

# The Impact of *My Brilliant Friend* on Twitter: a Catalyst for a... Brilliant Digital Affiliation?

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## 1. Introduction

A new wave of high-quality TV productions in Europe raises questions regarding how fans around the world react to culture-specific peculiarities and quirks of environments and situations that have emerged from a non-English language TV production. This chapter will examine the case of *My Brilliant Friend* (henceforth *MBF*), a successful TV-series in Italian, based on the first of the four-book saga *Neapolitan Novels* by Elena Ferrante. The saga follows the lives of two girls who grew up in a rough neighbourhood on the outskirts of Naples from the 1950s to the present day. It is a global bestseller translated into English, Dutch, French, German Spanish and numerous other languages (Muldoon, 2017). The first book — *MBF* — was adapted for TV through a co-production between the US cable network HBO and Italian networks RAI Fiction and TIM Vision, that aired the first episode on November 18<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> 2018 respectively.

This series attracted considerable attention from fans affected with so-called “Ferrante Fever” (see Straniero and Amadio, 2017) that evolved in the

phenomenon of fandom, i.e. the fans of a celebrity, team or a fictional series regarded collectively as a community or subculture. On-line fandoms come in many forms, changing constantly as social media evolve and *MBF* fandoms are no exception. According to Collins (2004: 281), the digital environment provides “a set of rituals that generate the emotional intensity and dominate the focus of attention”. Digital platforms, such as Twitter, provide a way “to address the entire community of users” (Highfield *et al.*, 2013: 316). Morgan (2019) has coined the term “The Netflix Effect” to describe the situation “when a new series catapults an unknown actor to fame” and triggers a reaction from fandoms that often consists of a “feverish” drive and the “feeling of belonging to an audience”. In the case of the debut of a long-awaited TV series such as *MBF*, the display of frenetic on-line activity was inevitable.

To approach fan-driven digital activity, Morgan (2019) recognizes that “cult media fans are seen to be an information-intensive group in many respects, with a variety of sophisticated online and offline information practices”. Furthermore, Pentland (2014: 149) describes such digital communities as “collective intelligences” (*ibid.*: 44) as users who gather online around a topic of interest adopt common rules, as well as specific interactional modes, and according to Jensen (2011: 164) this process results in the emergence of “cultural communities” that display several unique features.

This paper will examine the group dynamics of Ferrante fans on Twitter in order to understand how language is used by fans both to share their opinions on the series and to create a group identity based on common interests within an international fandom that appears to be fascinated by a European TV product. Following a brief review of the relevant literature and a presentation of the methods employed, we will assess an exploratory dataset of tweets posted by Ferrante fans during the first four days after the launch of the series. Content analysis of the tweets will be carried out on two levels. We will first analyze tweets that were posted in Italian from a linguistic perspective with the aim of examining which language practices occur in Italian Twitter discourse. Then the general patterns of user behavior and group dynamics will be analyzed in the tweets posted in both English and Italian, in order to assess how fans express

what Morgan (2019) labels their feeling of belonging to an audience. At this point, specific attention will also be given to the use of humour in the tweets (Shifman 2007; 2014).

## 2. Tools and Methods

Due to a system of followers, where anyone can follow anyone else, Twitter provides the ideal platform where enthusiasts can discuss their favorite TV series (Guerrero-Pico 2017: 2087). In fact, Twitter seemed a good place for us to explore the initial phase of an Italian production with an international resonance such as *MBF*. In order to track the behavior of fans of *MBF* we constructed a small corpus of tweets collected from the Twitter accounts that appeared during the first four days following the debut of the series in Italy. Using Python 2.72 software and a third-party package<sup>1</sup>, we extracted all the tweets that included the string “La mia amica geniale”. This resulted in a database of 99 tweets of which 73 were in Italian and 26 in English posted by 86 distinct users that will be anonymous and identified by a unique set of letters in the text. We decided to focus on tweets in Italian to better compress and analyse the collected data. This approach allows for a better discussion of extracted tweets in one language, i.e. Italian, avoiding the fragmentation of the obtained sample. The limited dataset of collected tweets does not allow us to make generalisations of any sort concerning the features of online communication by fans in Italian. Therefore, it is important to recognize the context of this research based on a case study of a sample of four days of tweeting activity. Our goal was an initial exploration of online spaces where *MBF* fans gather, with the additional aim to better understand fandom dynamics for future research.

