

When minorities' group discussions in social media become a resilient strategy.

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Abstract. The paper presents a brief overview of how social media can influence minority interactions by focusing at their features. Starting from the notion of “active minority” (Moscovici, 1981) the aim of the study is to understand how participants of a social mediated community face a critical event by focusing at socio-psychological dimensions that affect their “on line resilience” and how they promote their “social empowerment”.

At this purpose was performed a quanti-qualitative analysis - lexicographic and content analysis by means of a software called *Taltac* (Bolasco, 2013). Results pointed out different socio-psychological processes (self-definition, trust, emotions and values) before and after critical situation emerging by on line discussions.

Keywords. Active minorities, resilience, political participation, social media

1 Introduction

The link between lack of power and personal resilience in everyday life has been explored in various social psychology perspectives [1]. The common determinants of a positive and participative approach to personal and social lack of power is what Freire defined “process of conscientisation” as development of critical thinking constructed by sharing common ideas, practice, and knowledge within a community. Belonging to a community, sharing knowledge and arguments – mostly in a context of lack of information – can give the opportunity to perceive a sense of control on the events and shared problems and thus it can be a source of personal resilience [2].

Within this framework the present work explores what means to be part of a minority group built through a social media (in particular, a Facebook group) and what discourses and argumentations are used to face a critical phase in which participants are involved.

The psico-social notions that contribute to understand this process are the construct of *active minority* [3] and its relation with *social trust* [4].

To be part of a minority group means to be part not only of a social minority in quantitative terms but also to have a marginal status and lack of power [5]; but a minority group can actually exert some influence on the majority, though in an indirect and slow way, because, just thanks to its marginal status, it can adopt an autonomous and divergent thinking useful to evaluate, judge and discuss the majority's choices.

In the influence process minorities have to assume coherent, autonomous and egalitarian behavioural styles; but what are the discourses they construct to solve problems and at the same time to resist and to face critical events?

What are the characteristics of minority thinking? What arguments do people in a minority group use, and how do they construct a strategy to induce an opinion change in their own group or outside of it?

First of all we need to define and distinguish two different types of minority groups, one belonging as social category to the majority but having less power or a different opinion on a given topic (ingroup), and the other belonging to a different social category (outgroup).

This difference looks useful to understand what is the role of trust that members of minorities assume toward different institutions and what are the social organizations they trust in while looking for possible strategies to face negative events.

2 Social mediated communities and their features

Social media and social networking seems to be a new way to construct meanings and to build new forms of relationships away of or in support to “real life”. From this perspective social media can be used as the main or unique tool to be in touch by means of what we can name “social mediated communities”: a virtual togetherness of members that produce discussions and proposals though not in physical presence or by regular contacts but sharing a social category [6] and/or place identity [7].

In this sense an interesting dynamics can develop when participants do not personally know each other but they share a common cause or make part of a same social category – like in the case study presented below, of a Facebook group of young university researchers. In this case researchers inform each other by sharing problems in their virtual group, because they acknowledge a competence to its participants, but maybe also because they don’t feel confident to their respective academic real contexts.

Thus, social mediated communities in this case can be a good way to exchange information and support during a critical and problematic phase for their work-life that the researchers face everyday, as in the case of a national competition to access a university job (see below).

One important feature of group discussion is its structure: either formal or informal; formal when groups correspond to acknowledged institutions like political parties or formal associations; informal when outside the social network the group is not acknowledged as such. In this case the network can be the expression of a spontaneous majority or minority group joined by common interests or belonging to a real or virtual social group. Another feature is also relevant: an either vertical or horizontal structure. The group structure is vertical when it contains opinion leaders that regularly animate a discussion by links or posts, and horizontal when participants democratically and actively intervene. Lortie-Lussier [8] stated that a minority group with a leader is more influential, but this becomes a research question when groups live in a cyber-place.

