were saluted as the symbolic resurgence of data and knowledge-driven policies after the 'populist' era of incompetent politicians, a narrative that was dominant during the initial coverage of several media actors (see, for example, the Guardian, 2020). Scholars have produced a more nuanced interpretation of the role of experts, and their relation to politicians and policymakers during the pandemic. Indeed, in general, Lavazza & Farina (2020) individuate three main reasons why both policymakers and the lay public tend to trust in scientists' and medical experts' advice: first, it generally works, as the advancements especially in the medical field are undeniable. Second, experts provide *legitimacy* to policy proposals and reduce opposition; third, experts' opinion is (supposedly) rooted in rationality. At the same time, there are two main reasons that can curb the epistemic authority of experts and their opinions. First, parties and politicians can advance policy proposals that (legitimately) run against the experts' viewpoints. Second, complex phenomena, such as the disintermediation of information flow together with other sociological changes, have challenged the epistemic authority of experts and mined public opinion' trust in experts' provisions (Lavazza & Farina, 2020).

The pandemic has partly re-defined the relation between experts and non-experts. Indeed, in the outbreak of the pandemic, medical experts and scientists (i.e. virologists, epidemiologists, immunologists) quickly gained popularity among public opinions. On the one hand, because several politicians at least initially dismissed or were incapable of managing the pandemic, forcing, first, the public and, second, institutions to heavily rely on experts' advice. On the other hand, media were quick to give experts an increasingly leading role, and TVs' schedules were quickly filled with experts' panels. Thus, despite the many scholarly worries about a lack of trust in experts, and especially in medical ones in connection to the anti-vax movements

(Kata, 2011), the pandemic seems to have re-instated this general trust of the lay public towards science and scientists (Lavazza & Farina, 2020). In a follow-up paper, Farina & Lavazza (2020) further discuss the epistemic authority of experts and the relation between policymaking, expertise, and public opinion, specifically during the Covid-19 pandemic. Considering the lack of agreement between and within experts, especially during the early stages of the pandemic, they argue for broadening the discussion on the measures to adopt to fight off the pandemic, beyond not only medical expertise, but also expertise per se. Indeed, they consider the Covid-19 to have signified specifically the ‘epistemic rupture’ between medical experts, other experts, public opinion, and policymakers (Farina & Lavazza, 2020).

The same ‘fracture’ between experts and policymakers is tackled by Parviainen et al. (2021) through the lenses of the literature on non-knowledge. They identify three main strategies adopted by politicians in dealing with lack of knowledge, misinformation, and especially experts’ disagreement: first, to rely on the language of probability and underline uncertainty. This solution is considered to be failing as it potentially slows down the ability of decision-makers to take action. The second strategy is to heavily rely on facts and knowledge, which can as easily paralyze governments’ decision-making process when uncertainty becomes prevalent. Lastly, a complete mistrust of experts’ advice and suggestions is connected with what they call a ‘populist’ attitude to governing (Parviainen et al., 2021). In this context, they praise the Finnish government communication strategy - the ‘epistemic humility’ approach - , that was able to establish the legitimacy of its decisions not on knowledge and facts, but on what was *not* known yet, granting it epistemic flexibility in dealing the health crisis caused by the pandemic (Parviainen et al., 2021).

In a nutshell, this section has highlighted how expertise has been declined in different ways according to different contexts; in particular, the relevance of a specific field of expertise has been re-conceptualized in light of different phenomena. Indeed, while the election of Donald



Trump and the Brexit vote have canalized a general discussion around the refusal of expertise in the name of a populist, popular, approach to policymaking, the 2008 financial crisis has put under the spotlight economists and financial analysts, and the recent health crisis induced by the Covid-19 pandemic has shifted the attention to MDs, medical and STEM experts.



Hypotheses

The present paper takes its cues from a general interest in how members of the elites, rather than of the lay public, interpret, understand and exploit technocratic ideas and attitudes. In particular, we wish to tackle three main research questions:

RQ1. How and under which conditions, elites' members conceptualize technocrats and technocracy?

RQ2. What are the main differences among members of different elites in how they understand and conceptualize technocrats and technocracy?

RQ3. As to communication on social networks, what are the return in terms of engagement (i.e. likes, retweets) in displaying technocratic attitudes?

These questions can be analysed through the following hypotheses:

Hp1a: As the literature suggests that technocratic attitudes are more prominent during a crisis, we expect mentions of both technocratic, populist and techno-populist attitudes to increase during times of crisis (i.e. the Covid-19 induced Pandemic).

Hp1b: As the literature suggests that technocratic attitudes are more prominent during a crisis, we expect *positive* representations of technocratic, populist and techno-populist attitudes to increase during times of crisis (i.e. the Covid-19 induced Pandemic).

Hp2: We expect significant differences in how members of different elites represent and discuss technocracy. In particular, we expect members of the experts and academics' elites to be more likely to interpret technocracy as opposed to populism and normal democratic rule. Thus, we expect them to be more likely to characterise technocratic, rather than populist and techno-populist attitudes, as positive and to be more likely to display technocratic attitudes themselves. Conversely, we expect members of the political elites to be more likely to adopt a technocratic populist stance.

Hp3a: As literature has greatly detailed, technocratic attitudes are widespread in public opinion; therefore, we expect that when members of elites mention technocracy or adopt technocratic stances to generate more engagement with respect to when they do not.

Hp3b: As literature has greatly detailed, technocratic attitudes are widespread in public opinion; therefore, we expect that when members of elites mention technocracy or adopt technocratic stances to generate more *positive* engagement with respect to when they do not.



Data & Methods

We chose to focus on social media, and in particular on Twitter, to tackle our main research questions; indeed, Twitter is not only the social media more vastly used by members of elites, and in particular, experts and academic. It also allows to collect messages from members of different elites (i.e. media, politics, academics), who could have very different communication strategies, when communicating under identical constraints of space, and identical ‘feedback’ possibility - i.e. retweet, follow, likes (see also Chapter. 2). Thus, we selected messages publicly posted on Twitter, tweets, as the main data. The IDs of the elite members were manually collected from a list of elite members identified by means of positional approach (see chapters. 1 and 2). Data – messages publicly posted on Twitter – were collected by using the resting API available on Twitter, which allows to collect up to 3.200 tweets by the requested id. In total, we identified 1575 elite actors on Twitter. We collected a total of 63655 tweets, including the text of the messages and additional information (such as date and time of posting, number of retweets, replies and comments, etc.). Below, table 20 provides a summary of the main variable of interests, their main distribution information and how they were collected and assessed. To conduct the manual analysis we selected 10.000 random posts, through subsequent selections.

