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**VOTING INDECISION:
A CHALLENGE TO “VIDEO-POLITICS”?**

The case of the 2000 Regional election in the Veneto region

by

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PARTY CAMPAIGNING AND LEGITIMACY

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Abstract

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The relationship among citizens, politics and media has been changing dramatically during the course of *the Italian political transition*. Nowadays, mass media is playing a more important role both in the political system and the electoral campaign compared to the past. This paper presents some results from a survey conducted in the Veneto, which is an important Northern region. It is the region where the political change was deeper than other Italian geo-political areas. The Veneto is the region where in the past the Christian Democrat Party was deeply rooted, and where the Northern League was born and had a great social and electoral success. A representative sample of voters (n=800) of this region was interviewed (by CATI method) in the study. The research (in-house poll survey) took place the same day of the Regional election on April 16, 2000.

The paper focuses on the campaign for the election of “regional governor”. It was a very important appointment for scholars, for many reasons. Firstly for the way in which the campaign was conducted by candidates (centred on “nationalisation” of a local election and “spectacularisation” of the electoral campaign). And furthermore because it was the first time that new electoral rules were adopted for the “regional election”. In fact, this time voters were in the position to indicate a split ticket vote in the same ballot paper; one for the “governor” and the second for a party list or coalition, possibly different from the one which supported the candidate for “governor”. As already mentioned the “personalisation” was a basic characteristic of the election campaign which relied heavily on the media.

The statistical analysis (cross-tabulation and logistic regression model) explain how the media campaign had the primary role of <<reinforcing>> the political orientation. This because the campaign was followed by people who had already made up their minds. The undecided voters - a quantitatively and qualitatively more and more important part of the regional (and national) Italian electorate - are less sensitive to mass media-centred campaign communication, as they tend to rely mostly on interpersonal networks. Furthermore, the article shows that "personalisation" of electoral campaign - exalted by media and marketing professionals - had minor impact on the final results compared to the traditional political belonging and ideological cleavages.

The conclusion I draw from the empirical data collected is that the question of what is the contribution of media-originated factors vis-à-vis that of politically and socially-based factors on voting behaviour is still an open issue. In particular, voting indecision was strictly linked to the inattention toward the electoral campaign. The *undecided voters*, who are a privileged electoral target of communication strategy, are the ones who challenged the video-politics, since less of them followed the media campaign.

VOTING INDECISION: A CHALLENGE TO “VIDEO-POLITICS”?¹

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1. In *transition* toward video-politics

About ten years ago, the so called *Italian Political Transition* started. Over this period the Italian party system has changed dramatically. Most of the traditional political parties and leaders have disappeared. All parties have changed their names and new ones have been born. At the same time, in Italy, the debate on the connection between communication and politics has been refurbished.

The relationship between media and politics is widely known as a classical *communication research studies*' problem. The Italian case gives an additional interest to this matter. In fact, the phase of *Political Transition* has implied the redrawing of the relationship among the traditional political system actors (parties, voters, pressure groups, institutions). On the other side during this period, the political role of the media system has increased greatly, and consequently it has taken a central place in the political system.

Actually during this phase many different aspects were changed: i.e., the ideologies' crisis; the emerging of new cleavages like the territorial one; the political participation has embraced new and less institutionalised ways; the party feeling of belonging has thinned down; the territorial political subcultures have declined. This last process involved firstly the “white zone” – which was located in the North-East of the country - and, in a less dramatic way, the “red zone” of central Italy.

Regarding the decline of the “white zone”, it is enough to think of the demise of the Christian Democrat Party. This party, deeply rooted in the “white zone”, has been for more than forty years the most important party from the electoral and the government role viewpoint. The media system found its own space in the empty left from the dissolution of the Christian Democrat Party and from other phenomena which occurred during the '90s.

Traditional political parties have changed not just their names and their symbols, but also their organisational structures. Parties have become more “light”. In comparison with the past they have lost most of the touch with the territory, the local society and the power of mobilisation. Generally speaking parties have reduced the role of ideology and the organization. At the same time processes such as *personalisation* and *media communication* have increased their importance in parties' strategy. It has carefully paid attention to the leader's image. Political marketing techniques are used as a fundamental instrument to understand the electorate's attitudes and needs. Political consultants are regularly asked about how to plan the electoral campaign, convention, events, advertising and so on.

A fundamental impulse toward the “mediatization” of Italian politics came from the General election held on the 27th of March, 1994². On that occasion, Silvio Berlusconi - a wealthy

¹ An earlier version of this paper was discussed with Professor Ilvo Diamanti. I am grateful to him for his suggestion. Acknowledgments also go to the Fondazione Nord Est for having allowed the use of the survey data on which the paper is based, and Michael Marus for his friendly help. Thanks also to Giampiero Mazzoleni, Director of Com Pol – Comunicazione Politica where the Italian version of this paper was published: ComPol – Comunicazione Politica, N.1 2001, pp.47-67.