The approach we adopted in analysing the data is based both on lexicogrammar and on community building processes, the latter retrieved mainly from fandom studies and memetics. After examining the Italian syntactic structures

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<sup>1</sup> Jefferson-Henrique/GetOldTweets-python, MIT License.

and lexis (Gheno 2017) adopted by fan-users of this series in the tweets, we assessed the group dynamics of all the users in both languages using a three ethics-based framework (for further details, see Cremaschi 2002: 565), in which we examined fans' engagement with each other and with *MBF* in terms of:

1. *Sanctity* – i.e. responses centered around acritical positive assessment of the series
2. *Autonomy* – i.e. responses centered around individual opinions;
3. *Community* – i.e. responses that involved an inclusive “we”.

Furthermore, Shifman (2007; 2014: 149) puts forward the idea that the digital world is “a major player in the production and distribution of humor”, recognizing that social media users humorously engage in “a performative display of opinions that is meant to be heard far and wide”. For this reason, specific attention was also given to humorous aspects of the assessed tweets and what we defined as humour, because, while not being completely humorous *per se*, parts of a tweet or even single elements within a tweet did indeed signal non-seriousness. Therefore, we assessed each tweet suspected to be humorous, bearing in mind comments of other users to a given tweet, as well as considering non-verbal elements, such as emoticons, emoji and gifs.

### **3. Tweeting in Italian**

Scholarly literature regarding computer-mediated language (CML) is in agreement that written language has undergone a re-coding from speech and heavily reflects a return to orality. Terms that describe this third modality of language include “conversational-like interactions” (Zappavigna 2012), “secondary orality” (Bonegru 2008) and “conversational writing” (Jonsson 2013). CML has a number of salient features. First, it is multimodal, i.e., it often consists of a combination of different modes, such as verbal text, audio, images, animations and video. Second, it is hypertextual, as it may activate connections through hyperlinks to other texts that can be accessed by a click of

a mouse, keypress set or by touching a screen. In other words, CML cannot be simply reduced to a speech-writing opposition.

Italian linguists, such as Gheno (2017: 38), define CML in Italian as *italiano digitato* (typed Italian) and Antonelli (2016) has coined the term *e-taliano*. CML — and not just in Italian — has specific features that place it within the written-spoken continuum by which Nencioni in 1976 (see also Pistolesi 2015) described different forms of communications included between the two extreme poles of “spoken to be spoken” and “written to be written”. These features, such as brevity, syntactic fragmentation and the fact that little importance is given to correct spelling, are partly determined by the user’s typing speed and the urgency to communicate in real time.

As the basis of the typed Italian used in digital interactive communication we find the so-called “neostandard” variety, that was theorised by Sabatini (1985; 1990; 2016) under the name of *italiano dell’uso medio* (i.e., “Italian of average usage”). Paraphrasing Gheno (2017: 41-42), neostandard Italian is the everyday language in which, for example, *lui* (“he”) has replaced the (more grammatically correct) subject pronoun *egli*, reflexive forms are used to mark colloquial style (e.g., the standard transitive form “ho bevuto il caffè” — “I drank coffee” — vs. its colloquial reflexive form “mi sono bevuto il caffè”, see also footnote 2) and in conditional clauses expressing an impossible or unreal condition (e.g., “if I had known, I would not have come”) an imperfect indicative tense is used instead of the combination of past perfect subjunctive + past conditional (e.g., “se lo sapevo non venivo” vs. “se lo avessi saputo non sarei venuto”) etc.. As Gheno (*ibidem*) observes, even if reading certain constructions online may cause perplexity, they have been common in informal written contexts for a long time, but perhaps they have never been so visible as they are now.

### 3.1. Which Italian for *MBF* fans?

The goal of this section is to analyse the Italian adopted by fan-users of this series through an examination of the syntactic structures and the lexis contained in our corpus of tweets.