3 A case study: The Roars (Return on academic research)

Within Italian institutions one of the most conflictual debates concerns University. In 2013, after a reform of the University proposed in 2011 by the right-wing Italian Ministry of Instruction Gelmini, professors and universities were evaluated by an independent agency called ANVUR (Evaluation National Agency of University and Research), passing from a local evaluation with single competitions between candidates to a professor role-crossing in a national evaluation process of “professor eligibility”. The first round of evaluation started in February 2013, an after one year at least part of the evaluators’ committees – in December 2013 – finished their work and published the lists of eligible and non-eligible candidates, with their corresponding evaluations.

The Ministry of Instruction and University decided that the eligibility would follow numeric criteria obtained by reference to the so called “medians” obtained considering the number of publications with the impact factor and citations by the scientific community. (Only later, when a new Minister came, Francesco Profumo, the more qualitative criteria were exploited).

In this confusing period – due to novelty and lack of information – within the very institution of the Anvur Agency an active group of researchers created a Facebook group and a website called “roars” (Return on academic research”).

They do not know each other but their number grows up very fast and at the time of this work they count almost 5000 members (7 millions of views and 21.600 comments) who discuss together on the situation trying to find possible solutions together.

3.1. A textual and lexical analysis of Roars

Group discussions have been examined through two methods of analysis. On one side, they have gone through automatic lexicographic analysis by using TALTAC, a software for qualitative analysis. On the other side the lexicon obtained through quantitative measures was analyzed by means of “concordance analysis” that, like “traditional” discourse analysis, takes into account the text of all answers to draw recurrent concepts, topics or semantic areas from them.

The automatic quanti-qualitative analysis was performed on the subjects’ discussions by *TalTac* (“Lexical and Textual Automatic Processing for Content Analysis”: [9]), a software for textual data analysis based on a “lexicometric approach”: an application of statistical principles to textual corpora. The “textual statistics” [10] aims to extract the semantic level in a text starting from the list of words obtained by statistical analysis; for example, in the specificities’ analysis, the software extracts automatically a list of significant words obtained by a statistical comparison between sub-parts of text according to selected variables. From these statistically significant words we also extract also the list of the sentences where significant words appear in order to interpret and identify both contextualized meanings (looking also at “negations” or other unexpected sense of words) and relevant topics.

Here we describe topics and discussions that emerge from the Facebook group of “Roars” Italian researchers by focusing and detailing the used lexicon both in the first period (before the national evaluation results) and in the second period (after publica-

tion of first results) to identify the minority's discourses aimed at facing two critical periods, one characterized by lack of information and another by negative evaluations from commissions.

We extracted a corpus by means of Facebook Graph API (Application Program interface, for advanced users) and we obtained a *corpus* which counts 31948 (V) occurrences with 307682 (N) different words and a high lexical richness index $[(V/N)*100]$, equal to 10,38%.

The lexical analysis includes some descriptive information, particularly interesting for the understanding of minority group discussions, like *adjective analysis* and *time analysis*.

3.2. Adjective analysis

We used the dictionary of positive and negative adjectives present in TalTac2 by analysing the negative index¹ to identify the polarization through a positive or negative lexicon. The index reveals that the corpus shows characteristics of negativity as high as 71%, that is higher than the reference value for Italia (which is 40% according to Bolasco [9]).

Looking in depth we see that negative adjectives are very often used in the first period concerning the Evaluation Process. We can recognize an adjectival use focalized on the first period on a sematic area of doubt and highly oriented toward a personalized criterion (*questionable discretion, objectionable, poor, questionable, unproductive, smoky, doubtful, bad*);

on the other hand the second period that corresponds to the first publication of concrete results focuses on the emotional use of adjectives revealing a sense of unfulfilled expectations, like *scandalous, disconcerting but also shameful, indecent, disgusting, detrimental, pernicious, laughable, mediocre*.

Moreover, the second period shows a very high frequency of the adjective "pertinent", that is used by the committees as the most typical "cause" of negative evaluations. (Actually, one of the most used motivations mentioned by evaluators to deny eligibility is that a candidate's publications, notwithstanding their high number and quality, show a lack of *pertinence* to the core of the discipline).