In order to build our final dataset and conduct our empirical analysis and analyse the tweets content we rely on the well-established mixed method of qualitative, manual coding, followed by quantitative methods of analysis. Furthermore, we relied on already collected information to insert variables as control.

Table 3.1: Description of the Main Dataset

| | Retrieved/Assessed | Description | Value Range |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| <i>Positional Approach</i> | | | |
| Author ID | Manually | <i>A numeric id ranging from 1 to 4856 randomly assigned to each identified actor</i> | 1- 4856 |
| Gender | Manually | <i>A variable describing the gender of the identified actor</i> | 0 Female 1 Male |
| Age | Manually | <i>A variable describing the age of the identified actor at the time of the data collection (2020)</i> | 34-93 |
| Elite | Manually | <i>A variable describing the Macro Category of the Elites the identified actor is part of</i> | 0 Politics 1 Media 2 Academics 3 Public Administration 4 Private Businesses 5 Armed Forces 6 Voluntary Associations |
| Elite_Position | Manually | <i>A variable describing the more specific role the identified actor occupies within each elite (i.e. senator, full professor, editor-in-chief, cfo etc.)</i> | - |
| <i>Elites on Twitter</i> | | | |
| N. of Followers | Automatically | <i>N. of accounts following the account of the identified actor</i> | 0-3.800.000 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|--|-----------|
| N. of Following | Automatically | <i>N. of accounts followed by the identified actor's account</i> | 0-48.535 |
| N. of Tweets | Automatically | <i>N. of Tweets published by the identified actor's account</i> | 0-214.415 |
| Year of Joining | Automatically | <i>The year the identified actor's account was created</i> | 2007-2021 |
| <i>Communication on Twitter</i> | | | |
| N. of Tweets | Automatically | The number of Tweets manually analysed | 10.000 |
| Technocratic Attitudes | Manually | “The emergency we are living in requires leadership and personalities of extreme competence outside politics” | .25% |
| Populist Attitudes | Manually | “We will keep fighting for the President of the Republic to be elected by the people and not by the Palace’s intrigues” | .69% |
| Mentions of Populism | Manually | “The lynching on social media of a kid for a luxury watch is very telling of how much latent populism there is in this country” | .50% |
| Positive Mentions of Populism | Manually | “[I am] an Italian MP, South Tyrolean, proudly patriotic, popular, commoner and populist. Italia über alles” | .03% |
| Mentions of Technocracy | Manually | “I hope that in our country it will be possible for competence and reliability will be part of politics. Stop to technical governments!” | .42% |
| Positive Mentions of Technocracy | Manually | “Let’s hope that the Draghi Cabinet, and in particular the technical ministers, Cartabia and Colao, will take this opportunity to decrease the duration of trials” | .15% |
| Mentions of Technocratic Populism | Manually | “The last thing we need is a super manager | .20% |

| | | | |
|---|---------------|--|----------------------|
| | | nominated by a technical government [in Rai]. We would end up having, instead of three politicized channels, one single voice” | |
| Positive Mention of Technocratic Populism | Manually | “The rationale of M5S’s proposal on conflict of interest is simple: if you had some success in your professional life, then you cannot have a political role; if you didn’t have any success, then you can: it’s the victory, a walkover victory, of the incapable over the capable” | .08% |
| Reactions: Favourites | Automatically | - | Mean: 61 SD: 371 |
| Reactions: Retweets | Automatically | - | Mean: 83 SD: 1358 |



Results & Discussion

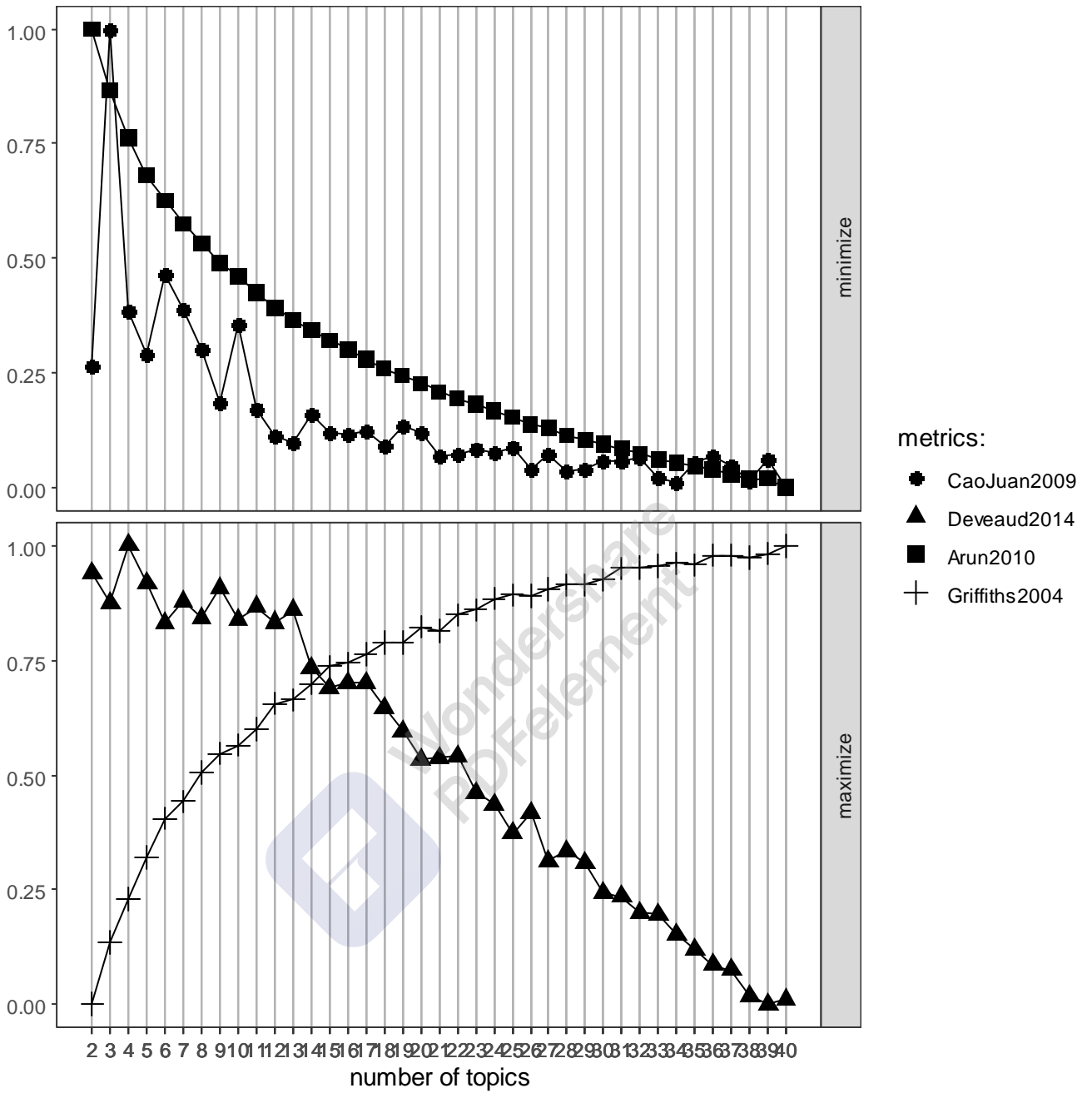
Before turning to the testing of the hypotheses formulated in the previous section, we present the results of an exploratory analysis of the main subject of discussion of the messages analysed. In particular, we employed Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) technique, one of the most popular method of topic modelling. LDA is a probabilistic model that identifies the words that constitute each topic contained in the corpus under inspection.

