Catholic Media in the Hands of Laics: Case Study of Vatican Communication Chiefs’ Twitter Activities

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Abstract: The shape of religious media communication changed dramatically because of the opportunities given by digital media and by the process of the secularization, structural changes in religious organizations, and the challenge enabled by the huge loss of credibility in the eyes of the world. We can observe certain dynamics in the professional approach of official Catholic media, especially those based in the Vatican. Its on-line project Vatican News has provided news service since 2017, now in almost forty languages. In the spirit of continuing the reform of the Roman curia, for which the founding of Secretary for Communication (now dicastery) was the “pilot” area, Pope Francis appointed the first layperson to lead any office of curia in 2018, and journalist Paolo Ruffini became the prefect. A few months later, one of most famous experts on the Vatican, also a lay person, journalist Andrea Tornielli, became editorial chief of the Dicastery for Communication. Other personal changes continued soon. The goal of this article is to analyse the initiative that Ruffini and Tornielli took in their office during six months after their appointment. The quantitative content analysis of both their Twitter accounts, closely connected with the newscast produced by Vatican News, is the scientific method used in this paper. There were detected new journalistic genres in the social media space (e.g., short video, editorial, story), vast popularity of Pope Francis, and success of his own Twitter activity (he obtained even tens of thousands of followers) or, contrarily, the omission and inconsistency when introducing uneasy themes (abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, ecology or economy) to the public. There was also the surprising realization that Ruffini is more popular in the Twitter milieu than Tornielli.

Keywords: Catholic Church; Vatican; dicastery for communication; laity; media reform

1. Introduction

The Vatican’s communication went through a large number of changes in the last nine years or so of Pope Francis’ pontificate. Since 2015, when Secretary for Communication was founded as the part of Roman curia, there have been new dynamics in the use of the digital technologies and especially the social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube). Furthermore, some progress in the quality of content of the Vatican’s media (its press, radio, TV, publishing house, or website Vatican News) aims to unify all the national versions under one roof, and a large number of personnel changes was detected. Among all these changes, the deeper involvement of lay men and women, especially media professionals, is clearly visible.

The Vatican’s media is being reformed because the Church as the whole needs to be reformed constantly to serve its original and universal purpose: the preaching of the Gospel. After all, the original purpose stimulating the origins of the Church generally was to preach the Gospel. In other words, Christianity is fundamentally a “communicative event” (Spadaro 2014), and the word and its treatment is pivotal for Christianity (Maier 2016). The contemporary change in the media area of the Vatican concerns one of the many expressions of Pope Francis’ desire and also poses a challenge to “convert” the Catholic Church (Ivereigh 2019). Furthermore, in the atmosphere of the historic breakouts of the sexual abuse cases...
involving clergy in many countries of the world (Deutschlandfunk 2021; BBC News 2021; Watkins 2021), transparent and open communication is necessary for Church. Journalism generally operates through a professional paradigm or “a way of seeing and interpreting the world that is taken for granted as the way by those who practice it” (Berkowitz and Eko 2007). Here, we can observe how the Vatican’s media professionals are moving towards greater accountability. The paradigm is being reconsidered in the frame of paradigm repair theory and “moved to transparency as an alternative to objectivity” (Vos and Moore 2020). This transparency may be defined as openness, showing the public how journalists do their work and—what is especially interesting in the situation of the Church abuse crisis—acknowledging the mistakes (Ibid.) to gain back the lost legitimacy. Subsequently, the paradigm of the Church communication is being repaired, thus “not returned to its original state but adapted to live another day” (Ibid., p. 20) with purpose to “add continuity to the meanings of the journalistic interpretive community” (Berkowitz 2000). In other words, it is an attempt to restore faith in the paradigm of objectivity by “isolating the people or organizations that stray from the rest of the news media institution” (Ibid.).