#### 3.1.1. Syntax

Due to speed and immediacy and to the constraint imposed by Twitter's character limit<sup>2</sup>, users tend to avoid long sentences and to base syntax on coordination (Gheno 2017: 42). Clauses, phrases and single words are often linked together through coordinating conjunctions, e.g. *e*, *ma*, *o*, *né* etc. (“and”, “but”, “or”, “not” etc.), or through the use of commas (De Santis: 2010), e.g.:

1) User\_aiU: “Tra Elena e Lila c'è un rapporto molto forte, si compensano, sono l'una l'opposto dell'altra”;

2) User\_ric: “#Lamicageniale la povera Lila ha sempre aiutato tutti ma lei non ha avuto niente di bello dalla vita”.

Ellipsis of the main verb is also very common:

3) User\_Imm: “Il secondo anche più bello del primo, un'ora che è volata”

The elliptical structure (“il secondo [è/ è stato] anche più bello”) is followed by a relative clause that is similar to a cleft sentence where the main verb *essere* is omitted (“[è] un'ora che è volata”) (see next section on cleft sentences);

4) User\_lil: “I due primi episodi de #Lamicageniale sono bellissimi e molto curati nei dettagli. Cosa volere di più?”

In example 4, only the infinitive verb *volere* is left and the main verb is elliptical (e.g., “Cosa [si può] volere di più?”);

On the contrary, in Tweet 5, ellipsis does not involve a single verb and the meaning of the utterance must be inferred by the reader:

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<sup>2</sup> Since 2017, the length of tweets has been expanded from 140 to a maximum of 280 characters.

5) User\_Tat: "#Lamicageniale #MyBrilliantFriend Aspettavo d'agosto questa serie parte bene ma soprattutto la bravura delle bimbe".

The meaning of the entire tweet has to be reconstructed by the reader. Syntactically, there is no punctuation between the clauses (i.e.: "Aspettavo da agosto questa serie. Parte bene, ma [...]"). As for the content, the user claims that s/he was looking forward to watch this series since August ("Aspettavo da agosto questa serie"); the second clause is initially focused on the good start of the series ("[la serie] parte bene"), then the attention shifts to the acting skills of the little girls ("la bravura delle bimbe"), but there is no verb related to this new topic. Therefore, it can be inferred that the series it is off to a good start, but above all the acting skills of the little girls stand out.

6) User\_Mar: "Una serie TV così magistrale non si vedeva da tantissimo tempo. La recitazione, poi. Che ve lo dico a fare."

Tweet 6 includes a three-word clause ("La recitazione, poi"). Despite the lack of a main verb, it can be inferred by the following clause ("Che ve lo dico a fare", i.e.: "needless to say"), that the acting was excellent. Moreover, the use of the colloquial expression "Che ve lo dico a fare" is aimed at reproducing informal spoken language in writing, with the user addressing the community ("ve lo" dico, i.e.: "I tell **you**").

### **3.1.2. Cleft sentence starting with the verb *essere* and use of *ma* at the beginning of a sentence.**

In cleft sentences including the verb *essere* ("to be"), information following *essere* is what is new for the addressee, whereas the clause introduced by *che* contains the information that is taken as given:

7) User\_LaC: "Ringrazio pubblicamente @\_minaerva perché è grazie a lei che capisco ogni parola in dialetto ne #lamicageniale"

In place of standard, non-marked syntax ("grazie a lei capisco/ capisco grazie a lei"), the construction "è grazie a lei che capisco" is chosen to emphasise the pronoun *lei*.

8) User\_Lad: “Ma alla fine della storia si viene a sapere chi si è fregato le bambole?”

The use of this structure with the conjunction *ma* (“but”) at the beginning of a sentence is aimed at introducing an opposition to what has been already mentioned or at marking the transition to another topic. In Tweet 8 we also find the low register verb *fregare* (meaning “to steal” in this case) that is used in its colloquial reflexive form<sup>3</sup>.