As discussed, our corpus consisted of 63655 tweets posted by previously identified members of the elites. Using a combination of popular packages in RStudio, we pre-treated the corpus with common techniques used in text-as-data analysis: we removed stop-words, punctuations and non-text elements (such as links), and we ‘stemmed’ the words. Before conducting the analysis, we also restricted the selection to words that occurred at least ten times in the corpus. Finally, in order to select the optimum number of topics to extract through LDA, we relied on four well-established metrics developed in four papers, the first two concentrating on the minimization of the extremes and the second on maximization³³. We set the metrics to compare the ideal number of topics to extract anywhere from 2 to 40.

As presented in Figure 3.1, three over four metrics suggested that the optimal number of topics to extract is 40. We proceed to compute the LDA model, setting the extraction of 40 topics, by fitting 1000 iterations through the Gibbs method of sampling.

³³ We relied on the explanations of the various R packages we used to conduct the analysis. The referenced papers that were used to develop the metrics are: Arun et al. (2010); Cao et al. (2009); Griffiths & Steyvers (2004); Deveaud (2014).

Figure 3.1: Number of Topics to Select



In what follows we present the results of the exploratory topic modelling. In table 3.2, we present the words composing the first ten topics (the topics were allocated in four subsequent tables to improve readability).

Table 3.2: 1-10 Topics

| Topic 1 | Topic 2 | Topic 3 | Topic 4 | Topic 5 | Topic 6 | Topic 7 | Topic 8 | Topic 9 | Topic 10 |
|----------------------|--|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------|-----------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| vaccin | italian | Donn | Abbiam | Impres | chied | pass | Rom | sanrem | sal |
| covid | cultur | Diritt | Movstell | Misur | giustiz | Torn | Mil | bell | tutel |
| pandem | ital | Libert | Lavor | Aiut | firm | camb | sindac | teatr | rispett |
| sanitar | stor | impegn | Port | Lavor | riform | continu | Citt | music | costitu |
| greenpass | raccont | Lott | risult | Sostegn | process | poss | Piazz | francesc | regol |
| medic | general | democraz | Iniz | Famigl | maf | vogl | candid | ser | sicurezz |
| cur | min | Uman | giuseppeconteit | Decret | vic | prest | Bocc | spettacol | matteosalvinim |
| posit | cultural | Gen | Mov | Risc | giust | liber | elettoral | pap | ambient |
| contag | ester | societ | Stell | Cris | verit | arriv | campagn | festival | cittadin |
| cas | luog | uomin | Continu | Attiv | ordin | green | amministr | artist | legasalvin |
| mascherin | mostr | Valor | Import | Economy | mer | dobb | napol | bellissim | garant |
| dos | luigidimai | violenz | Nuov | Bollett | appell | notiz | colleg | maestr | norm |
| coronavirus | ben | dignit | Stiam | Superbonus | legal | facce | San | concert | futur |
| sal | valorizz | internazional | Obiett | Sub | referendum | segnal | pront | ctcf | controll |
| virus | rappresent | difend | Otten | intervent | giudic | sper | magg | cant | fondamental |
| terz | protagon | battagl | Battagl | ristor | cort | speranz | ottobr | giovann | maggior |
| tampon | arte | Liber | Ottim | settor | inchiest | normal | capital | voc | animal |
| vaccinal | patrimon | Civil | Cittadin | pandem | criminal | segn | domen | massim | necessar |
| risc | direttor | combatt | Accord | prorog | vien | indietr | lup | canzon | rif |
| obblig | riconosc | Giorn | Raggiunt | difficolt | accus | divent | bar | scen | serv |
| Covid-19 Pandemic | Cultural and Artistic Italian Heritage | International Women's Day | M5S related | Economics and Welfare | Mafia and Justice | Restrictions | Elections | Entertainment and Festivals | Lega related |

The topics are easily inferable through a quick inspection. The first relates to the Covid-19 pandemic, being composed of words all pertaining the disease and the measures taken to fight it: on the one hand, words such as “Covid”, “Pandemic”, “Contagion”, “Coronavirus” on the other hand, and “Vaccines”, “Greenpass”, “Cures”, “Third” likely referring to the third dose of the vaccine.