² Cf. Diamanti & Mannheim (edited by), 1994. In particular see the Introduction and the articles written by Rodriguez and by Guizzardi

businessman and media entrepreneur who leads the most important Italian private television group – stood as the candidate for prime minister. He was able, thanks to his media and political marketing strategy, to build a new party named “Go Italy !” (Forza Italia !) and to lead it to victory. All of this happened just within a few months.

For the first time, Italian politics experienced a new way of doing politics. Innovative resources such as political marketing, media, and political communication were used, that is to say, they were used in a different way from the traditional one. Berlusconi soon became popular as a political leader, as well; before presenting himself as a candidate, he was widely known just as a businessman.

The process that involves the progressive centrality of the media in the political field had already been experienced in many other western countries before Italy. But in Italy it was something innovative that outlined the changes which occurred during the ‘90s. It has been a transformation which was unthinkable until a short time earlier, because of rooted historical and sub-cultural elements on the national political culture.

The progressive weakening of the parties’ identification and the birth of an electoral market more and more open and competitive, raises some interest about the role of political communication (Diamanti & Mannheim, 1994). Particularly, it is interesting to understand how voters approach the electoral campaign and what is the impact of the political consultant communication strategy.

The debate on media power is still an open issue. Pieces of research carried out in Italy are now numerous (Segatti, 2001). Many of them focused on the relationship among citizens, media and politics on the “changing doorstep” (Corbetta & Mazzoleni, 1995). Other research has tried to quantify how many votes are “moved” toward centre-left and centre-right coalitions by the influence of private and public television groups (Ricolfi, 1996). Some studies were performed to understand how voters collect political information and formulate the voting choice (Campus, 2001).

In sum, the dispute on the connection between media and politics has stimulated the Italian debate.

2. Electoral campaign in the Veneto region

The scenario outlined above is the wider context where the Veneto region is located. This paper presents some findings which come from research performed in this region during the Regional election in the year 2000. It is an area which has been in the centre of the deep transformation that has touched the Italian political system during the last few years.

This well-known territorial area represents an important case study, because it belongs to the so-called *white zone* (see below). Moreover, the interest of this area is pushed up by the last regional election whose results were expected and then carefully analysed. The Regional election held the 16th of April, 2000, was an important selection to look at the relationship among politics, media and citizens. The peculiarity of this election and the case study are involved in a wider frame that concerns the whole national context. In brief, the main reasons of that salience are the following:

1. Firstly for the territorial context. The Veneto region is today in the centre of the “northern question” (Diamanti, 1996), where a territorial cleavage has risen. In addition this region has been represented under the geopolitical viewpoint in a specific area. It was the heart of the (ex)*white zone*; that is the area where the Christian Democrat Party was particularly rooted since the end of the 2nd World War till the early ‘90s. In other words, the Veneto region has been a “significant” place where the connection between citizens and politics was deeply typified for at least two reasons. Local society showed: i) a strong sense of belonging to the Catholic tradition; ii) a strong attachment with the territory which was shaped by the Church and the social presence of its linked associations and organisations.

The *Transition* phase has carried significant transformation in all Italian society. The Veneto case appears particularly relevant because, like many other Italian areas, it was deeply involved in the changing process; but, more specifically, because these deep and quick transformations had definitively marked the crisis of that specific territorial model of relationship between citizens and politics.

2. Secondly it is worth mentioning the new electoral law for Regional elections. It was the first time that voters had the opportunity to vote directly for the “Governor” candidate. Current electoral law allows the casting of two different votes on the same ballot sheet: one for the candidate as “governor” (first past the post system), the other one for a party or a coalition (system of proportional representation). Electors were in the position to vote both, candidate and party list, or just one of them. It was also possible to split their ticket. One elector could vote for a “Governor” candidate and in the same voting paper cast a vote for a party list or alliance which is not the one who supported the candidate himself.

This made the “personal” factor quite important in the competition and in the influence on the electoral behaviour.

An interesting situation was raised in the Veneto under this point of view (Diamanti, 2000b). Centre-left coalition presented Massimo Cacciari (former mayor of Venice) as candidate for “Governor”. He enjoyed of a consensus wider than the coalition who supported him. The opposite situation characterised the centre-right alliance, where Giancarlo Galan was weaker compared to his coalition³. This made the results of the regional election in the Veneto particularly interesting.