2. Laity Taking Part in Roman Curia: The Historical Continuity since Second Vatican Council

The Catholic Church with its 1313 billion baptized, representing 17.7% of world total population in 2017 (Vatican.va 2019a), consists of believers with different forms of life and types of service. Apart from consecrated clergy and consecrated persons (number of 414,582 based on statistical data from 2017 (Ibid.), the majority of the Church is formed by laics, of which the majority is formed by women. The lay apostolate is concerned with participation in the mission of the Church (Paul VI 1964). To this mission are called all the laypeople by the fact of their baptism. Furthermore, according to the decree of Second Vatican Council (Paul VI 1965), lay people are strongly called to the apostolate because of their spirituality born of family life and its specifics. For the purpose of defining the role of lay people in the Church, The Pontifical Council for the Laity was established as a department of the Roman curia in 1967, and the rights of laity are described legislatively as well (Vatican.va 2021). Then, Pope John Paul II moved the process of recognizing lay service forward with proclamation that “lay men and women [. . . ] are fulfilling their own apostolic role” (John 1988). Later, Pope Benedict XVI stressed the necessity of a “change in mindset [. . . ] concerning the role of lay people in the Church” (Benedict XVI 2012).

3. The Steps of Pope Francis since 2013

In the continuity with his predecessors, Pope Francis has supported the involvement of laity in the Church’s processes and mission. The one of his biggest desires from the beginning of the pontificate was to diversify the Roman curia by appointing laypersons into executive positions of its departments, an approach never used there before. There, he referred to the conclusions of the council again: not to take laity as the “members of ‘second order’” (Francis 2015a) but, contrarily, to be conscious of the fact that “there is no one more appropriate than they” for the mission in Church (Ibid.). Nevertheless, the real structural change started on the 15th of August 2016 when the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life was established (Francis 2016b) and took over the responsibilities of former council for lay people. Soon after, the apostolic exhortation about the love in family was issued, stressing the role of lay men and women among the Christians (Francis 2016a). Although the prefect (e.g., “minister”) of dicastery is a cleric, Irish Cardinal Kevin Farrell, with experience from the United States, in 2017, two women—thus laypersons—Professor Gabriella Gambino and Dr Linda Ghisoni, were appointed to its key executive positions of undersecretaries (Vatican.va 2017).

4. The Overview of the Reform of the Vatican Communication

Unlike other institutions, the Church is inherently built on communication (Eilers 2009). Although Catholic thinking about the use of media was formed by council ideas
(Inter Mirifica 1963; Communio et Progressio 1971), the 21st century world is very different from that of the 20th century. It experiences the “pervasive presence of social media, cyber insecurity, the rise of populist authoritarianism, the return of great power rivalries and increased threat of nuclear war, global climate change, commercial integration and the expansion of global institutions” (Latinovic et al. 2018). Therefore, the Church has to deal with the fact that it is challenged to react to all these changes flexibly and properly. The Catholic shift from the authoritative hegemony (Althoff et al. 2018) toward the digital two-way communication (Gaillardetz 2013) is partly supported in literature (de Feijter 2007, p. 92). The Church even engaged in publication of two documents concerning the use of the Internet for the spreading of the Gospel (Vatican.va 2002a, 2002b). The Church appreciates the role of social sites in the “transmitting of the key religious values” and the “authentic expression of the piety” (Golan and Martini 2019) in contrast with labelling social media as the “root of sin”, which is typical for some fundamentalist religious groups (Golan and Campbell 2015). In fact, the role of social sites in the communication of the Catholic message is quite strong. Pope Benedict XVI labelled social networks as “portals of truth and faith” (Benedict XVI 2013) or “new spaces for evangelization” (Ibid.). Shortly before his resignation in 2013, he launched an official Twitter account, @Pontifex, which is now used by Pope Francis, and its content attracts millions of people. Instagram or YouTube channel of Vatican News emerged soon after. They are used for various activities, for example, sharing of short videos from papal apostolic journeys, synods, summits, or conferences.

Nevertheless, for many years, the Holy See communications were called on reform. It was criticized for inefficiency, duplication, and lack of a coordinated message. Therefore, the Secretary for Communication was established with the aim to unify the media activities of Vatican structurally (Francis 2015b). Later, as the radical reforms were executed, it was transformed into Dicastery for Communication. The key challenge was to combine all the Vatican media production into one structure, which was the goal of a five-year reform program since 2015. Practically, that means that different communications outlets share their content, which is delivered across multiple platforms—a so-called “content media hub”. It all should proceed towards centralization of the message and maximizing its scope. The greatest progress was made in 2016 when many of the Vatican’s disparate media outlets—radio, television, and new web service Vatican News—were unified with the aim to centralize their content but emphasizing the originality of every single national branch. Now, this service operates in almost 40 language versions.