Topics 2, 5, and 6 likely pertain to policymaking in three different sectors: respectively Arts and Culture, Economics and Justice. Topics 4 and 10 directly relate to the communication of

two of the parties most active on social media: M5S and Lega. The Twitter usernames of the two leaders, respectively “giuseppeconteit” and “matteosalvinimi”, are also included. Other parties’ spheres are also captured by subsequent topic. Topic 7 deals with the restrictions and limitation to freedom caused by the pandemic. Topic 8 covers elections and electoral campaigns. Finally, topic 9 covers Entertainment and Festivals, such as Sanremo.

Table 3.4: Topics 11-20

| Topic 11 | Topic 12 | Topic 13 | Topic 14 | Topic 15 | Topic 16 | Topic 17 | Topic 18 | Topic 19 | Topic 20 |
|------------|-----------|----------|----------|-------------|----------|-----------|---------------|----------|------------|
| cittadin | scuol | Lasc | Perc | Leg | | buon | polit | nuov | polit |
| forzaital | giovan | famigl | Può | Cont | fort | augur | part | econom | moment |
| pag | bambin | mort | Cap | salvin | rend | Tant | fratellidital | cresc | respons |
| lavor | ragazz | Perd | poss | Drag | miglior | Amic | parol | social | scelt |
| eur | social | manc | vuol | Part | giust | natal | stess | svilup | guid |
| aument | student | Car | Cos | matte | volt | Cuor | Ver | innov | bisogn |
| tass | figl | Amic | problem | sinistr | divent | Libr | Melon | digital | forz |
| cost | stud | person | face | Vot | import | cinem | Giorgiamel | cre | sens |
| tagl | presenz | | bisogn | centrodestr | sicur | Felic | italian | futur | dar |
| sold | apert | giornal | spieg | Renz | possibil | Film | fratell | sosten | ital |
| redd | insegn | Dolor | Ciò | Let | rest | Car | giorg | ricerc | stabil |
| mes | med | abbracc | ragion | leader | strad | paol | chiar | strateg | difficil |
| fiscal | formazion | profond | Dev | giusepp | sent | bell | unic | sfid | istitu |
| banc | educ | | cred | premier | signif | compleann | mett | invest | serv |
| prezz | univers | Sent | mett | destr | costru | man | ital | sistem | continu |
| occup | class | scompars | permett | maggior | dobb | amor | propr | tecnolog | rispost |
| reform | futur | Pac | consider | Matteosalv | veloc | fest | Ide | trasform | rappresent |
| parlament | cors | pensier | andar | govern | mod | lettur | pres | azi | dimostr |
| pension | prof | notiz | serv | dichiar | pover | Don | manten | merc | maggior |
| redditodic | dirigent | | abbi | mand | temp | perd | cred | settor | capac |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|-----------|----------|---|----------|---|---|-------------|-----------------|------------|
| FI related | Education | Mourning | - | Politics | - | - | FdI related | Developm ent | Resilience |
|------------|-----------|----------|---|----------|---|---|-------------|-----------------|------------|

Table 3.4 presents the most relevant twenty words composing topics from 11 to 20. As above, topics 11 and 18 covers the ‘spheres’ pertaining two parties, FI and FdI. Topic 12 and 19 deals with policymaking, respectively concerning schools and development. Topic 13 describes mourning and death (the names of the deceased were cancelled). Topics 14, 16 and 17 are not as easily interpreted. Topic 15 deals with politics in general, with several leaders’ name mentioned. Finally, Topic 20 includes several words describing responsibility, service and strength/capability that we may sum under the umbrella term of “Resilience”.

Table 3.5 presents the most relevant 20 words composing topics 21 through 30.

Table 10.5: Topics 21-30

| Topic 21 | Topic 22 | Topic 23 | Topic 24 | Topic 25 | Topic 26 | Topic 27 | Topic 28 | Topic 29 | Topic 30 |
|----------|------------|----------|------------|------------|----------|------------|-----------|----------|-------------|
| ital | Legg | - | Dirett | solidariet | cos | interv | dat | part | mar |
| viv | Sen | - | Present | forz | pens | post | pubblic | italy | port |
| giorn | commission | - | Segu | minacc | dic | guard | serviz | franc | salv |
| unit | Approv | - | Gennai | ferm | vol | Legg | inform | - | arriv |
| italian | Camer | Sol | Febbrai | vergogn | - | vide | sistem | les | guerr |
| ital | Propost | - | Dicembr | ricev | prov | Pot | condizion | des | popol |
| marz | Vot | Ver | Stamp | violenz | ved | Corr | mod | pour | afghanistan |
| coragg | Pdnetwork | - | Pagin | vicin | sap | Test | strument | liv | nat |
| celebr | Deput | Parol | Event | attacc | scriv | articol | funzion | mai | usa |
| comp | Present | Paur | Sar | pien | tant | condivid | priv | gran | situazion |
| ringraz | Montecitor | Fin | Conferment | grav | davver | comment | garant | show | migrant |
| novembr | Emend | Scritt | Iniz | condann | conosc | - | tratt | twitter | lamorges |
| inter | Aul | | sit | sub | altre | complet | prim | mar | paes |
| april | Bilanc | Gent | link | inaccett | sembr | attenzion | personal | tim | immagin |
| nasc | Parlament | Ven | onlin | gest | foss | Alta | consent | son | sbarc |
| onor | Test | Viagg | streaming | atto | fatt | riflession | utilizz | merc | ital |
| valor | Senator | Andat | facebook | massim | molt | Parl | conferm | albert | silenz |
| giugn | Enricolett | Vien | canal | mort | - | Lanc | bas | lov | migliai |
| simbol | Interrog | Succed | cors | luig | per | messagg | veng | mad | lib |
| popol | Intervent | Not | info | esprim | fac | ascolt | riguard | los | immigr |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------|------------|---|------------------|--------------------|---|---------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Patriotism | PD related | - | Press Conference | Reactions to Crime | - | Privacy | Foreign Languages | Immigration and Foreign Relations |
|------------|------------|---|------------------|--------------------|---|---------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|

Topic 21 contains words celebrating Italy and various national recurrences that we summarize under the umbrella term of “Patriotism”. Topic 22 pertains to Partito Democratico (PD)’s sphere and main policy proposals. Topic 23, 24 and 25 were not classifiable under a single topic; some of the words were delated and not discussed in the results, as they were either not interpretable or words that should have been included in stopwords (and thus removed) but were misspelled. Topic 24 deals with press conferences or live streaming on (other) social media platforms; in general, we can consider it to be the efforts of politicians (who constitute more than half of the elite members to adopt Twitter) to communicate directly with their followers and electorate. Topic 25 on the other hand relates to general reactions and condemnation of various crimes. Topic 26 can be easily traced back to “privacy” as it contains words such as “personal”, “private”, “information”. Words in Topic 29 are all in a foreign language and were probably clustered together because only a small amount of accounts would

send messages in non-Italian languages. Finally, Topic 30 deals with Immigration and Foreign Relations.