3.3. Text Imprinting: Time, mode and person analysis

Time analysis reveals a strong *orientation to the present*, because out of all verb frequencies our subjects express time information most frequently in present tense (82%, as opposed to 11% past and 7% future) mostly in the first period, while in the second, future time slightly increases (+2%): which in a certain sense can be seen as determination in planning. The most frequent mode is - as predictable - the indicative; but also a large use of conjunctive and conditional can be found (79% indicative vs 11% conditional and 10% conjunctive), which is quite high compared to general Italian use, with conditional and conjunctive around 4% and 7% respectively. This might

¹ The index is obtained by extracting all the positive and negative adjectives by means of Taltac dictionary of adjective and then by calculating the ratio between the total of the negative occurrences and the total of the positive ones (tot. Occ. Pos/tot. Occ. Pos*100).

be accounted for by participants' high level of education that allows the use of complex forms (i.e. hypothetical constructions), but it can be also an index of *uncertainty*; researchers in this context argue in search of strategies and possible solutions in a confused context.

Another characteristic is the conjugation extremely oriented toward the third person (69%) compared to first (26%) and second (5%); what we expected was – given the dialogical form of discussions – an overuse of the first and the second person; on the contrary the high frequency of third person might be due to a sort of *contraposition between “me-us” and “they”* (researchers vs evaluators), this tendency is present in the whole Roars's discussions but increases significantly in the second period.

3.4. *The peculiar and characteristic lexicon of researchers as a minority group*

Beside the absolute value of words, the *key words* or *peculiar lexicon* [9] are the over-represented words in the text created by a comparison between the corpus and the external lexicons of frequency, taken as reference model.² The measure of the variance from the reference lexicon is represented by the *square deviation*³.

If we group the overrepresented vocabulary we find three main recurrent topics that we can phrase as follows:

1. *The evaluation process, its participants and its effects*
2. *The researchers' reference values: political and economic processes underlying the evaluation process*
3. *Participation and common proposal*

1. *The evaluation process, its participants and its effects*

This first topic spreads across all participant and all technical aspects of the evaluation:

(reported in a decreasing order, all up to 3,95; $p < 0.05$) *qualified, certification, commissioners, universities, enabled, researchers, competitions, university, teaching, PhD, commissions, full professor, publications, evaluations, median, privacy, associate, professor, monographs, band, enabled, recruitment, candidate, monograph, bibliometrics, article, assessment, commission, Commission, rewarding, to enable, casual, relevant, candidate, round, quote, magazines, policy, judgment, publish, publishing, co-optation, meritocracy, curricula, quotes, results, areas, suitable rejected, suitable, economists, humanistic, accreditation, rankings, merit, discipline, parameters, indicators,*

² In this case we used the *standard Italian*, resource in Taltac.

³ *standard quadratic deviation*: considers significant words overused compared to the lexicon of reference, we then consider the forms with greater deviation of 3.84 which is the reference value of a chi square with one degree of freedom ($p < 0.05$).

argue, excellence, merit, selection, progressions, bureaucracy, ministry, errors, extractions, judge, questionable criteria

Within this topic a very negative evaluation of evaluators emerges: in terms of types of discrediting criteria [11] they are attacked as to their competence (ignorant) and honesty (*clubs, nepotism, barons*), finally being described as a power out of the law (*illegitimate*) and out of control (*insanity, delirium, boycott, rubbish*): *recommended, shame, ridicule, crap, baron, distortions, sawn, nonsense, rubbish unlawful, scandalous, madness, delirium, clubs, fallacious, nepotism, trumpet, questionable, rag, decency, crap, boycott, shameful, embarrassing, ignorant.*

1. *The researchers' reference values: political and economic processes underlying the evaluation process*

The second topic covers the value dimension, with researchers widening their discourses to the political and economic field.