The first prefect of the dicastery was a cleric, Monsignor Dario Viganò (Ibid.). The Brazilian-born chief was responsible for starting the process of incorporation of the Holy See daily newspaper L’Osservatore Romano, Vatican’s photographic services, its printing press, and publishing house into dicastery, which was accomplished in 2018. However, Viganò resigned after three years in March 2018 (Vatican News 2018m). After that, Msgr. Lucio Ruiz served as “ad interim” leader for the communications office, whereas Viganò occupied an advisory position.

In 2016, Pope Francis for the first time appointed two laypersons into the dicastery. The American television journalist Greg Burke became the director of the Holy See Press Office and the Spanish radio journalist Paloma Garcia Ovejero his deputy director (Vatican.va 2016). In July 2018, Pope Francis appointed layman Paolo Ruffini as new prefect of dicastery with the function from September on (Vatican.va 2018a). It was the first time ever that a layperson had occupied a position of prefect in any of Roman curia departments. In December 2018, Pope Francis next appointed two laypersons into Dicastery for Communication: skilled media professional and expert on Vatican, Andrea Tornielli, became editorial director of dicastery, and another Italian professional, Andrea Monda, became director of L’Osservatore Romano, newspaper daily of the Holy See (Vatican.va 2018b).

At the same time, Vatican Press Office director Greg Burke unexpectedly resigned together with his vice director Paloma Garcia Ovejero. Subsequently, Pope Francis appointed
“ad interim” journalist Alessandro Gisotti, former coordinator of the Vatican social media and a long-time veteran of Vatican Radio to the dicastery (Vatican.va 2018c).

The last important personnel change in the dicastery occurred in July of 2019; an experienced journalist Matteo Bruni was appointed the new director of the Holy See Press Office and Brazilian-based radio journalist Cristiane Murray his vicedirector (Vatican.va 2019b).

5. Profiles of Two Key Laymen of the Vatican Media

(A) Prefect Paolo Ruffini

Paolo Ruffini, lawyer and media director, was born in Palermo in 1956. Until 2018, he worked in Italian radio and TV RAI, the newspapers Il Mattino and Il Messaggero, and then, he led the TV of Italian bishops TV2000. He also received several prizes for journalism and “presented in study conferences about the role Christians play in information, communications ethics and new media” (Harris 2018). He is married and has children.

(B) Editorial Director Andrea Tornielli

Italian journalist, writer, and experienced vaticanist Andrea Tornielli was born in 1964. He has studied the old Greek language, and he worked for Catholic media Il Sabato, 30Giorni, Il Giornale, and publishing house La Stampa, where he directed the Vatican Insider server. He also contributed to Radio Maria. He has published almost 40 books, including biographies of Popes or saints and those dedicated to historical affairs (Harris 2018). Among the most famous is the analysis Jorge Mario Bergoglio. Francesco. Insieme. La vita, le idee, le parole del papa chestacambiando la Chiesa (2013); the summary of Pope Francis’ critical attitude towards capitalism, Papa Francesco. Questa economiauccide (2015); or an interview with Pope Francis: Il nome di Dio è Misericordia (2016). Some of his books were translated into several languages. Andrea Tornielli is married and has three children.

6. Case Study of the Social Media Activities—Methodology

As the reform of Dicastery for Communication continues, the professional members of the department are using social media more for the purpose of spreading the Gospel and for the Church’s mission in general, which means spreading the agenda of Pope Francis, Vatican diplomacy, and stories, images, audio, or video clips. It is clear from the brief observation of the Twitter accounts of Ruffini and Tornielli that their activity often doubles the media activity of Vatican News. The aim of the following case study is therefore to analyse and interpret their style of work with Twitter accounts or the role of several topics in their production, the number of followers, comments, likes, or retweets. The quantitative content analysis should lead to the exact data summed up with the use of statistic methods.