Table 3.6 presents the words and topics from 31 to 40

Table 3.6: Topics 31-40

| Topic 31 | Topic 32 | Topic 33 | Topic 34 | Topic 35 | Topic 36 | Topic 37 | Topic 38 | Topic 39 | Topic 40 |
|----------|------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|---|--------------------------|
| comun | Ital | Progett | president | europe | sar | trov | amp | ricord | incontr |
| region | Sport | Pnrr | quirinal | parl | aspett | ultim | today | public | tem |
| territor | Orgogl | Fond | mattarell | europ | punt | abbiam | great | fot | partecip |
| marc | Compl | Risors | repubbl | futur | ser | prossim | peopl | appen | parl |
| impegn | Gioc | Finanz | vot | europ | doman | parl | support | dov | import |
| regional | Prem | Comun | elezion | gas | ospit | settiman | world | memor | centr |
| oper | Vinc | Sud | nom presidente dellarepub | energ | parl | possibil | day | stor | confront |
| lombard | Success Straordina | Pian | bl | transizion | rai | Già | tim | gennai | organizz |
| calabr | r | Sosten | drag | rinnov | staser | numer | work | dimentic | interest |
| ross | Ital | Eur | votazion | russ | mattin | soluzion | global | vittim | dialog |
| nomin | vittor | Nuov | serg | president | ved | molt | year | testimon giornatade | prodott |
| venez | emozion | Invest | discors | ital | vist | Ten | years | llamemor | occasion |
| vigil | grand | Intervent | second | energet | skytg | rispond | join | lugl | collabor |
| colp | squadr | Oper | profil | verd | rad | domand | good | agost | affront |
| venet | sogn | Realizz | grand | nucl | raiun | interest | italy | affinc | assoc |
| govern | stor | Programm | condvis | ruol | raitr | rispost | meeting | uccis | sed |
| zon | forz | Mess | elettor | ecolog | appunt | divers | clim | palerm | tavol |
| sicil | final | Sicurezz | palazz | cris | agorara | arriv | women | mor | vis |
| terr | campion | Band | elett | congratul | raccont | different | read | gener | discut |
| sardegna | vint | | figur | union | luned | situazion | mak | accad | Quality |
| Regions | Sport and Victories | Recovery Plan | Elections | Europe | Media | - | English | Anniversar ies and Internation al Days | Parliament Discussion |

Topics 31, 33, 34, 35 and 40 can either be ascribed to policymaking (such as Topic 33, that explicitly relates to the Recovery Plan) or politics, such as elections, regional activities or parliamentary discussions. Topic 32 relates to celebrating victories in sports and international competitions of Italian athletes. Topic 36 is vastly similar to Topic 24, as it appears to include politicians' communication about their (mainstream) media appearances. Topic 37 is again too ambiguous to be referenced to a unique topic. Topic 38 groups English words, again probably clustered together because of the small number of accounts sending messages in English. Finally, Topic 39 includes references to Anniversaries, International Days and Recurrences.

In general, we observe how the majority of Topics relates to politics, and especially its procedural aspect and policymaking in various sectors. There are also several Topics dealing with events (such as sport victories or the deaths of famous people) and recurrences or anniversaries (both national and international Days or celebrations of national days). This can be the reflection of both the standard communication of politicians, that usually include commentary on important recurrence and of Twitter infrastructure, that shapes the day-to-day conversation around trending topics.

Next, to assess our hypotheses we fixed several regression models, with different specification according to the typology of the dependent variable. As already implicit in both the topic modelling analysis, and in the table summarizing the results of the qualitative coding, mentions of technocracy, technocratic attitudes and technocratic populism were rare, and even rare were *positive* outlook on such concepts. Thus, while, as discussed, public opinions seem to express technocratic tendencies and a demand for them in the government, members of the elites appear to be more conservative in this respect. Furthermore, elites are comparatively as reluctant to adopt populist attitudes or to discuss populism in positive terms (similar results on the political elites are found in Casiraghi & Bordignon, 2021).

In the table below, we present the first results of our inferential analysis. In particular, we fixed a logistic model testing the predictors influencing the probability of a message displaying technocratic attitudes or not (Model 1 and 2), and populist attitude or not (Model 3 and 4).

We expected, in general, two predictors to have effects on the probability of displaying technocratic attitudes: the typology of the elite and the moment of crisis. Indeed, we expected

members of the ‘Experts’ (Academic and Intellectuals) and the moment of crisis to display technocratic attitudes more frequently³⁴.

As shown below, we found little support for our hypotheses. In particular, we found no support for the ‘moment of crisis’ hypothesis, as it had effects neither on Technocratic nor on Populist Attitudes.



³⁴ Despite the fact that the dataset contains tweets from 2010 through early 2022, we decided to consider the pandemic and the first Lockdown in Italy as enough of a ‘shared’ shock to be considered a moment of crisis.