3. A third aspect, strictly linked to the previous one, is related to the specific type of election held. It could be named “leaderisation” of the electoral campaign, which first of all was based on the two candidates. Moreover, the reformed rules concerning the power of the regional Presidents made them real “Governors”, as they are generally called today. This is reminiscent of the power personalisation process and associates with it the politics “spectacularisation” (Pasquino, 1990). Furthermore, it shouldn’t be forgotten that the electoral campaign was carried out in an atmosphere of extreme “politicisation”. In fact the main protagonists of the campaign were the national leaders, before the local ones: on the one hand Silvio Berlusconi, for the centre-right coalition which is the current national government majority; on the other hand Massimo D’Alema, who represented the centre-right alliance, the current opposition. So this election had faced an intensive process of “nationalisation”. By means of the media, the regional electoral campaign soon turned the election into a duel, between the national majority and the opposition. It was something like the primary election for the General election which would be held the following year, 2001. All of this did not make the campaign unobserved, but it sparked a wide interest. Even though the law named *par condicio*⁴ has limited the possibility to make electoral propaganda, *events* and other political communication projects planned during the pre-electoral period⁵ had a wide coverage on the media system.

3. Research hypothesis

In brief, we have to do with an interesting electoral campaign, in a relevant territorial context, during an election which presents important evidences of innovation.

This paper takes the idea from this scenario. The underlying hypothesis can be condensed as follows: the Italian political system has experienced a season of dramatic change. New logic is raised, such as having a recourse to a political consultant, to an image-maker, to political marketing

³ Different house poll in their pre-electoral surveys gave coherent results

⁴ It is the debated law which rules the electoral campaign

⁵ It is enough to remind “Blue” the freedom boat rent by Berlusconi

techniques and to technological communication. Against all of this, the ways citizens approach political information continue to be heterogeneous. The relationship between citizens, media and politics is a complex issue; neither the “personalisation” of the electoral competition nor the paradigm of the “powerful media” are able to completely understand this question. Though both are important, the “personal” factor and the presence of a relevant long term perspective⁶ effect the cognitive sphere.

It is likely that the widespread “videopolitics” age (Sartori, 1988) is still important in the electoral market segments which do not pay attention to the electoral media communication. Or else, these voters who predominantly follow television political information show a behaviour that recall the lazarsfeldian “selective exposure” which implies “limited effects”. In other words media influence would take place inside a complex audience’s social interaction network: the social class position, the belonging to associations and social groups, the presence of local opinion leaders, the local opinion atmospheres, the plurality of (local and national) media sources, the web of interpersonal contacts over the territory and in the everyday life places, etc.

In other words, it is the “two step flow of communication” theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Besides, the concept of the “selectivity strategy” by means of the audience approaching the media, implies that information perception and memorisation is made following a personal method. From this perspective communication strategies are filtered and the effects of media are weakened. The role of political marketing is scaled down; it is reduced.

From the point of view explained above we can say that on one hand means of communication exerts a minimum (or indirect) power on the public who do not follow the electoral campaign. On the other side the effect would be *limited* for the one who does follow it. It is likely that media campaigns do not “change” the voting choice of the latter voters. At least media campaigns have a “reinforcement” effect on people who have already made up their minds.

What is possible to find out about all of this among Italian voters’ behaviour? In particular nowadays, we talk more and more often about the <<media’s power>> because of the centrality of the media system on the political system where parties *use* the media – unlike a recent past when it was possible to talk about the <<power’s media>>⁷ because the party system used to *control* the media system.

An in-house poll carried out in the Veneto region - during the Regional election day (16th April 2000) – collected, among other data, useful information to face some of the problems mentioned above. The survey, whose findings will be presented in this paper, was conducted by the Fondazione Nord Est⁸. Results could give some interesting clues about how voters have lived the electoral campaign. As the reader can imagine the information gathered is not able to offer an exhaustive answer to the problem. On the other hand it was not the aim of the research, even of this paper.

Moreover there are limits implied in the instruments used: the survey technique. By means of a questionnaire it is possible to collect opinions, attitudes, in other words immediate answers to stimulus. It is not possible to get the reality or the real behaviours, but just respondents’ statements who rationalize their answers.

⁶ Cf. M.Wolf for a reconstruction of the communication effects theory. See also (Mazzoleni, 1992, 1998). About the main theory cf. (Mc Combs & Shaw, 1972); (Blumler & McQuail, 1978); (Ball-Rokeach & De Fleur, 1976); (Noelle-Neumann, 1985)

⁷ Cf. Mazzoleni, 1992, where he sustains that “media’s power” means that the political system used to control the media system.

⁸ The Fondazione Nord-est in-house pool, directed by Ilvo Diamanti and Fabio Bordignon, was carried out on the Regional election day, 16th April 2000. The representative sample of electors of the Veneto was made by 800 cases. Main results are presented on I.Diamanti (2000a). Il comportamento di voto alle Elezioni Regionali nel Veneto. N/E Newsletter, 4, 2000.

At any rate it is possible to get an idea about how citizens of the Veneto region have faced the electoral campaign from the political information point of view. This paper tries to give an answer to a couple of fundamental questions:

- a. *what kind of relationship can be seen between citizens and the electoral campaign?* More in detail the questions are: 1) how many citizens did follow the electoral campaign? 2) what means of communication did they choose ? 3) Is there a different social profile for the ones who followed the campaign?
- b. *what kind of political behaviour can be related to voters who paid attention to the electoral campaign?* In particular, more specific questions are the following: does there exist a connection between the time of the voting choice, with regard to 4) the election day, and the interest toward the electoral campaign? 5) which factors, in the voter's opinion, most influenced their choice?; 6) the (declared) party or the coalition vote?

