

# The godfather ‘caught in net’. The social media story telling of Matteo Messina Denaro arrest

Rosario D’Agata<sup>1</sup>, Gabriele Pocina<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Catania – rodagata@unict.it

<sup>2</sup>University of Catania – gabrielepocina@gmail.it

## Abstract

On 16th January of 2023, after 30 years on the run, Matteo Messina Denaro was arrested in Palermo. Unlike other important arrests of mafia bosses (Totò Riina in 1993 and Bernardo Provenzano in 2006), the capture of Messina Denaro took place at a time when media coverage was mainly online. Not only was it online, but also - and again unlike all the other bosses arrested previously - Messina Denaro's capture occurs in the era of social networks where, as it is well known, everyone is given the opportunity to comment, express ideas, open debates. This work aims to analyse the reactions of the users of the main social networks to the news of the boss's arrest. From an operational point of view, the work consists of three steps. In the first step, through a web scraping procedure, all the comments on the posts containing the topic “Matteo Messina Denaro” were collected. The social networks used for the analysis are X and Facebook. The draw began on 17-January-2023, and ended on 20-October-2023, almost one month after his death on September 25th. In the second step we focused on the analysis of the main issues observing their change over time and using topic modelling methods. Finally, we carried on a comparison, highlighting differences and similarities in lexicon and topics among the social media (X, Facebook). In this case, the aim is showing how the same themes can conceal and assume different connotations depending on the social platform and, consequently, the user-type who shares them.

**Keywords:** Social Network, Latent Dirichlet Allocation, Topic Model, Matteo Messina Denaro.