Table 3.7: Determinants of Attitudes

| VARIABLES | (1) Technocratic Attitudes | (2) TechnocraticAttitudes | (3) PopulistAttitudes | (4) PopulistAttitudes |
|----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| N_Followers | -1.64e-06 (2.53e-06) | -1.57e-06 (2.51e-06) | -4.47e-08 (7.76e-07) | -4.81e-08 (7.48e-07) |
| datejoining | 0.0801 (0.0859) | 0.0787 (0.0861) | 0.0562 (0.0479) | 0.0549 (0.0482) |
| Age | 0.00269 (0.0233) | -0.0729 (0.142) | -0.00466 (0.0128) | -0.119 (0.0782) |
| c.Age#c.Age | - | 0.000665 (0.00123) | - | 0.00108 (0.000723) |
| Female | -0.626 (0.647) | -0.628 (0.648) | 0.00764 (0.290) | 0.00948 (0.291) |
| Media | 1.107* (0.668) | 1.130* (0.674) | -0.594 (0.543) | -0.588 (0.544) |
| Business | 0.336 (0.829) | 0.368 (0.837) | -1.981* (1.025) | -1.991* (1.026) |
| Experts | 0.110 (0.909) | 0.0449 (0.928) | -0.441 (0.510) | -0.633 (0.536) |
| Residuals | 0.309 (0.833) | 0.309 (0.842) | -2.012** (1.026) | -2.059** (1.033) |
| Degree | 0.0351 (0.584) | 0.0434 (0.583) | -0.0870 (0.316) | -0.0898 (0.317) |
| More Education | -0.306 (1.190) | -0.258 (1.190) | 0.430 (0.529) | 0.504 (0.526) |
| PandemicCrisis | 0.895 (1.041) | 0.856 (1.045) | 0.797 (1.016) | 0.790 (1.063) |
| Constant | -167.6 (172.8) | -162.8 (173.5) | -117.6 (96.38) | -111.9 (97.01) |
| Observations | 9,078 | 9,078 | 8,899 | 8,899 |

Turning to the typology of Elite, we find similarly little support: experts are no more likely than politicians to express technocratic attitudes, and no less likely to express populist ones. On the other hand, members of the media elite appear to be more likely, compared to politicians, to display technocratic attitudes. Such disposition is likely the result of both the rebuttal of politics in general, and, more specifically of Conte Cabinet I, which was formed by two parties generally considered as ‘populist’ and that was opposed by many mainstream media. For example, one journalist, in relation to the downfall of Cabinet Conte II and the formation of Cabinet Draghi I, commented: “The more the consultations go on, the more we

feel empathy for the technician himself, Mario Draghi. Covered by the saliva of the *laudatores* no-matter-what”.

In a similar fashion, members of the Business elite are significantly less likely to express Populist Attitudes. This is likely explained by the type of communication that is required given the position they occupy; while members of the business elite might be incentivized to communicate in a reassuring, if ‘catchy’, way, but have little incentive to express negative feelings towards the elites, and especially the financial one of which they are part.

Likewise, members of what we have called the ‘Residual Category’ – that includes the cultural, religious and voluntary associations’ elites – are less likely to adopt populist stances compared to the political elite. Again, this is probably due to a difference in communication approach and, especially in the case of religious and voluntary elites, the opposition to the stances on migration taken by populist radical right parties (i.e. Matteo Salvini’s League) that might offer some incentives to take the distance from such populist approach.

Next, we fixed a series of ordinal logistic models to test which predictors increased the probability of characterising populism, technocracy and technocratic populism as *positive*, from negative through neutral. It should be noted that are characterised as ‘neutral’ also all those observations that did not contain any references to these three concepts.

Table 3.8: Determinants of Attitudes

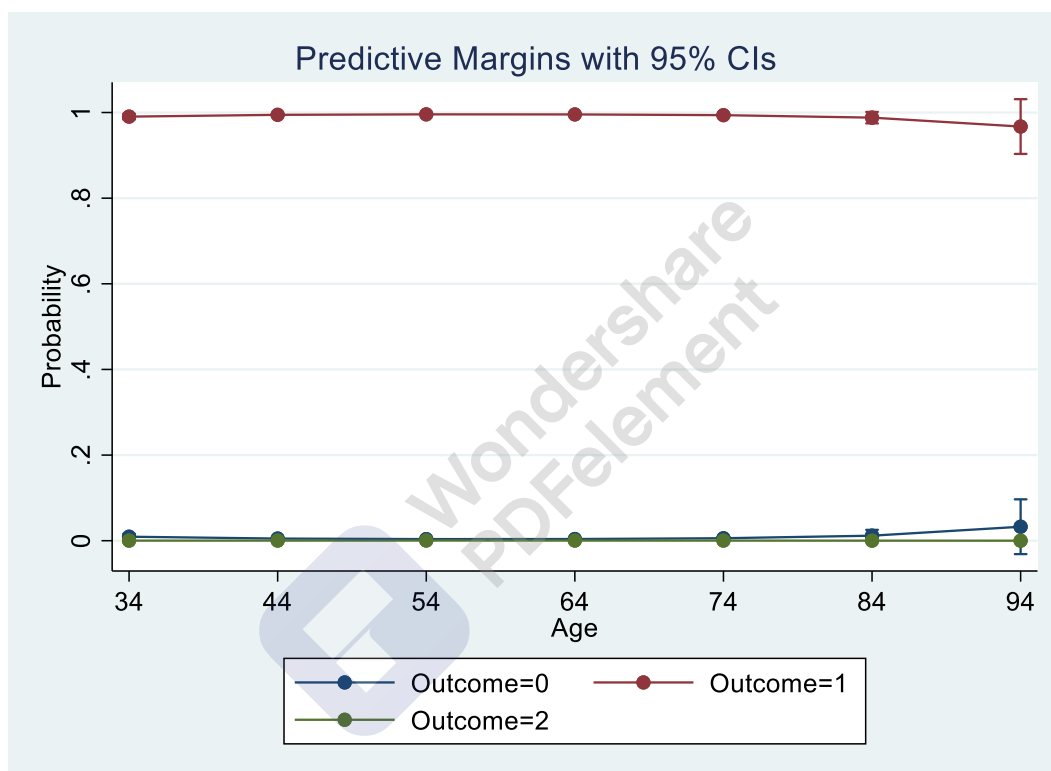
| VARIABLES | (5) Populism | (6) Populism | (7) Technocracy | (8) Technocracy | (9) TecnoPop | (10) TecnoPop |
|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| N_Followers | 6.70e-07 (4.97e-07) | 7.83e-07 (5.69e-07) | -9.30e-09 (6.02e-07) | -1.04e-08 (6.03e-07) | 3.34e-07 (6.82e-07) | 3.49e-07 (7.20e-07) |
| datejoining | 0.0316 (0.0607) | 0.0406 (0.0617) | 0.108 (0.0691) | 0.108 (0.0691) | 0.00196 (0.0911) | 0.00413 (0.0911) |
| Age | 0.00683 (0.0148) | 0.191** (0.0791) | 0.00236 (0.0166) | -0.00396 (0.114) | -0.00904 (0.0221) | 0.0545 (0.146) |
| c.Age#c.Age | - | -0.00166** (0.000697) | - | 5.69e-05 (0.00101) | - | -0.000570 (0.00129) |
| Female | 0.0367 (0.339) | 0.0233 (0.340) | 0.205 (0.394) | 0.205 (0.394) | -0.792 (0.511) | -0.800 (0.514) |
| Media | 0.167 (0.572) | 0.0814 (0.579) | -0.797 (0.504) | -0.795 (0.506) | -1.261* (0.695) | -1.286* (0.700) |
| Business | -0.282 (0.506) | -0.359 (0.517) | -0.0498 (0.638) | -0.0477 (0.639) | -0.583 (0.830) | -0.603 (0.832) |
| Experts | -0.455 (0.516) | -0.291 (0.538) | 0.566 (0.663) | 0.561 (0.671) | 0.322 (0.901) | 0.368 (0.900) |
| Residuals | 0.167 (0.571) | 0.135 (0.583) | -3.23e-05 (0.606) | 0.000661 (0.606) | -0.280 (0.784) | -0.291 (0.787) |
| Degree | 0.397 (0.351) | 0.390 (0.351) | -0.333 (0.422) | -0.333 (0.422) | 1.585*** (0.545) | 1.584*** (0.545) |
| More Education | -0.123 (0.552) | -0.271 (0.549) | -0.143 (0.770) | -0.140 (0.772) | 1.306 (1.046) | 1.271 (1.047) |
| PandemicCrisis | -0.196 (0.972) | -0.133 (0.973) | 1.436 (0.952) | 1.433 (0.954) | 0.273 (1.650) | 0.290 (1.645) |
| /cut1 | 58.82 (122.1) | 81.80 (124.3) | 211.4 (138.9) | 211.0 (139.2) | -2.666 (183.3) | 3.382 (183.5) |
| /cut2 | 72.29 (122.1) | 95.34 (124.3) | 224.2 (139.0) | 223.7 (139.3) | 11.62 (183.3) | 17.68 (183.5) |
| Observations | 9,078 | 9,078 | 9,078 | 9,078 | 9,078 | 9,078 |