4. The attention on the electoral campaign

The analysis starts by giving consideration to the use of political communication over the pre-electoral period (see Tab.1). The respondents state that 57% followed the electoral campaign. Moreover 37% of voters did not pay attention to the campaign because they were not interested in it. The remaining 6% says that it did not realise the campaign was taking place. This minority shows a deep sense of detachment from the political sphere. Therefore most of the Veneto voters (94%) state that they had known about the Regional election and that the campaign was in progress. Even though fewer of them, two out of every three voters, had followed the electoral campaign. This shows, how mentioned above, the campaign in the Veneto did not pass unnoticed. However the component part of "not interested in" is quite sizeable.

A second inquiring addressed which means of communication are most frequently followed during the electoral campaign. As other research has found⁹, Tab.1 shows the media primarily followed is the television (73%), afterwards the newspaper (16%). The number of voters who use other media to satisfy their political information need is less. More "traditional" means of political communication, such as electoral rally, election radio programme, political leaflets, are scarcely used.

Door to door propagandistic materials, in which candidates invest a lot of resources, are used the least (2%).

⁹ Cf. Survey carried on Itanes programme, P.Corbetta & G.Mazzoleni in A.Parisi & H.Schadee (edited by), 1990, pp.302

Table 1 The Veneto Region voters who stated that they followed the electoral campaign and means of communication mostly used (%)

Did you follow the electoral campaign?	
Yes	57
No I didn't, I was not interested in it	37
No, I didn't realise it was taking place	6
Where did you follow the electoral campaign?	
On TV	73
In the newspaper	16
Participating in electoral rallies	5
On the radio	4
Reading political leaflets	2
(n)	(800)

Source: Survey Fondazione Nord Est, 16 aprile 2000

It could be said that “video-politics” is a wide spread phenomenon and deeply rooted in different kinds of elections (General, Regional, European etc.). Maybe this situation is particularly elevated in the Veneto for its specificity. In fact this region was considered a politically important area, besides the well-known candidates (Massimo Cacciari and Giancarlo Galan) attracted the attention of national media (as well as the local one).

Following an electoral campaign implies the voter’s psychological involvement in the political sphere. Those who follow politics - even if in a sporadic way, simply getting information during the pre-electoral period - carry out a form of political participation. Even though getting information means living politics in the private sphere, in an *invisible* way (Barbagli and Maccelli, 1985), it is however an important model of political participation. It entails the presence of a public opinion which is interested in getting information and developing its own opinions (Habermas, 1986, 2000).

Classical factors that favour political participation (Milbrath, 1967) influence the attention toward the electoral campaign, as well. The research findings show that the ones who followed the campaign enjoy a higher socio-economic level. It must be said that the identity and the feeling of belonging to a cultural experience (Pizzorno, 1966) is as much important, and it also influences the approach to the electoral campaign.

Looking at the data collected, it is possible to see that voters who followed the electoral communication differentiate themselves by gender, age and education. Compared with electors which did not follow the campaign, they are older (over 45 years old), they have an higher education and there is a higher proportion of men among them (63% vs. 51%). These social characteristics imply an enduring collocation in the relationship network, such as work¹⁰, social and cultural milieu (see table 2).

It is interesting to remark the frequencies in which the interviewed go to church in order to attend mass. This is a widely used indicator that reflects the consent toward “church religion”. Churchgoers, in fact, usually have a closer relationship with Catholic tradition, the cult and the ecclesiastic institution (Cappello & Diamanti, 1995; 143).

The study shows that the practising Catholic followed the electoral campaign – especially on TV - more than those who usually do not go to church. This is quite relevant because people who are traditionally strict Catholics are also the ones who are collocated on social “peripheral”

¹⁰ The considerable presence of civil servants means mostly white collar workers who have an education level higher than average

positions. In other words they enjoy fewer social resources such as education, prestigious social status etc., however, they show remarkable interest toward political information. The church still exerts a normative orientation and a considerable action of social integration. After all, the research was carried out in a particular territorial context, the Veneto region, where the connection between the Catholic Church and the Christian Democrat Party was deeply rooted to the extent that the North-east zone was called “White area”. The Veneto was the centre of this area and the relative <<territorial political subculture>> (Triglia, 1986).