#### **a. Lexis**

The use of single words in English within Italian tweets is very common in our data. According to Gheno (2017: 50-51), even if translations or possible periphrases of an English term exist, using an Anglicism (see section 3.2.1) apparently sounds more convenient or “cooler” than using its Italian equivalent, possibly due to the fascination of Anglo-American culture in Italy (see Radtke 1992: 5-44, in particular p.25).

#### **b. Lexical borrowings and hybrids**

A lot of English terms are related to the semantic field of television production, such as these overt lexical borrowings (Gottlieb, 2004: 45): *backstage*, *set*, *clip*, *casting* and *pilot*:

9) User\_vis: “In questo backstage le due piccole attrici raccontano la loro storia sul set. Interviste, clip e backstage su #LAmicaGeniale”

Other cases are related to the field of broadcasting (e.g. “premiere”), to the product’s reception, e.g. “flop” and “audience”, and finally to the public’s fruition of *MBF* (e.g. “torrent”) and their spasmodic wait for episodes, in expressions such as “no spoiler” and “binge watching”:

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<sup>3</sup> The colloquial use of the reflexive form of transitive verbs (i.e., the standard transitive form “chi ha fregato le bambole?” – in English: “Who did steal the dolls?” vs. its colloquial reflexive form “chi **si è fregato** le bambole?”) is an intensifier. It stresses that there is a particular, psychological involvement of the subject in the action described by the verb. It is one of the features of the new standard Italian listed by Sabatini (see also Bellina 2016).

10) User\_bub: “#LAMICAGENIALE (FLOP IN AMERICA)”;

11) User\_Imm: “Mi piacerebbe poter fare binge watching senza dover aspettare una settimana”;

12) User\_den: “Sentite, ho visto il pilot de #LAmicaGeniale e ho già pianto tipo 16 volte, non so come andare avanti”;

In our tweets we also found the occurrence of hybrids (*ibidem*): the verbs *floppare* and *spoilerare* have an English root and the inflectional morpheme of the first Italian conjugation, ending with suffix *-are*:

13) User\_Mic: “Floppa #LAmicaGeniale, merito della Rai e del suo pubblico vecchio!”;

14) User\_per: “La serie tv de #LAmicaGeniale è tratta dal primo libro, right? [...] non mi spoilerò nulla degli altri libri?”;

In addition to the verb *spoilerare*, which is used in the colloquial reflexive form, in Tweet 14 we also found the English interjection “right?” to seek confirmation instead of an Italian interjection that has the same function (e.g.: “vero? giusto?” etc.).

### **c. Dialects and Mangling**

Italian dialects today are used in social media with the function of “colouring” speech. They no longer appear to be linked to a specific area of origin and illustrate what Ursini (2005: 332) has labelled “de-regionalization of dialects”. As Gheno (2017: 62) argues, contrary to other Italian dialects, the Roman dialect is currently experiencing a great moment of popularity on social media, due to the fact that it is instinctively perceived as “likeable” (“fattore simpatia”, *ibidem*) and to a long tradition of Roman comedians. In Tweet 15 the adjective *poraccia*, Roman for *poveraccia* (Ravaro 2001), i.e. “poor thing”, is used to express a negative opinion on the series “I Medici”, an Italian-British historical drama on the family of the Renaissance Florence that premiered in Italy on Rai 1 in 2016:

15) User\_Mic: “Già i medici sembravano la versione poraccia e pecoreccia delle serie Usa”;

The Roman adjective *poraccia* has been perceived by the user as the most suitable term in the context, regardless of whether the user is actually Roman or not (see also Severgnini 2003 on the national use of the Roman dialect in the media).

The following case is an example of mangling (“storpionimi”, see Gheno, 2017: 77, a neologism for “mangled words”), i.e. the tendency to deliberately modify the spelling of words to imitate the tones of foreign languages, baby talk, dialects or regional varieties of Italian, etc.:

16) User\_sup: "STAAA CESSS" tradotto nei sottotitoli con un sobrissimo "ugly bitch" ammerigani ma che ne volete sapere voi #MyBrilliantFriend";

in which *ammerigani* is a deliberate wrong spelling that imitates the pronunciation of *americani* by an English speaker.