Once again, we find little support for the two main expectations that we had. The moment of crisis hypothesis is not supported in any of the models. The typology of media has not any effect on the likelihood of characterising either populism or technocracy as positive as opposed to negative or neutral (Models from 5 to 8),

Notwithstanding these poor results, we can still draw useful insights from the models on technocratic populism. Indeed, we observe that members of the media elite are less likely to characterise technocratic populism as positive compared to the political elite. Taken together with results presented before, it suggests that while media elite are more likely (compared to

politicians) to *display* technocratic tendencies, they are, at the same time, more likely to consider technocratic-populism as more negative compared to their politician counterpart.

Furthermore, education is significant as well in models 9 and 10. Indeed, those who have a degree are more likely to appreciate technocratic populism stances compared to those who have a high school degree or less. Even more important, those who hold more than a university degree (for example: MDs, MBAs, PhDs) do not share the same attitude.



Another interesting result is the effect of age, which is significant both a basic term and as a polynomial, on the likelihood of considering populism as a positive concept. As we observe in the graph above, there is a slight inflection towards the extremes; thus, age and the probability of characterising populism have a slightly accentuated U-Shaped relationship.

Finally, we test the effects in terms of reactions (likes and retweets) of adopting technocratic attitudes. In a nutshell, we investigate how *convenient* it might be for members of the elites to adopt a technocratic stance in terms of the effectiveness and efficacy of their communication.

In order to test our hypothesis, we fit two negative binomial regression models, considering that both the dependent variables are zero-inflated and characterized by higher variance than means.

Table 3.8: Determinants of Likes and Retweets

| VARIABLES | (11) Retweet | (12) Likes |
|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| TecnocraticAttitudes | 109.6*** (25.22) | -142.7*** (26.18) |
| N_Followers | 4.81e-07*** (1.22e-07) | 4.36e-06*** (2.68e-07) |
| Datejoining | -0.0512*** (0.0125) | -0.0743*** (0.0130) |
| Age | -0.0806*** (0.0188) | -0.130*** (0.0203) |
| Age^2 | 0.000545*** (0.000165) | 0.00122*** (0.000179) |
| Female | -0.300*** (0.0646) | -0.550*** (0.0683) |
| Media | 0.506*** (0.0949) | 1.162*** (0.101) |
| Business | 0.142 (0.104) | -0.902*** (0.111) |
| Experts | 0.890*** (0.102) | -0.582*** (0.119) |
| Residuals | -0.454*** (0.103) | 0.432*** (0.112) |
| Degree | 0.377*** (0.0707) | 0.119 (0.0724) |
| More Education | -0.253** (0.122) | 0.319** (0.130) |
| PandemicCrisis | 1.172*** (0.190) | 0.0180 (0.218) |
| Lnalpha | 1.789*** (0.0139) | 1.789*** (0.0139) |
| Observations | 8,879 | 8,879 |

The table above present the quite insightful results of our analysis. First, we observe that displaying Technocratic attitudes has a significant effect on both the count of retweets and likes (favourites). However, while in the first case the effect is positive, in the latter is negative, meaning that while adopting a technocratic stance might increase the total engagement, the elites' audiences also perceive them negatively.

The type of elite also has an effect. Media members are indeed more likely to generate more likes and retweets compared to politicians. Conversely, experts are more likely to generate retweets compared to politicians, but less favourites. Again, we interpret this result substantially: experts might be more likely, or more prone to, generate debate (hence, the retweets) and more likes. Politicians might be making use of bots to generate more positive engagement (likes) for their communication effort. Members of the Residuals category are likewise less likely to generate engagement both in terms of likes and retweets. Education is also significant. Indeed, people holding a degree are more likely to generate engagement in terms of retweets, while those with higher education level are less likely, compared to members holding a high school diploma or less. On the other hand, people with more than a degree are more likely to generate favourites compared to those with the diploma or less; substantially, this result can be explained by the fact that elite members that are so specialized are usually very known and (more unanimously) appreciated in very niche field: for example: Medical Doctors, Top Managers with an MBA.