This research used quantitative content analysis of two Twitter accounts of Paolo Ruffini and Andrea Tornielli during a period of 6 months: for Ruffini, from September 2018 until February of 2019 and for Tornielli, from January 2019 until June 2019. In the personal interviews with these two media professionals, which were part of the subsequent inquiry, it was uncovered that their nomination really had been something very surprising for them and that they immediately had to adapt to their new positions (e.g., working for the Pope rather than serving as PR professionals and independent journalists, justifying papal steps, etc.). Therefore, this timing was used in order to research how they coped with the fact and which approach did they choose in the use of their official Twitter accounts.

The month of January was a period that we can observe the activity of both of them. That is clearly due to the preparations for the special summit “Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church”, which culminated in February 2019. The goal is also to compare the approach of these two journalists towards the topic of Church abuse crisis as an issue of the crisis communication.
Coding, Which Aims to Capture Emphasis of Ruffini and Tornielli

1. Form of their Twitter activity (7 categories)
   1. own tweets;
   2. Retweets of *Vatican News*;
   3. Retweets of colleagues from the dicastery;
   4. Sharing of *Vatican News*;
   5. Sharing of own media text or video;
   6. Retweets of other media;
   7. Retweets of Pope.

2. Topic (26 categories)
   1. Papal visit to Baltic states in 2018;
   2. Pope or Vatican issues in general;
   3. Synod “On young people, faith and vocational discernment”;
   4. Summit “Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church”;
   5. Clergy sexual abuse and protection of minors and vulnerable adults in other milieus than Church;
   7. Spiritual content in general (homilies, sermons, stories, or faith testimonies);
   8. Journalistic analysis;
   9. World Youth Day in Panama in 2019;
   10. Diplomatic and apostolic relations of Vatican and China (namely the “Provisional Agreement between the Holy See and the People’s Republic of China”);
   11. Media and communication in general, World Communications Days, and personal changes in the dicastery as such;
   12. Pictures or visually presented thoughts;
   13. Francis’s papal predecessors;
   14. Interreligious dialogue;
   15. Papal journey to United Arab Emirates in 2019;
   16. Suffering and persecution of Christians in the world;
   17. Papal journey to Morocco in 2019;
   18. Feasts, world days or anniversaries;
   19. Diplomatic relations of Vatican and South Sudan;
   20. Apostolic journey to Bulgaria and Macedonia in 2019;
   21. Shrine in Medjugorje;
   22. Apostolic journey to Romania 2019;
   23. Moral issues—euthanasia, abortion, gender, or prostitution, etc.;
   24. Economics;
   25. Migrants;
   26. Case of Emanuela Orlandi

3. Used language (9 categories)
   1. Italian;
   2. English;
   3. French;
   4. Spanish;
   5. German;
   6. Latin;
   7. Portuguese;
   8. Ukraine;
   9. Other.

4. Number of comments

5. Number of retweets

6. Number of likes
7. Photos included (3 categories)
   1. Journalistic;
   2. Illustrative;
   3. None.

8. Media mentioned (5 categories)
   1. Vatican News;
   2. Other Vatican media;
   3. Other Church media;
   4. Secular media;
   5. None.

9. Multimedia content included (2 categories)
   1. Audio/video, etc.;
   2. None.

7. Findings

Case A: Paolo Ruffini

The total number of Ruffini’s tweets in the selected period was 259.

Since September, the main topic of Ruffini’s Twitter activity was the synod “On young people, faith and vocational discernment”, which was to some extent concerned with the topic of clergy sexual abuse (total of 120 tweets, thus one-third of the whole of Ruffini’s content). In the following month, when the synod took place, Ruffini tweeted daily the news and shared the photos. A good example of a featured photo is one in which Pope Francis holds his notes when going to the assembly (Vatican News 2018h). Another one shows two bishops taking a picture of youth dancing (Ruffini 2018f). Another iconic snap shows Pope using the lift together with other attendants (Vatican News 2018j). As expected, the biggest attraction for the audience was the videos, in which bishops explained the role of the synod briefly, e.g., in one- or two-minute-long speeches (Vatican News 2018g).