#### **d. Orthography**

Capital letters mimic a loud voice (Gheno 2017: 85; Crystal 2001: 87):

17) User\_Lad: "[...] NO SPOILER eh, voglio solo sapere se lo spiegano";

18) User\_fil: "non è che adesso vi vedete tutti #LAmicaGeniale e poi non fate audience il 27 novembre VERO? GUARDATEMI. VERO?"

The use of multiple punctuation marks to emphasize emotions (Tweet 19), and contracted forms, i.e., the tendency to omit vowels (Gheno 2017: 47), also recur in the tweets:

19) User\_fed: "Ma cosa sto leggendo?????"

20) User\_ric: "#lamicageniale non mi é piaciuto come é finito e come la vita nn abbia regalato niente di bello a Lila".

In Tweet 20, *nn* is the contracted form of the negation *non* and in Tweet 21 *ste* (more precisely: ‘*ste*) is the contracted form of *queste*.

21) User\_val: "Ma ste ragazzine sono pazzesche #LAmicaGeniale #MyBrilliantFriend"

According to Pistoiesi (2004) CML is characterised by the effort to recover emotions, prosody, mimicry, gesture and proxemics, that are normally lost in the shift from speech to writing. This recovery occurs through compensation strategies that may involve syntax, lexis, spelling, as well as the use of emoji, acronyms, etc.. As stated by Gheno (2017: 99-102), their omission would not prevent the effectiveness of communication; however they are now part of a trend that users have acquired and replicate.

After having examined the main syntactic, lexical and orthographic features of the tweets collected, the next section will focus on how fans share their opinions on the series and express their sense of belonging to an audience.

#### **4. Fandom dynamics**

As it evolves online, fans' language becomes deeply embedded in the rules, interests and materials of fan communities. The relationship between how users speak and write, and how they express themselves around a cultural item such as *MBF* — that is something of a cult — is expressed by a process that we can define as “linguistic convergence”. Fandoms modify and adapt their own “languages”, developing often what is called “fanspeak,” where national languages and dialects become warped, changed and integrated to create jargon and ways to express themselves that only other fans within a specific community understand. This process may even generate forms of art (“fan fiction,” “fan art,” “fan music” and so forth), that are developed by community members and that are fully dependent on online mutations of the national language through fandom dynamics (Noh, 2016: 31). Current fandoms are passionate communities that span nations worldwide and beyond national boundaries, linguistically and culturally.

Fandoms have a performative identity that is expressed through a collection of practices and discourses that express values, ideals and symbolic representations. The *MBF* fan community experience is a combination of both Italian and Neapolitan in the series. Their comments on how Neapolitan has been translated in the Italian subtitles (see section 4.2) demonstrates how they

take pleasure from, and are interested in, the different and rich qualities of the languages involved in a subject of which they are passionate, as well as displaying a desire to learn about the history and culture of Italy. In these online exchanges new words, phrases and terms are exchanged for emotional gratification and to form relationship links (see Nagle, 2017) that constitute a proper fandom.

According to our data, users and fan users interested in *MBF* engaged online with a shared understanding of being in a community. Their activity, while being chaotic and limited by a word-count, is structured like an ongoing conversation that is designed to involve as many users as possible. This involvement is achieved, for example, through humour, i.e. funny emoticons, ironic tweet phrasing, excessive punctuation etc., that emerged in its social function and is displayed through what Chiaro and Lobanov (forthcoming) have defined “shards”, inklings of humour that are recognized by in-groups. Our content analysis of 73 tweets in Italian and 26 in English was arranged around three widely recognized ethical themes mentioned above, i.e., Sanctity, Autonomy and Community. These themes represent specific group dynamics and will be proposed below and presented through significant examples.