Table 2 Voters’ social profile and attention to the electoral campaign
(Only significative differences from average are reported)

	Gender	Age	Educational level	Occupational position and social condition	Municipality size	Frequency of going to church
Followed the electoral campaign	Male	Over 45	None and elementary school Lower secondary school, University degree	Public servants, Retired, students	Over 20.000 inhabitants	Churchgoer
Followed the electoral campaign mostly on TV		18-44 years, over 64	None and elementary school, Lower secondary school	Private employees, housewives, retired, unemployed		Churchgoer
Followed the electoral campaign mostly in the newspapers	Male	45-64 year	Higher secondary school, University degree	Public servants, Independent workers (shopkeepers, craftsmen), entrepreneur, students	Over 20.000 inhabitants	Non churchgoer

Source: Survey Fondazione Nord Est, 16 aprile 2000

Above, it was observed that the most frequently used media were first the TV and then the newspaper. Less important under this point of view were other means of communication. These different media use their own diverse language. TV adopts the language of the image, of the “spectacularisation”, of the simplification of the social reality. Newspaper is synonymous with entirety, complexity and widening (Corbetta and Mazzoleni, 1995: 312). The use of these media needs different cognitive and cultural resources, and different audiences, as well; more “popular” is the public who watch the TV, more “sophisticated” the ones who read the newspapers. Nevertheless voters could follow more than one media. For instance they could follow both means of political communication: watching TV and reading the newspaper. Many other pieces of research have showed that the ones who read the newspaper follow the campaign on TV, as well. But our questionnaire made an inquiry focusing on just one media, asking to indicate the most used.

The social profile of the voters who followed the electoral campaign on the diverse media presents differences worth taking into account. Considering the gender of respondents, men followed the campaign more than women, moreover they used newspapers more than women. On the other hand women preferred TV. However women have traditionally been less involved in politics and political participation. This can be seen also on the media used to get political information; women who followed the electoral campaign preferred a media easier to approach, like TV.

Looking at the age bracket, the 45-64 year old voters followed the campaign more with the newspaper. Younger and older citizens preferred TV. Education, as easily predictable, had a strong

influence on the media chosen by the voters. An higher education level is strictly linked to the use of the newspaper. Moreover, if we take into consideration the occupational condition – which is strictly related to educational level - the ones who are employed and enjoy prestigious socio-economic status prefer getting political information by newspaper instead of following the campaign on the TV (see Tab.2). Non-churchgoers and inhabitants of bigger towns of the Veneto used the newspaper more during the electoral campaign.

5. Electoral campaign and voting behaviour

Voting choice is a complex decision which implies a variety of different influence factors, most of them ignored by the voters themselves. So the question is as interesting as difficult to measure empirically by research techniques. However, it is possible to get an idea about the voting choice analysing some information collected by the survey.

For instance, it has been asked: i) what, in the respondent's view¹¹, were the factors which influenced more the choice; ii) the time of the voting decision in regard to the election day. This is an important piece information because it could give an overview about the strength of the relationship between voters and the party for which the voters voted. It is a quite interesting point since electoral studies carried out during the last few elections showed that the voting indecision was progressively increasing; iii) the party or the coalition for which the voters voted. This could give further information to enrich the profile of voting behaviour with respect to the electoral campaign.

The moment of voting decision

First, it is interesting to see the moment when electors decided which party to vote for¹². As mentioned above this is quite important since it implies the level of identification with the party voted for. In fact, if a voter knew in advance what party to vote for, he or she would be more identified with it than the one who decides to vote, for example, the same day of the election. If this aspect is connected with the voters' interest on the electoral campaign, it would be possible to argue whether following the campaign helped the undecided voters to make their mind up.

As can be seen on Table 3, the electoral campaign was followed more by the ones who had made up their minds a long time before (conventionally these voters will be called hereafter *decided voters*). Seven out of every ten people who followed the electoral campaign already knew who to vote for. The proportion among the ones who did not follow the campaign was just 56%. This is confirmed from other gathered information: the voters who made up their minds nearer to the election day are the ones who followed the media campaign with less attention. They had addressed their political information demand somewhere else, and their doubts about the voting choice were not resolved by electoral communication.

In particular if the *undecided voters* (those who decided on the election day) are taken into account, it could be seen that there are three times as many who did not follow the campaign (12% vs. 4%). But these *undecided* electors were less involved in the pre-electoral communication in spite of the fact that they represent the most important electoral target for political marketing strategy. In fact they are potential votes since they did not make up their minds till the imminence of the election.

It seems that the media were used firstly to “reinforce” party orientations already rooted. Just secondarily electoral communication helped voters to size up their voting decision. In particular *decided voters* probably followed the electoral campaign in a “selective” way. They looked for confirmation of pre-existing political attitudes. Therefore, it can be said that the influence of media

¹¹ As argued above there are many other factors unknown by the voters

¹² Cf. F. Zucchini (1997), pp.91-137 for a study on the moment of voting decision

- or better yet, the effect of the electoral campaign - were mainly a “reinforcement” effect, then “limited”.