During the synod, there were also traces of the topic “clergy sexual abuse” (in six months, the total was 19, whereas the summit alone was connected with 8 pieces of such news). There was, e.g., tweeting of the news item connected with the afore mentioned accusative letter of Viganò (Vatican News 2018l). A few days later, Maltese archbishop and specialist in the area of abuse investigation, Charles Scicluna, stressed in his speech that justice is necessary when dealing with the abuse cases (Vatican News 2018i).

Apart from information connected with the Pope’s fixed schedule and general Vatican agenda (35 cases), a topic closely followed by Ruffini was of course the papal apostolic journey to Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia (23) or the provisory agreement about the appointing of Chinese bishops (13). At the end of September, Ruffini shared the information about the Pope’s rosary prayer intention for the spiritual dealing with sexual abuse in the Church (Centofanti 2018). He also added a picture describing “how to pray” (Ruffini 2018e). This can be considered quite an innovative method of Church communication. Another quite extraordinary step was the publishing of a video on the anniversary of Francis’ ordination (Vatican News 2018a). Immediately, it garnered 100 views. News item like this appeared a few days later on Francis’ 82nd birthday, too (Ruffini 2018a).

February 2019’s summit, “Meeting on the Protection of Minors in the Church”, was secondly mentioned in the middle of December 2018 (Vatican News 2018b). Since then, the number of news stories about the event increased rapidly. The bishops were—among other commands—urged by Pope to meet with abuse victims in their nations (Ruffini 2018b).

Soon after the middle of December, there were announced probably the most important personal changes in the Dicastery for communication: the appointment of Andrea Tornielli to the position of editor-in-chief of Vatican News (Ruffini 2018c) and appointment of Andrea Monda to the position of the director of L’Osservatore Romano (Ruffini 2018d). Ruffini retweeted Monda’s first text—an editorial—in the position of the director (Monda 2018).
Altogether, Ruffini’s tweets focusing on the media or the personal changes in dicastery reached the number of ten. At Christmas, the weekly Angelus prayer of Pope Francis was streamed on the social sites (Vatican News 2018d). With the entering of the New Year 2019, there was also a focus on the quickly approaching summit on protection of minors but also on the World Youth Day in Panama (altogether 11 cases).

Among the most followed of Ruffini’s tweets was the one with a photo of a young boy in a wheelchair being lifted up by his friends to see the Pope in the crowd (TVN Panamá 2019). Highly observed was also the papal message to the young people from all world in Panama: the preaching about “Virgin Mary—the biggest influencer” ever (Tornielli 2019d). Although Pope Francis rarely speaks about moral themes, during the press conference, in the plane back from Panama to Rome, he spoke about the drama of confession of women who were forced by circumstances to undergo abortion (Ruffini 2019).

Summarizing the form of tweeting, Ruffini rarely published his own ideas (only sixteen times from all 259), and only once did he publish his own media content (video), whereas he mostly retweeted the content of @Vatican News Twitter account (126), shared the newscast from Vatican News website (92), and retweeted the tweets of his colleagues from dicastery (10), other media (8), or the Pope himself (7).

Especially successful among Twitter users was his tweet with the photo of the Pope’s signature in his book in a former jail for political prisoners in Lithuania (Ruffini 2018g). Another case was the video summarizing the apostolic journey to this country, which reached a public of 3100 followers (Gisotti 2018a). That must be considered, in comparison to the standard few units of followers (or maximally 20 or 30), a very large success. Ruffini’s self-presentation or the presentation of his good relationship with Pope Francis is also visible. In one video, he is, for example, explaining the theme of World Communications Day (Vatican News 2018k).

We can also state that one piece of information was often shared by Ruffini more times in different languages. We can find examples, apart from Italian (dominant with 188 cases), where also in English (36), French (10), Spanish (19), or Portuguese (6), pieces of news were spread. In one case, Ruffini communicated only by image, so no language had to be used. In spite of that, Italian was the most used language, and it is absolutely clear that it was retweeted mostly of time.

In total, Ruffini’s tweets were commented on by 1728 users, retweeted by 13,370 users, and liked by 54,794 users. The numbers are so high mostly because of his retweeting of the Pope’s official account, which is followed by even hundreds of people. Without any doubts, the absolutely most successful tweets remained Pope Francis’ short quotes; e.g., one about the gift of baptism reached 6600 of people (Francesco 2019b).