Finally, the moment of crisis corresponded with an increase on the number of retweets, but did not have a significant effect on the likelihood of generating more likes. Turning to the control variables, we observe that the number of Followers is positively correlated with more likes and retweets; indeed, even if Twitter's architecture is open enough to encounter content from outside one's network of following, it is only reasonable to suggest that the broader the audience base the more likely it is to elicit a reaction. As one might expect age also plays a role, with younger and oldest members of the elite less likely to generate engagement.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have explored the propensity of elite actors to characterise as positive or negative several attitudes that are, as documented, diffused in public opinion: populist, technocratic and techno-populist attitudes. Second, we explored whether they displayed populist or technocratic attitudes.

Preliminary and exploratory results suggest that, despite their popularity among non-elite members, such concepts are seldom discussed by elite actors. Second, we found little support for our hypotheses concerning the moment of crisis (HP1a, HP1b) and the differences in terms of elite types (HP2). Indeed, the moment of crisis did not increase substantially the likelihood to either discuss more or discuss more positively populism, technocracy and techno-populism, or to adopt a more technocratic or populist stances. On the other hand, we found support for HP3a as the adoption of technocratic attitudes increased the level of engagement (retweets). Conversely, HP3b was not supported, as the adoption of technocratic attitudes not only did not increase, but also decreased, the likelihood of positive engagement (likes).

Thus, the present paper investigates an often overlooked aspect of the renovated interest and debate on the technocracy and techno-populism. Indeed, first, we investigated how members of different types of elites (politics, media, experts, businesses) characterise such concepts and attitudes, contributing to the literature that generally focuses on public opinion – and, thus, non-elite members. On the other hand, we chose to focus on social media communication, that allows for a direct and immediate response from the audience, thus testing how engaging or convenient these attitudes are for the public, and how ‘convenient’ it is for members of the elites to express them. Finally, this paper contributes to the existing research by building two original datasets that can be used in future research and projects.

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Concluding Remarks

The general research question underlying the present work is, in light of the vast literature on populism and especially its connection with social media, to explore elite actors, their behavior on social media and their connection with populism, elitism and technocracy. In the present work, this question is addressed and tested by several hypotheses in three main chapters. The first chapter identifies the members of the elites and analyze their main socio-demographic characteristics. Building on Carlo Carboni's work on identifying and analyzing elite actors in Italy, I selected 5245 people occupying the most relevant positions in Italian society. We also collected socio-demographic information on these actors: gender, age, place of birth, place of living, level of education, type of education, position occupied within their institution. Subsequently, we tested some confirmatory hypotheses, vastly confirming previous research's main findings. First, elites' members appear to be, on average, more educated than the average population and more educated with respect to the actors identified in 2004. Second, we observe an increased heterogeneity within elite ranks, in particular within the political, elective, elite, in terms of education, gender and field of specialization. Second, we find an increased, almost doubled, number of women within the ranks of the most powerful actors in Italian society. Conversely, we do find a greater representation of technical fields of specialization, compared to the humanities and law degrees with respect to the 2004 analysis. In particular, there is less ground to maintain that the ineffectiveness of elites is to be identified in their educational path.

The second chapter explores the propensity of these actors to adopt, be active, and be early adopters of social media on part of the elite members. Furthermore, we analyze, by means of exponential random graph model (ergm), the following network among these actors.

In terms of adoption and activation, political actors are more likely to both adopt and being active on Twitter. On the other hand, members of the mass media elite seem to have embraced

social media before. Second, we observe some effects in terms of field of specialization; as posited by the literature, those specialized in STEM subjects are less likely to adopt social media. On the other hand, we test three hypotheses on the composition of the network itself, both in terms of the likelihood of forming ties and in terms of centrality of the actors. First, we find significant indications of homophily: members of a given elite are more likely to form a tie with a member of the same elite than otherwise. Furthermore, being a member of the political elite increases the likelihood of being a central actor. Likewise, specific characteristics of the Twitter account increase the likelihood of being a popular actor.

Finally, the third chapter explores, first, the main topics elite members discuss in their online communication. Second, it tests in particular whether such discussion pertains technocratic, populist or techno-populist attitudes. Preliminary results (topic modelling) suggest that, despite their popularity in public opinion, such concepts are seldom discussed by elite actors. Second, we found limited difference in terms of attitudes across elites' types. On the other hand, we found that the adoption of technocratic attitudes increased the level of engagement (retweets). Conversely, the adoption of technocratic attitudes not only did not increase, but also decreased, the likelihood of *positive* engagement (likes).

Among the major contributions, we provide an original approach at the study of elite on social media, by considering members of all elites at the same time, allowing to compare their characteristics and their behavior on social media. Second, we explore a vastly uncharted territory by focusing on the attitudes (and especially technocratic one) on part of elite actors. Furthermore, we contribute to the existing literature by building three main datasets. The first one detailing information on more than 5000 elite members, building on the previous literature results. The second one detailing such elite members' behavior on Twitter: adoption, activation, number of followers and date of joining. Third, a dataset comprising more than 60.000 tweets automatically collected, 10.000 of which manually coded, to explore elite actors' attitudes. At

the same time, this work presents several limitations that also offer the opportunity for further research. First, the analysis is limited to the Italian case, without exploring the differences among different countries. On the one hand, a comparative study would further our understanding of elite education and formation. In particular, it would be crucial to observe whether the social (media) dynamics we observe among the Italian elites would be the same in other countries. Second, it is likewise limited to the analysis of Twitter, opening the possibility to explore the behaviour on other social media. For instance, the theory of affordances suggests that users adapt to the peculiar characteristics of the social medium they engage with, and it would be relevant to expand the research to elite actors' behaviour on other social media platforms. Third, it is limited to the time being without exploring the changes in the composition of the elites' ranks overtime, despite some descriptive analyses comparing Carboni's results with ours. Likewise, it would be relevant to test the evolution of the Twitter network itself in terms of density, cohesion and characteristics that determine the formation of a tie.