The term *politics* for example is a key term to understand the level of trust [4] in political and economic institutions. The term, that is overfrequent in the first period (110 vs 58) corresponds to “*bad politics*” (*cattiva politica*): a type of discredit that is mostly oriented on the competence and honesty dimension: “*ignorant and corrupted*”, “*incapable, corrupted and ignorant*” [11]. Politicians seem to be the cause of the present economic crisis and researchers – as is reported in the concordances below - ask for a “*political renaissance*” (*a new political framework, political path change, to take universities back to zero, ethical path, political renovation*) as far as politicians did not invest economical resources in the academic context and expressed their willingness only as “*an interested club*” on the basis of “*opportunistic reasons*”. In the second period the debate on “*politics*” decreases (110 f. vs 58 f.), politics is only mentioned as a site in which to ask for explanations and economic resources in public context (“*parliamentary explanation*”, “*resources*”, “*political and ethical choice*”) or becomes something to overcome by means of “*justice*”; moreover researchers now describe the executive side, represented by one more Minister of University, Maria Chiara Carrozza, as a powerless minister or sometimes as an absent interlocutor (“*Someone has heard Maria Chiara Carrozza?*”) remarking a lack of dialogue between researchers, professors and government.

Selected Concordance of “Politica” (period 1: freq. 110)

- *always for opportunistic reasons, the **political** class began to ride. We must instead get through this*
- *This is not a virus, but a precise **political** will, a specific project shared cultural and stubbornly pursued by a club.*
- *but the measure in question is another example of **bad policy** and bad politics, we know, only combines disasters. . .*
- *The blame for this economic crisis, ethics and morality is an ignorant and corrupt*

- *politicians* who shamelessly plundered the hopes of young people
- I expect, however, that will be conquered by force (see actions) rather than with **politics**
- But I do not seem to remember any **political** force that has never explicitly raised the question of which model of nation we want
- I would like this question, which is not technical but **political** , came out from the corridors of becoming part of the political debate
- The problem is that when a question is considered "technical" **policy** stop to discuss
- only if there is a significant **policy** shift . When we become a decent country **politically** , I said decent , not perfect.

Selected Concordance of " Carrozza " (period 2: freq . 39)

- The answer is not there, **Carrozza** is showing as a great **political** with a small p .
- **Carrozza** is there by virtue of the Holy Spirit and knows neither the school nor the university 's problems
- From **Carrozza** never came a word . . . Poor things . . . And what figures are you talking about? Let's organize together
- Can you see the Minister **Carrozza** who " abolished " a procedure in the race ? :)
- I'm sorry, but I think the response of minister Carrozza is in many ways exemplary and necessary
- **Carrozza** must stop talking nonsenses

The description of this more systemic and general discussion comes from the peculiar lexicon with the overrepresented words (reported below).

(reported in a decreasing order, all up to 3,95; $p < 0.05$) : *Research, Euro, European funds, salary, incentives, budget, salary, economists, cuts, gross loans, Europeans, money, shots wage, virtuous, financing, Italy, culture, quality, university, history, respect, scientific merit, science, person, future development, the U.S., background, announcements, scientists, international, internationalization, standards, republic, government, accountability, justice, innovation, proposals, development, expertise, regulatory, rector, opportunities, needs, nobel, initiatives resources*

3. Participation and common proposal

The third topic is the "researchers' participation and collective-cooperative activism".

Recurring terms are linked to *petition, rights* (ricorso, diritti) and shared information to face a *common* problem or strategy and possible *future* solution taken together (we-ness).

Actually recurrent verbs are ones of doing, changing, working, (fattivi, volizione, potere) especially in the form of second plural person (*we can, we stay, we want, we must, we do*).

Within this topic we can include words close to the idea of things to do together in order to react and to be protected from injustice (up to 3,95 square deviation) like *possibly, hope, example, can, could, may, plan, possibility, partici-*

pate, can, I can, discussion, work, best, you, join, proposal, community, work, joint strength, our, us, network, compare, decide, change, change, future.

