Humility-Based Persuasion:
Individual Differences in Elicited Emotions and Politician Evaluation

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The notion of humility has been neglected in the field of political communication in favor of the persuasive strength of a dominant leader. Humility is defined here as an interpersonal and epistemic stance aimed, on one side, at involving the interlocutor in an empathic and horizontal relation, and on the other, at admitting possible shortcomings in one's own knowledge or competence, as inherent in human nature. The present study investigates the effect of humble communication on emotional and evaluative reactions of potential voters by taking into consideration their individual differences in terms of perceived competence (self-esteem), benevolence (moral relevance), and dominance (social dominance orientation). Results reveal that a social dominance is a good predictor of negative emotions and evaluations elicited by a humble politician, whereas self-esteem and moral sensitivity are best predictors of positive emotions and positive evaluations of a humble politician. The results shed light on possible "humble-based interventions" to promote voters' political empowerment.

Keywords: political humility, political persuasion, political emotions, individual differences

Most research in persuasion focuses mainly on the role of source credibility and persuasiveness, sometimes including audience features, preferences, and group membership. Political persuasion is based on an integration of the leader with a particular group of electors, and is less a simple effect of a "great leader" with innate and stable extraordinary traits (Bass, Avolio & Goodheim, 1987; Hollander, 1995). More recently, theories have attested that leader effectiveness is basically a social construction (Haslam & Platow, 2001; Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2015) that grows from a group identity. This matching process between source and group identity has been attested by another important idea that inspired the present research: prototypicality (Hogg, 2001). According to social cognitive theory (Hogg, 2001), leaders can be persuasive because they embody the group attributes that facilitate the compliance process based on perceived similarity (the leader is "one of us"). The process of matching leaders and electors naturally passes through communicative verbal and bodily acts that contribute to forming the ethos of the persuader (Poggi, 2005), that, following the social cognitive view (Hogg, 2001), being perceived persuasive must be similar, close to the audience's values and expectations. Reviewing experimental studies on source persuasiveness shows that it should be competent, benevolent, and dominant (Burgoon, Buller, & Woodall, 1996; Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Poggi, 2005; Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a) and that, for example, people

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with high social dominance orientation (SDO) are more attracted to dominant and hierarchical leaders (de Vries, Bakker-Pieper, Konings, & Schouten, 2013; Nicol, 2009). In particular, this central attention to dominance persuasiveness is based on a set of communicative behaviors of someone who demonstrates having power over someone else (Mast, 2010; Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a; Turner, 2005). However, it neglects the role of other horizontal forms of managing persuasive power, such as humble leadership. Furthermore, studies in positive psychology (Wright et al., 2017) have pointed to strong correlations of humility with positive emotions, and other applicative studies, within organizational contexts, have partially confirmed the positive affective and evaluative effects of humble leadership (Li, Liang, & Zhang, 2016; Liu, 2016). The present study tries to fill this lack of research within political contexts, trying to empirically test emotional and evaluative effects in reaction to humble messages, opportunely chosen, by taking into account individual differences of potential voters, such as SDO (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994), self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), and moral domain relevance (Graham et al., 2011).

Humility: Related Works

In political persuasion, the concept of humility, so widely promoted in religious literature, has rarely been approached and coherently described in scientific research, in favor of the opposite notions, such as "dominance" as a common expression of a person's power (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985; Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a). From this point of view, humility has been seen as a lack of dominance, as a submissive and then negative feature of a politician (Weidman, Cheng, & Tracy, 2018). Regarding the persuasive account, a politician whose goal is to convince an audience to vote for him or her should demonstrate competence, trustworthiness, and have the ability to keep promises. Recently, this last feature has been represented in multimodal political communication where a politician who wants to be persuasive and be elected should show more power than the opponent, by interrupting, discrediting, and speaking loudly during conversation (Carraro, Gawronski, & Castelli, 2010; D'Errico, Poggi, & Vincze, 2012; Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a).

These considerations led political persuasion scholars to neglect the notion of humility. Humility is generally considered an attitude because, unlike emotion, it is a relatively enduring quality (e.g., Kesebir, 2014; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004), and even recently has been defined as a personality trait (e.g., HEXACO; Ashton & Lee, 2009), like honesty. Humility has also been defined as an affective experience (Saroglou, Buxant, & Tilquin, 2008), including antecedent cognitive appraisals (i.e., accurate evaluations of one's abilities) and activation of distinct cognitive-behavioral patterns (i.e., directing one's attention toward others and their accomplishments; Chancellor & Lyubomirsky, 2013; Weidman & Tracy, 2017).