On the contrary, we can observe a lack of public interest in those of Ruffini’s tweets that do not have any photo and only “copy–paste” the link from Vatican News (Gisotti 2018c). Accordingly, the important and interesting topics, such as the Vatican summit on the protection of minors, World Youth Days, ecology, or economy, did not reach the audience because of the apparent disinterest of the prefect to tweet them in any more potentially appealing way.

There are also some observed lacks in symbolic and imaginative communication. Ruffuni tweeted written content only in 107 cases. In other (28) cases, he used an illustrative photo. In the rest (125), there is no photo available to attract the Twitter audience at all.

The Vatican News website certainly helped Ruffini to create content in 222 cases. Twice, he retweeted other Vatican media, such as L’Osservatore Romano, and in ten different cases the Catholic media in general. In the rest of them (25 cases), there was no other media outlet distributed.

On certain occasions (30 times), Ruffini used video as the communication method on Twitter. It was usually very successful because of the shortness of capture (one minute or less) or the briefness of the information.
Case B: Andrea Tornielli

Andrea Tornielli started his mission half a year after Paolo Ruffini on the 3rd of January of 2019. This was well recognisable on his Twitter account, where he stopped to share news from *La Stampa* or *Vatican Insider*, his former home media, and started to promote *Vatican News* service. During six months, he published 365 tweets, which means an average of two every day.

One of the visible acts of his new engagement in the service of the Vatican was establishing the new journalistic genre, editorial (Tornielli 2019f), whose aim is to explain the acts of the Pope to the public, to analyse the situation in Church, and, apart from solely information, also brings the frame of interpretation that enables the creation of convictions or opinions.

In February, Tornielli informed followers about the news connected with the Vatican protection summit by way of retweeting pieces from the official @Vatican News account (76 pieces of news at all). He did so solely in Italian, and sometimes it was only the photo with sitting attendants of the summit (Vatican News 2019). The disadvantage of this approach was that the photo with hashtags did not bring any information to the people who are not Church “insiders” and who did not follow the occasion carefully. This is probably why, e.g., one of the most highly interesting pieces of information from summit (Tornielli 2019a) was lost among others and reached only one like and one retweet. The only self-written piece that Tornielli shared on his Twitter was the final editorial at the end of the four-day summit (Tornielli 2019b). The abuse topic in other context was mentioned by him twenty times. Quite surprisingly, the spiritual retreat of the Pope and U.S. bishops attracted a large audience (Gisotti 2019a).

The most important result of the summit, the papal document on the protection of minors in Church, met with very little public interest—the likes, commentaries, and retweets had a rate of one or two pieces (Tornielli 2019j). Therefore, we can argue that either the information was not relevant for the public sphere or that the Vatican’s communication failed in mediating this key issue.

As the World Youth Day in Panama was approaching (and was then occurring simultaneously), Tornielli tweeted a number of pictures (Tornielli 2019g) and videos (Tornielli 2019h) from the terrain, which gave a livelier impression of the journalistic work and also signs of civic journalism.

The other main topics of the Pope’s media agenda in the beginning of 2019 were also the apostolic journeys to United Arabian Emirates (Tornielli 2019c) (22 cases in all) and Morocco (9). Well followed were also the videos from the Pope’s trip to Bulgaria (42). The video with celebration of First Holy Communion with children in Rakovski (Gisotti 2019b) gained set a record in sharing. In comparison to the papal journey to Romania (31 pieces of news), we can see that the Bulgaria and Macedonia journeys were far more followed on Twitter than that in Romania although the Catholic population in the areas is almost the same. Throughout, we could observe that Tornielli used more videos than photos when tweeting. For example, during the Pope’s apostolic journey to Romania, he tweeted almost exclusively the videos with papal sermons or addresses. Strongly promoted was also the general information about the Pope and Vatican (50).

The other topics vary from the previous visit of Baltic states (1) to the synod on youth (3). Relationships with the Chinese Church were mentioned eleven times. The situation in South Sudan, where the Vatican is one of key diplomats promulgating peace, was reflected in eight cases. Only two tweets were dedicated to the approaching Amazonian synod.