Table 3 Attention to the electoral campaign and the Veneto region electors’ voting behaviour (%)

	Did you follow the electoral campaign?		Where did you follow the electoral campaign?		Total
	Yes	Not	TV	Newspaper	
When did you decide who to vote for?					
I never had any doubts	70	56	69	72	63
About a month before the election day	14	20	15	12	17
During the previous week	11	12	10	10	12
The election day	4	12	6	5	8
Which elements most influenced your voting choice?					
Confidence in the candidate	46	37	44	40	42
Candidate/alliance/party list electoral programme	20	16	20	25	19
My political orientation	16	20	16	23	18
Party sense of belonging	15	13	17	11	14
Friends and family advices	3	14	3	2	8

(n=800)

Source: Survey Fondazione Nord Est, 16 aprile 2000

Voting influence factors

As seen above *undecided voters* paid little attention to the campaign. But, in the end, they too voted¹³. So it is quite interesting to understand how their voting choice has matured. Research results show that the factors which most influenced the decision can be referred to channels different from electoral propaganda and not even strictly linked to political marketing strategy.

In fact, the ones who did not follow the electoral campaign were more influenced by vis-à-vis factors, such as social relation and interpersonal contacts in the everyday life places. These electors place the influence on their voting choice to immediate family, relatives, colleagues and friends’ advices. This was answered from 14% of those who did not pay attention to the electoral campaign vs. 3% of those who did. Moreover, 35% of *undecided voters* indicated as their voting influence factor “advices of friends and relatives” vs. 2% of voters that always knew who to vote for (See Fig.1).

Electors that followed the campaign and knew who to vote for explain their choice as follows: i) “personalisation” factor, 46% said <<confidence in the candidate>> (vs. 37%); ii) <<candidate and alliance election programme>> (20% vs. 16%); iii) party identification (15% vs. 13%).

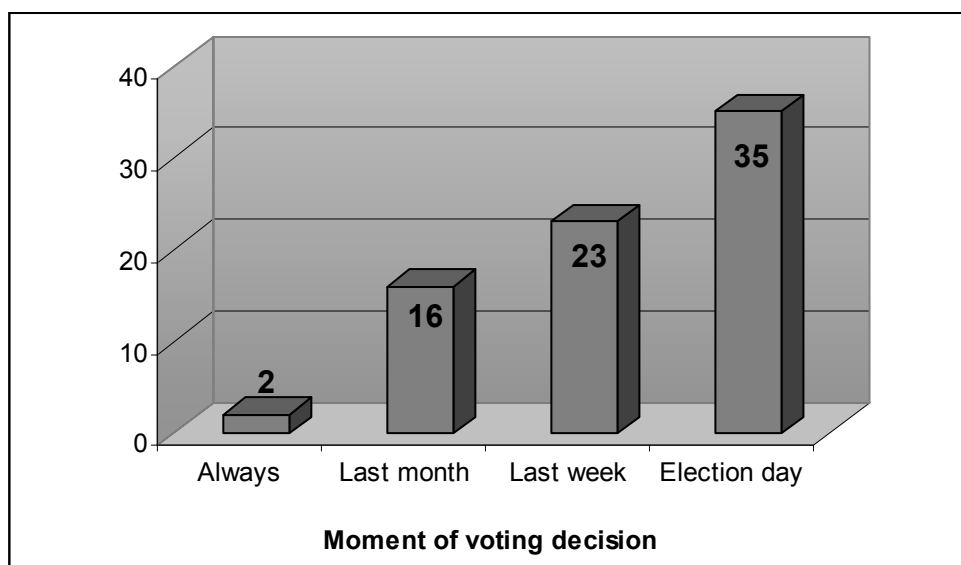
This means that there are different ways to approach the electoral campaign even among *decided voters*. In fact, the confidence in the candidate and the party identification influenced more voters who followed the campaign on the TV. On the other hand, the ones who got information

¹³ People interviewed are just the ones who had already voted when called for the survey or stated that they would have gone to the polling station

reading the newspapers considered the “election programme” and their own “political orientation” to be more important. This distinction reflects two different approaches:

- a) the first approach is influenced by belonging to the party and by the candidate’s “personality”. A media less sophisticated and more spectacular, like TV, is preferred. The social profile of these voters shows that they are not so rich in social resources, and they are less “competent” about politics;
- b) the other approach draws a kind of voter actively engaged in politics. This elector has an higher level of cognitive resources and a specific political identity. That allows these voters to live politics with more competence and expertise. Their demand of political information, which is satisfied by means of reading the newspaper (during the electoral campaign) gives witness that these electors are much more sophisticated than the previous ones.