More generally, humility can be defined as a positive feature that can be associated with intrapersonal benefits, like gratitude (Kruse, Chancellor, Ruberton, & Lyubomirsky, 2014) or self-control (Tong et al., 2016), and interpersonal ones, like fostering forgiveness (Davis et al., 2013), promoting prosocial behavior (Exline & Hill, 2012; LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Tsang, & Willerton, 2012), and buffering against stress (Krause, Pargament, Hill, & Ironson, 2016). Someone with humility is also generally considered to tend to express "positive other-oriented emotions" (e.g., empathy, compassion, sympathy, love) and the ability to regulate self-oriented emotions in socially acceptable ways (Davis et al., 2013).

The nature of humility, however, can be defined in two ways. The first, the opposite of dominance, so-called self-abasing humility, is likely to follow personal failures (close to modesty); is associated with feelings of submissiveness, unimportance, worthlessness, and traits such as low self-esteem and introversion; and motivates a behavioral orientation toward hiding from others (Weidman et al., 2018). The other nuance of humility, so-called appreciative humility, is based on representative feelings and thoughts; typically follows personal success; is associated with compassion, grace, and understanding; includes traits like high self-esteem, status, and agreeableness; and motivates a behavioral orientation toward celebrating others (Weidman et al., 2018).

This second form can be close to the psychological notion of humility as a state to "forget the self" (Tangney, 2002). On the other hand, the common sense refers to the highest level of self-awareness, in which the humble person is highly aware of his or her strengths and limits.

Taking into account appreciative humility, several studies in the field of organizational psychology have defined the humble leader as one who (1) acknowledges personal faults, mistakes, and limits; (2) is open to new, even contradictory ideas; and (3) has the tendency to give voice and merits to "employees." In this view, a humble leader may have positive effects on employees—for example, he or she can increase "voice behaviors" that are proactive and constructive suggestions (Li et al., 2016; Liu, 2016).

Within the leadership realm, this notion is similar to other leadership descriptions (e.g., the "servant leader," which in its definition "goes beyond self-interest"; Greenleaf, 1997), is governed by creating within the organization opportunities to help followers grow with the goal of pursuing community well-being (Greenleaf, 1997; Luthans & Avolio, 2003), and has the responsibility of increasing the autonomy of followers (Bowie, 2000). Also, authentic leadership includes some components that are close to humble leadership, that focus on integrity elements such as self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and a mainly internalized moral perspective (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). In fact, it is characterized by high ethical standards that guide other persons' decision making. Finally the "transformational leaders" inspire followers to adopt a vision that involves more than individual self-interest (Burns, 1978; Judge & Bono, 2000). The openness to new ideas is the motivational core of transformational leaders, who are focused on followers' needs and aspirations, and improve and transform followers' abilities by means of intellectual stimulation (Bass, Avolio & Goodheim, 1987). The description of altruism, benevolence, and openness to new ideas that feature these other notions of leadership is part of a "humble stance" definition, even if it can be seen mainly as a "communicative" notion.

In the following study, I will opt for a definition of humble-stance (D'Errico & Poggi, 2019) that is presumably correlated with a more general attitude and possibly with a personality trait. A stance can be defined as a multimodal public act, performed interactively through verbal and nonverbal communication, by which one positions oneself with respect to the object of a communicative interaction, oneself, the interlocutor, and the interaction itself, including the form and content of one's own and the interlocutor's utterance. For instance, an interpersonal stance (Jaffe, 2009) is a person's expression of his or her relationship to the interlocutors, possibly communicated affectively (D'Errico et al., 2012; Lempert, 2008); an epistemic stance is a judgement on the cognitive status of one's assertion and its level of certainty (Biber & Finegan, 1989).

Persuading by Humility: A Sociopsychological Approach

In political psychology, the notion of humility has been neglected because the persuasion process has been linked to a "dominant" politician, one who maneuvers to show strength over his or her opponent (Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a).

The tendency to focus on the notions of status, power, and dominance is strictly linked to the general definition of persuasion that represents an evaluative process based on a (delegated) trust in a person/politician who can pursue the achievement of people's goals (Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a). But in evaluating either an object or a person, two kinds of negative evaluations may be conceived: (1) one of inadequacy, if it lacks the power necessary to obtain goals, (2) and one of noxiousness, if it is endowed with power, but with a negative power that risks thwarting someone's goals. Thus, trusting someone means evaluating that person as one who has the necessary power to achieve goals and who does not harm (Castelfranchi, 2003).

