

Checking Out Electoral Twitterdom

Judith Harris (January 25, 2013)



Twitter in Italy is playing a role for the first time ever in a national general election. Taking a peek at what Twitterdom has to say

ROME - Twitter is a fact for i-Italy (check out: @iitaly), and in Italy is playing a role for the first time ever in a national general election. Now entering its last four weeks, the campaign is characterized - no less than any other activity these days - by lack of funds, and the streets of Rome are surprisingly free of posters by comparison with previous elections. But like TV, a Tweet is free for a candidate, and, like Pope Benedict XVI in Latin, most are therefore busy Tweeting their hearts out.

One holdout was former Premier Silvio Berlusconi, who recently commented on a TV talk show that he intended to use the internet ("We already do"), but that, "I don't know if we'll use twitter because I see that so many futile, nasty comments crop up on it. I think that a statement on Twitter could unleash a universe of negative responses." He changed his mind, and within 24 hours his Twitter fans jumped from 7,000 to 70,000 in a single day. Indeed, this upward surge came so quickly that skeptics became suspicious of what they called "inflated Tweets" until the "Berlusconi Committee 2013" spoke up, explaining that they were unpaid "Digital volunteers" working "for a Better Italy." Something similar happened with the Pope's advisors, who initially were concerned about abusive



Tweets. In the end they were persuaded to ignore whatever negative came down the Tweet path.

Because the scandal of Monte dei Paschi of Siena broke this week, the Tweets and reTweets on this prevail as we move into the weekend. According to the Bank of Italy, "hidden documents found recently" reveal that the managers of the world's oldest bank concealed toxic transactions. Although Economic Minister Vittorio Grilli said that the government had known of the bank's problems for at least a year, this did little to defuse the situation. Bank stocks tumbled. The fallout is also potentially political: the bank in the heart of Italy's "red belt" serves the prevailing leftist administrations, and the bank is therefore considered an ally of the Partito Democratico (PD) of Pier Luigi Bersani. From a Tweeter:

ON MONTE DEI PASCHI: "Bersani says the PD not involved. Banks do banking. O please give me a break"--MariaLuisa Trussardi

"The PD: "We're not involved." True. In 1472, when the bank was founded, not even Rosy Bindi was born"--Lia Celi

"The PD is a candidate to lead the country. I hope not the way it led the Monte dei Paschi"--Maurizio Belpietro [editor-in-chief, rightist daily Libero]

A second, minor flap involved the candidacy of controversial Sicilian magistrate Antonio Ingroia, whose new party is called Rivoluzione Civile Ingroia. On Jan. 3 Twitter suspended its account, @RivCivile, on grounds of "inappropriate" usage. Ingroia's followers responded, accusing Twitter of censorship. Ingroia's supporters' tweets are back, curiously interlaced with regular retweets from Bruno Vespa.

Taking a peek at what Twitterdom has to say on the elections and on individual politicians, it's only appropriate that we begin with the anti-Tweet Berlusconi himself. A footnote: almost all of these Tweets appear in Italian; the (rough) translation is mine.

ON BERLUSCONI: "Interesting fact: Berlusconi was on air for a total of 63 hours between 24 December and 14 January"--Open Europe.

ON PIER LUIGI BERSANI: "Can you help me? I'm down with t9, it's like when you vote for Renzi and Bersani pops out"--anelemella

ON GIANFRANCO FINI: "Fini's defense: I did everything wrong, vote for me"--Andrea B

ON MATTEO RENZI: "In the primaries Bersani's faithful participated more - Renzi maybe has more consensus but not all in the PD [Partito Democratico]"--benitotar

"Italy and Italians are wasting years of their social and political life for voting Bersani. Renzi is the future"--Il Baba

ON RENZI vs BERSANI: "Some people would rather have a turkey on the roof than a bird in the hand"--Floriana Mar

ON MARIO MONTI: "Even the applause [at Davos] is feeble, quiet, sober just like Mario Monti"--La Scelta di Sofie

"Mario Monti admits voting for Berlusconi in '94 "but that day I had a a veer and vomited"--GialloParma



ON BEPPE GRILLO: "Power to flower vote @beppegrillo" - Beppe Grillo Forever
"The situation is tough but you know they won't give you an easy ride, you're a thorn in their side, pungent and annoying"--Lino Pugliese

A POX ON ALL THEIR HOUSES:

"Berlusconi Monti Bersani & Renzi, reformers or conservatives?"--TzeTze Politica

"Bersani Renzi and buddies 1 ministry each hurts nobuddy, time to go home"--Angelolmbraini1

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