For Tornielli, common retweets included those from *Vatican News* (126), his colleagues from dicastery (6), or the sharing of *Vatican News* content (111). However, contrary to Ruffini, in eighty-one cases, he published his own text in editorial style. As as skilled expert on quality journalism, he retweeted four times different media and three times the Pope’s account.

The common style of Tornielli’s work is to publish tweets with different language translations of his own articles; he usually started with Italian (276) to continue with English (20), French (19), Spanish (21), German (9), or Portuguese (8) and even Ukrainian (1). The
content was always the same whether it was a newscast about the agreement between the Vatican and China (Tornielli 2019d) or summit about protection of minors (Tornielli 2019e). In ten cases, he did not use any language, and the content was universal—a photo or video.

In general, Tornielli’s tweets were commented on 1193 times. His pieces were retweeted 7150 times and, in total, liked by 25,854 users, which is half of the number observed in Ruffini’s case.

Independent of time, the videos from Sunday Angelus prayer with the Pope in St. Peter’s square in the Vatican (Vatican News 2018e) seemed to be also highly influential. The quotations from the Pope’s sermon tweeted from the@Pontifex Twitter account reached even 5700 people (Francesco 2019a). As the liturgical year continued, the regular parts of it were commented on by the Pope. The retweeting of his thoughts attracted a large audience—sometimes even 4500 (Francesco 2019c).

As for the photos, in the majority of cases (219) there were photos from Vatican News; in less (48), there were only illustrative photos; and in ninety-eight cases, there was none.

Tornielli mostly worked with the content of Vatican News (330 cases) or used different Vatican media (5 cases), other Church media (1 case), or none (29 cases).

Tornielli tweeted fifty-three videos in total, prevailingly from the Pope’s journeys, Holy masses, or videos with historical or educative content.

8. Comparison

Prefect Paolo Ruffini tweeted in the selected period a total of 259 times, whereas editor-in-chief Andrea Tornielli 365 times. Ruffini prevailingly referred to the Vatican News and the newscast of other journalists, whereas Tornielli established a new genre—editorial—explaining the Church affairs to the audience with an ambition to create a conviction or an opinion.

For both of them, the retweets of Pope Francis’ short quotes were the most successful, with thousands of followers. The general information about the Pope and Vatican were strongly promoted. Independent of the time, the videos from Sunday Angelus prayer with the Pope in St. Peter’s square in the Vatican were highly influential.

Both Italian journalists also accompanied the Pope on the apostolic journeys, so they could share the pictures from the area. As for Bulgaria, there were forty-two videos published on Tornielli’s site during just three days. On the other side, the trip to Romania was underestimated in the reporting of the news. The same was that with the Emirates, dominating the less-observed trip to Morocco.

Sometimes, the important and interesting topics, such as the Vatican summit, World Youth Days, ecology, or economy, did not reach their audience in both profiles’ activity. Specifically, the most interesting piece of information from the summit (the issuing of a document on the protection of minors, new legislation, or norms for clergy) was lost among others and reached likes and retweets at the rate of one or two. We could also observe that the style of informing the Twitter audience progressed as the summit continued, including the testimonies and stories of the abuse victims. Actually, one of Tornielli’s initiatives was the creation of a new rubric in Vatican News, which presented the stories of people, their faith, testimonies, and relationships.

Both journalists used the service of Vatican News frequently. Tornielli often published his own texts, prevailingly using contextual editorials. Ruffini never published his own text but tweeted own thoughts apart from thoughts of others.

Ruffini’s content was occupied by the synod on young people by one-third. Tornielli was on the other side, mostly involved in tweeting about the summit and many of the apostolic journeys. The variety of topics tweeted by Tornielli was generally wider than that of Ruffini.

Technically, the brief videos were successful among the public; resumes of the apostolic journeys, explanations of the theme of World Communications Day, and the video for the anniversary of Francis’ ordination all targeted more than the average number of followers (thus even thousands of them).
The observer may learn that the quality of media activities sometimes won over quantity. Despite the fact that Ruffini tweeted a great deal of times from Panama, where he accompanied the Pope, among his mostly followed tweets was a snapshot of a disabled boy in a wheelchair being lifted up by his friends to see the Pope better. In fact, this picture was not his but was retweeted from local television.