These features of a trustworthy persuader have been acknowledged as relevant by previous literature, under the names of competence and morality, respectively. In addition, the feature of dominance seems to be efficient for persuading an audience (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006; Dépret & Fiske, 1993; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003; Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a). Dominance has been defined as a relational construct implying a power comparison (to have "more power than" another); but also, the communication of power—the fact of producing signals conveying one's dominance—is important because communicating power is a way to maintain it or even to acquire more of it (Castelfranchi, 2003). And if a dominant stance is necessary to maintain one's power, this accounts for why, in political debates, signals of dominance are ubiquitous and attempts to lower others' dominance are very frequent.

Actually, signals of dominance do not necessarily take the form of peremptory orders or aggressive stances. Poggi and D'Errico (2010a), in their multimodal analysis of dominance strategies, have shown that some (the "blatant" ones, like using speech acts of criticism or accusation) are clearly characterized by aggressiveness or power display. Others (the "subtle" dominance strategies, like showing a calm strength, ignoring the other or using indirect evaluative forms like irony and acidity; D'Errico & Poggi, 2014), at first sight, do not show a clear exhibition of force or power but are nonetheless more indirect ways to show dominance.

The preference for the dominant communication in its explicit forms (e.g., discrediting the opponent) is higher when people show adherence to power, security, and SDO (D'Errico et al., 2012; Poggi, D'Errico, & Vincze, 2011).

On the contrary, a humble stance can be defined as a multimodal public act performed interactively through verbal and nonverbal communication, by which one positions oneself with respect to the object of a communicative interaction and also with respect of his or her interlocutor. In this sense, a humble stance of a politician can be expressed either by communicating his or her "horizontal," "equal" position toward the interlocutor or by acknowledging uncertainty (Vincze, Poggi, & D'Errico, 2012), limits and flaws, and thus the consequent possibility of making errors (limit awareness).

According the qualitative analysis by D'Errico and Poggi (2019), which aimed at discovering the features of humility, the humble stance is a "realistic" approach, an ability to keep one's feet firmly on the ground, in the awareness of being always fallacious and never perfect. Limited awareness implies a feeling and communication of equality with others (equality feature), not feeling superior to them, not displaying superiority, and if having some power over others, not taking advantage of it (nonsuperiority feature). This stance has behavioral consequences in that the humble person shows being on the same level as others, as well as treating them as equals (familiarity), and being empathic to them (empathy), which implies care and attention to the other, hence, giving an impression of altruism, of being oriented to other people more than to objects or to oneself.

The basic feature of realism entails, from an expressive point of view, not giving relevance to external tinsel or symbolic ornament like status symbols (essentiality), which results in features of informality and sincerity, not caring for anything but the real substantive value of people.

Such a definition of humility from a cognitive perspective shows how the main goal of a humble person is to be "like others," not more and not less; thus, in pursuing this goal, the humble person does not show nor make an appeal to his or her own power, superiority in terms of status, knowledge, merits, contributions, virtues, and capabilities. From a communicative point of view, the humble person considers it important not to put her- or himself first, but rather attributes a positive value to a larger dimension of belonging (e.g., others, group, organizations, party) and focuses on the problem rather than on the person who did something. Such horizontal perspective of the humble person who is focused on others and the group leads to emphasizing elements of similarity, familiarity, and informality. D'Errico and Poggi (2019) go on by analyzing the peculiar multimodal communication of the humble person: An observational analysis of four politicians defined as being "humble" by participants in a survey shows their frequent use of verbal expressions aimed at diminishing themselves, thanking others, suggesting and thus creating familiarity; their tendency to cite their familiar role as father, husband, son, or nephew, or to express their position mainly through rhetoric tools aimed at presenting themselves as a part of a whole (community, institution), to speak more in the name of the party, not in the first person. Humble politicians sometimes express negative emotions to stress the importance of an issue for their social group or for humankind in general. On the contrary, they rarely express positive emotions, such as joy and surprise, but they sometimes express slight embarrassment (eyes slightly averted form the interlocutor) when they are praised during interaction, or modesty (small smile, head slightly turned down; Keltner & Cordaro, 2017). They also state being touched or moved, as in the case of Barack Obama, who, expressing his emotions as though he were in his family or in an intimate moment, described himself as a politician in all his humanness.