Figure 1 The moment of voting decision and percentage of voters who stated that they were influenced most by friends and relatives (% , n=651)



Source: Survey Fondazione Nord Est, 16 aprile 2000

6. The voting choice

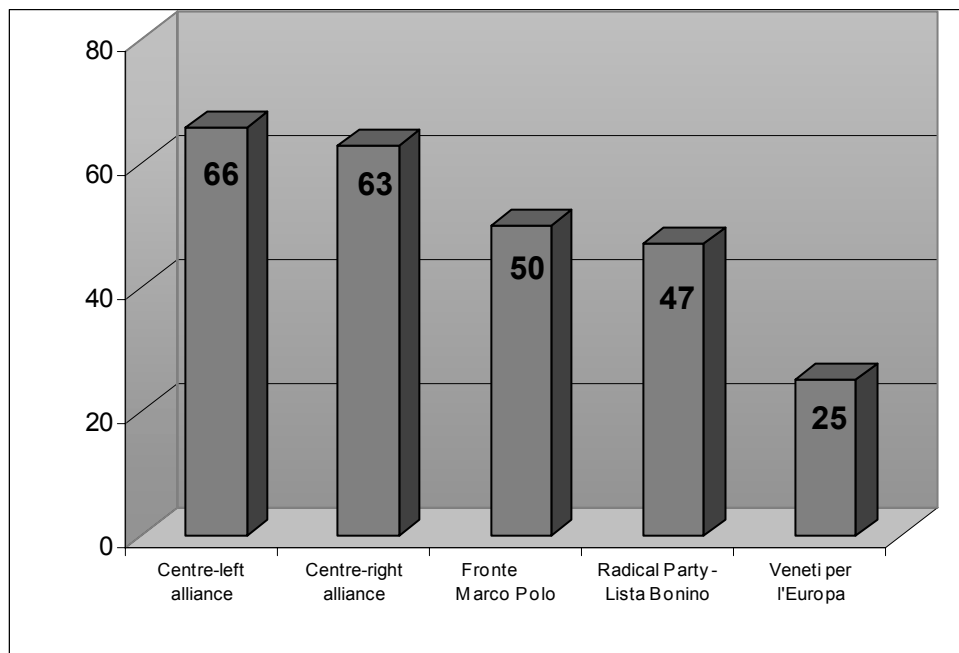
As seen in Figure 2, there are no appreciable differences in the two major electorate’s coalition with respect to the attention to the electoral campaign. Two-thirds of those who voted for the centre-left alliance followed the campaign (66%). Close by is the proportion of the centre-right coalition’s voters (63%). Unlike the electorate of other party lists, which followed the campaign less: there were 47% of voters of the Radical Party (Lista Emma Bonino); local based political parties followed the campaign at 50% of the Fronte Marco Polo’s voters and 25% of the Veneti per l’Europa.

It is possible to argue that voters of these party lists have less interest in politics than in its traditional form. In fact they have fewer tendencies to follow the pre-electoral debate. This suggests that political voters of parties like Radical and territorial-based ones, express a sort of vote “intolerant” and “alienated” in regard to the parties and the politics which represent the establishment, as the two coalitions which led the campaign do. Party lists that are outside the left-

right *continuum* – such as Radical and territorial based parties – represent more diverse cleavages than traditional ones. These parties attract the so called “voto difforme”, unconventional vote, oriented toward a non-traditional party (Nuvoli and Spreafico, 1990, 223-257).

These particular parties mentioned above, are reminiscent of the “anti-establishment” conflict. So Lista Bonino’s, Fronte Marco Polo’s and Veneti per l’Europa’s voters seem to look at the political arena with suspicion so much that they were the least to follow the electoral campaign.

Figure 2 Party lists or alliance and percentage of related voters who followed the electoral campaign (% , n=651)



Source: Survey Fondazione Nord Est, 16 aprile 2000

7. What did influence the attention toward the electoral campaign?

After having tried to answer the various questions listed above (see par.3) regarding the electoral campaign, now the focus is addressed toward the basic question which has led our path so far. In short, what did first push voters to follow the pre-electoral debate?

The aim is to get an idea on the kind of approach and on the attitudes which underlie this behaviour. To that end we resorted to a particular statistical technique, the logistic regression (Corbetta, 1992)

This procedure allowed us to evaluate the direct effects of some independent variables, such as gender, age, education, party list or alliance voted for, the moment of voting decision, the condition of churchgoer or not, and finally also what, in the respondent’s view, more influenced their choice. The dependent variable was the tendency showed by pollees to follow (or not)¹⁴ the electoral campaign.

The statistical procedure estimated the maximum likelihood parameter. The results of analysis are displayed in Table 4. By analysing the output it is possible to know each independent variable’s relevance. In other words, the aim was to know which independent variables increase or

¹⁴ In fact the variable used as dependent was dichotomous

decrease the likelihood of following the campaign¹⁵. The logistic regression model showed the presence of two variables that seem to have a statistically significant effect¹⁶:

1. the voting choice moment in regard to the election day;
2. the aspects which, in the electors' opinion, influenced their mind.