The total score of likes was 25,854 for Tornielli, and half of this number we saw in Ruffini’s example. The number of retweets was contrarily double for Ruffini. As for the comments, it was almost the same in both cases. The possible reason could be that Ruffini as the prefect gains greater credibility or sympathy—but on the other side, Tornielli is more skilled and a well-known journalist and media professional. Let us consider this an opportunity for the future research.

9. Discussion

In the light of the new findings from the realised case study, it is interesting to come back to the aforementioned paradigm repair theory and its subsection occupied with transparency. We may state that although the aim to repair the legitimacy of the Church through media communication of the Vatican in the Twitter area has enjoyed partially good progress, there is still much to repair in the future. We have seen how the key occasions of the recent period—the summit about protection of minors in the Church, the synod on young people, or the propagation of the papal Letter to the People of God—were underestimated in Twitter communication because of the language barrier (tweeting in Italian language only), lack of creative re-tweeting of Vatican News, or the lack of interest in the pictures, which may attract the digital audience.

10. Conclusions

As the reform of the Vatican Dicastery for Communication continues, the professionals who work there are using social media more often for the purpose of spreading the Gospel and the Church’s mission. They popularize the agenda of Pope Francis and share the stories, images, audio, or video clips.

The aim of this article was to analyse the work of two Italian-based laymen and media professionals, Paolo Ruffini and Andrea Tornielli, in media dicastery with the emphasis on their appearance in the Twitter environment. It was clear from the brief observation of the Twitter accounts of Paolo Ruffini and Andrea Tornielli that their activity often doubles the media activity of Vatican News.

The quantitative content analysis of their Twitter accounts during six months after their appointment was used as the scientific method. This timing was used in order to research how they coped with their—quite unexpected—nomination by Pope Francis and which approach they chose in the use of their official Twitter accounts. The month of January 2019 is a period in which we can observe the activity of both of them. That is clearly due to the preparations for the special summit on the protection of minors, which culminated in February 2019. The goal was also to trace the approach of these two journalists towards this painful issue, which needs proper crisis communication.

In the inquiry, there were coded the used forms of the Twitter activity, topics of the content, use of world languages, and especially the number of comments of these tweets, their retweets (shares), and likes. Included was also the coding of the photo supplement, of the other media, and of the multi-media activity (audio, video, using of other social sites, etc.).

There were detected new genres in the social media space (video, editorial, or story), the vast popularity of Pope Francis, and the success of his own Twitter activity (among tens of thousands of followers). Among the most popular examples were the “how to pray” picture, tweeting about “Virgin Mary—the biggest influencer ever”, or the video on the anniversary of Pope Francis’ priest ordination or his birthday.

Contrarily, there were often omissions and partial inconsistencies when introducing uneasy themes (abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, ecology, or economy) to the public.
These lacks may be developed in the future in the symbolic and imaginative communication of the Vatican.

Last but not least, it was surprisingly realized that Ruffini, a less-skilled journalist than Tornielli, is more popular in the Twitter environment and that users react to his content more often. Nevertheless, Tornielli often published his own texts, prevalently contextual editorials, whereas Ruffini never published own text.

The substantial thematic component of this paper was also the recognition (or valuation) of laics—men and women—in the Roman curia and the procedures taken by Pope Francis. From this quantitative content analysis, it is not possible to decide whether the activity of these two media professionals on Twitter relates directly to their status as laics. Further investigation, which would, e.g., compare the Twitter accounts of active priests or consecrated persons and accounts of laics, is needed.

The fact that Ruffini and Tornielli are not consecrated but are laymen is not constitutive for previous findings, and it can be only stated that their appointment into the curial office was something very extraordinary. Only time will show the results of their work for the Catholic Church and Pope Francis.

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**Notes**

1. Mark 16:15 in (Bible 2020).
2. The women are statistically more religious, and furthermore, they form the majority of society as such.
3. “Dicastery” is the general word used for the Vatican’s various offices and departments.

**References**