#### **4.1. Sanctity – Fan Worship**

In our dataset, we extracted 17 tweets in Italian and 8 in English that were characterized by the presence of absolute compliments, instances of worship and an emotional connection to the debut of the series. These tweets display what Cremaschi (2002) defines as belonging to a sanctity-based type of morality, and include references to crying, the need to see all the episodes immediately and overwhelming compliments regarding the two young girls playing the roles of Lenu and Lila in the first two episodes. There is a sense of overall emotional seriousness and awe towards the series, communicated through the use of plain text without emoticons and insistent *AmicaGeniale* hashtagging to provide a mark (Wu 2016: 295) of digital recognition. The tweets provided in this section will illustrate these traits. For example, Tweet 12, also

mentioned above, show how a user mixing irony and serious emotionality claims to have cried 16 times when watching the show without adding other elements to the tweet, i.e. emoticons, images and gifs.

An interesting trend was the urgent need to communicate a need for more *MBF* that we have defined “(T)witted up craving”. Here we find both tweets represent a craving to binge watch or an over-emotional appeal that the user cannot go on without more *MBF*.

22) User 1\_den (see Tweet 12)

23) User 2\_off: Bellissimo. Ho bisogno di tutti gli episodi, di tutti i libri, subito, non posso aspettare.

It seems that much of this surge is dopamine-motivated (Guedes *et al.* 2015: 3) with fans tweeting repeatedly to amplify their pleasure. The dynamics of fan communities online are significant and often shaped by emotional stimuli, i.e. pleasure, sadness, anger etc. While in Tweet 22 User 1 is weeping as a reaction to the series, User 2 in Tweet 23 needs more content *immediately*. Part of this worship is also focused on complimenting the two young protagonists.

24) User 3\_lor: Le due bimbe che fanno Lenu e Lila da piccole sono ADORABILI le voglio abbracciare.

User 3 in Tweet 24 wants to hug the two young girls for their cuteness, writing “*ADORABILI*” (“lovely”) in cap locks to emphasize his/her feelings. Sanctity-based tweets provide a look into the most emotional and convinced fan users, who represent a minority within the cases we examined and who seem to proselytize their idolized cultural product.

#### **4.2. Autonomy – “I- based tweets”**

Several tweets focused on personal feelings and thoughts, with an emphasis on what we have labelled “I-based” tweets. We classified 15 tweets in Italian and 10 in English as “I-based”. These tweets were sometimes highly critical, with negative evaluation of the contrast between the Neapolitan used by the actors

and the Roman accent of the narrative voice in the Italian version of the show. These users also displayed “hatred” towards some characters, others simply sharing the fact that they had just started watching the series.

“Linguistic-distaste” was usually proposed as an opinion that mainly pointed at the un-translatibility of Neapolitan and at the narrative voice of Alba Rohrwacher.

25) User 2\_off: “Il napoletano sottotitolato in inglese era una cosa che non mi mancava”.

Below are the user points out that s/he could have used without the English subtitling of the Neapolitan.

“Character-bashing” was also prominent. Some users decry the fate of their favourites, such as Lila, others are eager to see the reaction of others towards those characters who “misbehave” during the series. Shards of humour and disgust emerge in these tweets.

26) User 4\_Isa: “Non vedo l’ora esca #LAmicaGeniale perché odierete tutti Nino e lo insulterete dalla mattina alla sera e niente, sono qui per questo”.

27) User 5\_LaC: “Io non mi sono mai espressa relativamente le due protagoniste, almeno in pubblico, e certi giudizi mi lasciano con l’amaro in bocca”.

User 4 in Tweet 26 jokingly emphasizes that s/he only tweets because s/he cannot wait to read other users’ insults towards Nino Sarratore. Another user is left with a bad taste in his/her mouth due to the impolite behavior of other users that criticized Lenu in a spiteful way. The moral stand of users’ behavior (see Haidt, 2012) is crucial; having one tweet encouraging and another discouraging character bashing is extremely common on social media.

28) User 6\_Aer: “Devo recuperare letture importanti prima che inizi la serie”.

Legitimacy building was equally relevant. In Tweet 28 User 6 emphasizes his/her desire to do some important reading before watching the series. This approach, is common in series based on books, and seems to indicate that a

fan who has read the books on which a series is based is a “truer” fan than others who simply watch the series.