This area stands for the idea of resorting to a social resource to face a negative evaluation in a hierarchical and competitive context. In this connection, arguing on the web seems to be a way to give support and share information and at the same time it creates a secure place to discuss and find an exit strategy. Key words to understand this central topic are in this case rights, justice (as “superpartes” institution) and juridical words, seen as tools to defend themselves. (*law, human rights, justice, judiciary, self-defense, rules, extension, rules, terms, rules, just, recourse*)

Selected Concordance of “possiamo” (period 1: freq. 39)

- *we want and **we can** support our desire for an efficient country*
- *Then they win grants because they are good, **we can** do with their network. . . however, the theme of 'article linked towards resolving the dispute*
- *Then **we dissent** from his work as a minister (and I strongly disagree),*

Selected Concordance of “possiamo” (period 2: freq. 54)

- ***We can** no longer sit idly by and just complain amongst ourselves otherwise we will be accomplices in this disaster*
- *Yes, we need to move, **we can** not suffer a judgment that will have much influence on our lives. The important thing is to **participate**.*
- ***We can**, however, recourse of and make use of our rights*
- *only **we can** find arguments to convince the 'public opinion' s investment in research is useful and far-sighted*
- *simply share what I figured out why I think so **we can** clarify each other's ideas.*

3.5 Verb lemmas

The characteristic analysis of verb lemmas (with square deviation starting from 60,00; while the reference point is 3,95), i.e. all verbs converted in their infinitive forms, highlights four types of verbs. The first one, that we can name verbs of “**participation and social activism**”, goes from concrete actions to acts of group coordination and action planning. This type increases in the second period, after publication of the first results (s.d. > 3,95; agentic verbs: *power, succeed, find, finance, change, grow, participate, decide, earn, win, think, criticize, share, fix, work, show, get, take, raise, reward, predict, test, enable, risk, protest, overcome, invoke, invest, organize, enhance, reject, groped, challenge, boycott, create, propose, betting, solve, encourage, defend, prepare, rebalance, reform, excel, advertise, charge, rethink, take, fight, convince, fix, hold, secure, contribute, equate, try again, cooperate, prevent, respond to, influence, compel, start over, create, expand, promote, renew, resist, aspire, grow, to dream, to associate, to dare, enhance, fruit, flip, recover, trigger, coordinate, pursue, rebuild, program, address*).

Another interesting topic concerns verbs of on line group interaction, indicating that one of the main goals of the “ROARS” group is “**reasoning**” and arguing together:

Sometimes, for this minority, arguing is an instrument for the interpretation of acts or laws and for reasoning together on the future, on the basis, usually, of posted articles, links or news.

(s.d. > 3,95) *Understand, evaluate, discuss, click, refer, extrapolate, feel, add, to argue, to consider, recommend, center, disagree, implement, clarify, argue, protest, agree, infer, to reiterate, comment, confirm, restate, reason, verify, doubt, imply, specify, reflect, stress, indicate, infer, say, correspond, establish focus, to infer, to emerge, to intervene, to allow, to mention, simplify, differentiate, declare, issue, focus, excuse, introduce, monitor, communicate, examine, to assert, to aim.*

Another useful function of online interaction in this group, even if less represented compared to the other two, is the “**expression of emotions**”, especially negative emotions that are primarily acknowledgeable by the negative effects both on the economic and on the self-image side, and more in general on the researcher’s life.

Quite representative of a first type of expressive verbs are those mentioning negative actions and their effects on life and emotions.

(with square deviation starting from 15,00; while the reference point is 3,95): *Displease, fear, err, block, complain, waste, scream, regret, shame, suicide, insult, scuttle, beat, abuse, spitting, damage, freeze, hit, brandish, point, demolish, slay, crazy, break, fumble, pick up, prejudice, cringe, break, subdue, aging, affect, scrounge up, derail, deter, insult, graze, vomiting, mock, live*

Positive emotions are less frequent; in the first period we find verbs like “hope”, *auspicare*, in relation to positive expectations, but in the second period the coexistence of verbs like “*promote, enforce, continue to, thank, help, share, suggest, support, be grateful, agree, resolve*” highlights that positive emotion are only felt in presence of the potential support of the group composed by other active researchers in the same critical period.