Thus this analysis suggests that the aptitude for following the electoral campaign in the media is not influenced by a social characteristic or party orientation, or the sense of belonging to the Catholic subculture. But, this thing being equal, what influences more is:

- being an undecided voter (to be exact: making a decision the last day). This condition cut the aptitude to follow pre-electoral political communication down to 59% [$\exp[(0,3642)+(-0,8851)]=0,594$];
- being advised by family members, friends, relatives as the main influence factor on voting choice. Also this cuts the likelihood down to 39% [$\exp[(0,3642)+(-1,3101)]=0,3883$].

¹⁵ Logistic regression was performed using 468 cases instead of 800 (sample size), since these cases were available using all the information needed for the model (non response in one variable excluded the case). About the technique Cf. Corbetta, (1992), see also Corbetta, Gasperoni, Pisati (2001)

¹⁶ Actually the significant variables are three. The third one is gender. But even if being female is significant, the likelihood to follow the electoral campaign is just 2% higher. So it is irrelevant and it was not taken into account.

Table 4 Binomial logistic regression model for the analysis of the attention toward the electoral campaign
(Estimates of maximum likelihood parameter, estimates standard error (e.s.). (n=468)

	Attention toward electoral campaign vs. in-attention toward electoral campaign	
	B	e.s.
Gender		
Male (0)		
Female	-0,3428*	0,2142
Age		
18-29 years old (0)		
30-44 years old	0,0990	0,4162
45-64 years old	0,4971	0,4201
Over 65 years old	0,6182	0,4584
Educational level		
Up to middle schooling (0)		
Secondary schooling	0,0144	0,2716
University degree	-0,0260	0,3136
Frequencies of going to church		
Never (0)		
Rarely	0,0767	0,3839
About once per month	0,3754	0,3950
About once a week	0,3386	0,3520
Moment of voting decision		
I never had any doubts (0)		
About a month before the election day	-0,3679	0,4422
During the previous week	0,3972	0,3955
The election day	-0,8850*	0,4881
What influenced most the voting choice		
Confidence in the candidate (0)		
Alliance/party list/candidate electoral programme	0,2112	0,2967
Own political orientation	-0,3436	0,2894
Party belonging	-0,1891	0,3056
Friends and family advices	-1,3101***	0,4782
Party/alliance voted for		
Centre-left coalition (0)		
Centre-right coalition	-0,1324	0,2209
Radical party	-0,7378	0,5636
Veneti per l'Europa	-0,7069	0,9015
Fronte Marco polo	-4,6705	11,9754
<i>Constant</i>	<i>0,3642</i>	
<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>38,066</i>	
<i>Degree of freedom</i>	<i>20</i>	
<i>Likelihood</i>	<i>0,00853</i>	

* $0,05 \leq p \leq 0,10$ ** $0,01 \leq p \leq 0,05$ *** $p \leq 0,01$

8. Conclusion

From the results illustrated above, it is possible to get some final considerations which are related first to the specific research context. However, these findings could give some clues to the broader debate on the relationship between media and politics.

Firstly, it is clearly evident that video-politics had a leading role on the electoral campaign, much more important than other means of communication. The pervasive video-politics represents, by now, a well known and an overall tendency. But some relevant issues are hidden behind this.

First, voters who had already made up their minds were the ones more involved in the electoral campaign and particularly viewed television political communication. Consequently, this

suggests that media communication had primarily a “reinforcing” effect. It is quite likely that *decided voters* carried out a “selective” media consumer model.

In other words, they looked for confirmation to their pre-existing political attitudes in the electoral communication. It seems rather difficult to find in these *decided voters* a place for changing opinion due to political information. This suggests that, in the Veneto case, political belonging had more influence than both, the “personal” factor and the communication strategy oriented to leader image valorisation.

But, what seems particularly relevant concerns the *undecided voters*. As widely known this part of the electorate still holds itself rather large in the imminence of the election day. Consequently they become an important target for a political consultant and a political marketing strategy. On their *indecision* the election results are played. However these voters were not fascinated with electoral communication, let alone from a candidate’s image.

In order to get information (and advice) on who to vote for, these electors preferred to rely on a more reassuring (maybe because of being closer to them) social network. They did not trust the media. They spoke to people they met in their everyday lives, perhaps believing them to be more trustworthy. In sum the ones who made up their minds during the last day turned their attention to friends and family first.

This, of course, does not mean that media, communication and “personalisation” do not count for the voting decision. Nowadays in politics, *communication* means *being* in the political arena. Party lists, alliances, and candidates are not allowed to make a wrong political communication. Also voters who did not follow the campaign and who are not interested in politics have, in any case, an idea of what is going on in the political field. Quick and casual discussion, in the family, in the place of work, and in the place of spare time provides this information.

It seems that a paradoxical situation has been created: *decided voters* who are, at the same time, voters less willing to change their minds, are also the ones who followed the electoral campaign in the media. Thus the attention on the electoral communication was stimulated not from the *voting indecision*, but from its contrary. Voting indecision was one of the factors of the inattention toward the campaign. Unintentionally, just the *undecided voters* - prior electoral target of communication strategy – are the ones who challenged the video-politics.

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