### 4.3. Community

The tweets that focused on a sentiment of bonding amongst users were mostly in Italian. 42 Italian tweets displayed this feature versus 8 in English. These tweets were the most humorous, as many of the examples below will demonstrate, their content was focused on community building through quotes and, and examples of Italian identity in contrast with the English localization.

29) User 5\_LaC (see Tweet 7)

30) User 7\_sup (see Tweet 16)

31) User 8\_Chi: “tutti i giornalisti USA sono diventati espertissimi di storia e cultura locale napoletana #credici”.

In case 29 User 5 shows pride in *MBF* fandom and the desire to learn Neapolitan as well as the importance of mutual help in the community to do so. User 7 mocks the translation of *sta cessa*, (a form of insult literally meaning that the person is as ugly as to resemble a toilet) in cap locks for emphasis, mentioning “ugly bitch” to laugh off this translation and deliberately misspelling “Americans” in a mocking way. Italian identity and fan identity often overlap to show pride at being both (Davies, 1998). User 8 openly ridicules American journalists who claim to be experts in Neapolitan history and culture overnight, basking in her double identity.

32) User 9\_Jac: “Per chi ha guardato o guarderà il pilot illegalmente [...] poi guardatelo anche in tv. È importante per gli ascolti”.

33) User 10\_fil (see Tweet 18)

“Fandom-Weirdom” emerges in those users who encourage others to behave conscientiously towards their favorite show. Both Users 9 and 10, the former using a serious tone and the latter a humorous frame, ask all other users not to download the series illegally but to watch the show properly on TV and in prime

time, even if it was already available illicitly, in order to contribute to an official share of the larger audience.

34) User 11\_Poc: *“After a very long day, #LAmicaGeniale”*

35) User 12\_Sub: *“Tra poche ore inizia su #HBO la serie #LAmicaGeniale, [...] una produzione italiana di cui andare fieri”.*

The feeling of belonging to an audience is here expressed by “time-togetherness”, since the series is perceived as a time anchor (Godin 2011: 97): in Tweet 34 User 11 displays his/her pleasure to be finally able to see the show after a long day and signals that after few hours the show will start and that a worthy Italian production is something of which one should be proud. More passionate fans of a TV series organize their time, when a new season is out, around the time of release of new episodes. Watching their favourite show is often the most pleasurable moment of the week for users.

A sense of community exists as a shared experience from a “we” perspective. These tweets show a shared understanding that emotions, details of the show, criticisms and instances of humour are projected online in a perceived togetherness.

## 5. Conclusions

In the first pages of *MBF*, Ferrante describes an element that is key to understanding childhood:

There was something unbearable in the things, in the people, in the buildings, in the streets that, only if you reinvented it all, as in a game, became acceptable. The essential, however, was to know how to play, and she and I, only she and I, knew how to do it. (Ferrante 2011, Book one: 6)

Similar game-like qualities characterize the digital environment of social media. Users seem to play with language online, hybridizing and contaminating, while ridiculing, signaling loyalty and creating and posting content with a contradictory tone, i.e. excited, serious, humorous, sad, etc. Often appreciation or criticisms

of *MBF* are secondary to a shared sense of community that unites fans. While speech mimesis, i.e. the imitation of spoken language in orality, is a well-documented process on digital spaces, tweets that are characterized by what we called “Linguistic-distaste”, “(T)witted up craving” etc., provides a valuable snapshot of the digital activity in the limited tweet sample examined. This brief study could provide a valuable starting point for future research on smaller fandoms.

The MBF fan base that tried to spread “the word” had the aim of determining the high appraisal of *MBF* among the fan community. The collected tweets about a series of books that became a popular TV series often showed the emotional attachment of these users to the fandom related content that they accessed on Twitter. The evolution of language has created a form of digital tribalism that manifests itself through emotions and weirdness that now dictates how the online discourse around a TV series develops and succeeds or fails. As Zeitchik writes “what was once the rarest of events — a fan campaign, carried out via handwritten letters [...] — is now commonplace” and the success of today’s TV shows now depends upon it. As the MBF fandom anxiously awaits more seasons of their favourite show, the brilliance continues.

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