This function of the Roars Group is evident when we extract “entities”⁴ or complex expressions (marked in bold) in the corpus that are clear requests for help, usually followed by a very large variety of answers:

"Guys, I have a problem and I would like to **share** it here **hoping** that someone would **suggest** a way to **solve** it. (...) Has anyone had similar experiences and can **help** me? "

⁴ Fragments Obtained through semantic concordance by means of so called *Entity research* (Taltac allows to extract phrases or fragments which present sequences or semi-sequences with two or more words that represent complex queries; Bolasco, 2013):

4 Conclusion

One aim of this study is highlighting how social media can be a tool for active minority groups to overcome some critical situations. Social networking is a place where people can share information, discuss on common problems and/or on political and economic situations, find shared strategies to adopt and finally develop group discourses and personal narratives. In minority groups arguing on line seems to correspond to a way to develop a group thinking by knowing the other member's point of view, by analysing together either macro-themes (political and economic situation) or micro-experience (personal experiences like rejection from the national evaluation, legal action). In this sense discourses can be seen as an active participation but also – beyond the institutional contexts where they live – they can facilitate the so called “process of conscientization” and critical consciousness [12] at an individual and group level. Social media – here, in “Roars”, the social mediated communities - are a space where discussions are freely faced by constructing a “social knowledge” favoured by the fact that they can “de-traditionalise the public sphere” allowing the coexistence of different points of view and dissenting voices and opinions by means of horizontality and egalitarian access [1].

The work presented is based on the Italian group of researchers “Roars” before and after a national evaluation process aimed at their possible enrolment as professor within Italian University.

Roars, as a minority group lacking any consulting or decisional power, before the evaluation results discuss all possible scenarios in absence of institutional information, especially analysing the political and economic present and past situation. After the extraction of peculiar and characteristic lexicon [9] the concordance analysis points out that this political tendency of discussion becomes a request to be listen to by the Minister, who is felt as distant and absent (“someone has heard Carrozza?”), and a more general distrust emerges toward a political class described as “ignorant, unqualified and corrupt”.

This lack of trust toward the political class and institutions [4] seems to be one motivation that lead Roars members to be active within the group by having peer discussions; in their “participation and common proposal” we can find a sense of trust in the belonging to a larger group, we find a “we” often opposed to “they”. Within this topic the juridical part, with all the possible tools usually thought and constructed together, seems to be the “neutral” institution to turn to face personal and group injustices.

This exploratory analysis is a way to understand psychosocial processes within minority group, with a particular attention to social trust. It helps us to better understand trust dynamics by means of social media discussions: we have seen that in critical phases if there is a lack of trust toward “political” institutions, minorities discuss for a common solution or for a guarantee which helps them as super-partes institution (i.e. the case of justice). This can be a resilient strategy for a minority, but further studies can go more in depth and analyse further acts of “social commitment” [4] to overcome negative and uncertain phase.

From the use of social media some methodological issues also emerge concerning the analysis of argumentation on line. The retrieval of on line discussions give the researcher a very large material to analyse and to understand, sometimes in a real-time situation. So before analysing in depth this big data and material obtained from social media a possible route to better understand and to identify argumentations in discussions is to identify main topics by means of a lexicographic approach [9; 10] through *imprinting* analysis of lexicon (time, mode and person analysis by extraction and frequencies aggregation), *peculiar* and *characteristic analysis* supported by *concordances* and *entity research* in the text.

From this methodological point of view, this study is a way to connect a lexicographic approach to the specific need of studying argumentation on line. Future works could explore the minority groups' argumentations used by their members to "embrace" each other from an instrumental and emotional side in a critical situation and in a position of lack of power.

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