The recent study by D'Errico (2019) showed that negative emotions, like sadness and bitterness (Poggi & D'Errico, 2010b), are significantly associated with humble politicians; yet this is opposite to what was found by the research of positive psychology, which on the contrary had pointed out how humility promotes positive valence feelings such as positive affectivity and gratitude (Weidman et al., 2018; Wright et al., 2017). Finally, in other potential competitive contexts, like the organizational ones (Liu, 2016), positive emotions partially correlated with humble leadership behavior.

Because data appeared conflicting and heterogeneous, the hypothesis might be made that such differences in the emotions elicited by humble leadership are due to individual differences in the leader's audience. To understand the emotions triggered and the potential associated persuasive effects of humble leadership, it is necessary to empirically verify the role of individual differences, and here, how much this is determined by potential voters' traits, such as SDO, self-esteem, and moral reasoning tendency.

The Study

Research questions concern the effects of humble communication in interactional and political contexts in terms of felt emotions and evaluation of the humble stance. According to a persuasion model in terms of goals and beliefs (Poggi, 2005; Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a), political persuasion relies on trust that the politician has the power to pursue the people's goals because she or he is a moral, dominant, or competent person (Burgoon et al., 1996; Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Poggi, 2005).

Here, one starts to understand whether a particular form of "horizontal" communication (i.e., the humble stance) can elicit different emotional and persuasive effects, by taking into account the audience's individual differences on perceived morality, competence, and dominance. Starting from these theoretical assumptions, I will test a three-way model on emotional and evaluative effects of the humble person/politician, where the audience's perceived competence (self-esteem; Rosenberg, 1965), SDO (Pratto et al., 1994), and moral relevance (Graham et al., 2011) can play a crucial role. Coherently with the notion of leader "prototypicality" (Hogg, 2001), I hypothesize that humility will be considered a positive feature first of a person ("appreciative humility"; Weidman et al., 2018) and then of a politician, and consequently will elicit positive emotions toward a humble politician, mainly in participants of high moral relevance and self-esteem, because he or she will be perceived as "one of us"; in particular, having self-esteem positively related to positive emotions, criticism management, and risk/uncertainty propensity (Sitkin & Weingart, 1995), such a participant will more positively manage the uncertainty associated with a humble stance of a politician, by also evaluating the politician positively. On the contrary, SDO will be negatively associated with an "egalitarian" distributed leadership (Nicol, 2009; Pratto et al., 1994), and thus will elicit negative emotions and negative evaluation of the humble politician.

This theoretical framework will allow the possibility to deepen the understanding of positive affects in humility because studies within positive psychology state that they are correlated with humility (Wright et al., 2017). But when they are measured in particular contexts, as with the organizational ones (Liu, 2016), they resulted as being only partially related to humble leadership behavior. Specifically, to my knowledge, within political communication studies, there are no studies that deepen the role of the humble politician in eliciting emotions and evaluations, especially in relation the audience's individual differences.

Method

To address the research questions, I designed a semistructured online survey on "humility and humble communication" that investigated the features and effects of humble communication through the recalling of autobiographical episodes (Goodwin & Williams, 1982). I submitted the survey to a sample of 82 participants, mainly Italians, balanced and composed of 51% women ($n = 42$, vs. $n = 40$ men), mean

ages 23.9 years (*SD* = 6); the majority had a high school (54%) or university (26%) degree, and party orientation included left party (46%), right party (24%), other (11%), and no party (19%).

The study procedure was structured in two phases: (1) the pretesting session, where participants fulfilled three validated scales that included Rosenberg's (1965) test of self-esteem, SDO (Pratto et al., 1994), and moral relevance (Graham et al., 2011), and (2) the "humility survey," which included questions on felt emotions and evaluation of the politician, phrased on the basis of a previous focus group aimed at modeling the main questions. In the humility survey, participants were asked to remember a humble politician and to find a YouTube video in which a politician communicates humbly.

Each participant's chosen video was used in the subsequent survey as stimulus to assess the emotions induced by the chosen humble person in the interpersonal field and by a humble leader in the political field, the evaluation of a humble politician, and the evaluation of humble communication.

Design and Measures

The study design is composed of the three independent variables (SDO, self-esteem, and moral relevance) obtained from the pretesting session, and the dependent variables were evaluation of emotions toward the humble person or politician, evaluation of the humble politician, and evaluation of humble communication.

Participants were involved in a first phase of pretesting (independent variables) that included the fulfillment of Rosenberg's (1965) self-esteem scale, SDO (Pratto et al., 1994), and moral relevance (Graham et al., 2011).

The second session was aimed at checking participants' definition of humility (appreciative vs. self-abasing) and detecting the emotions and evaluations elicited by the video in which a politician communicated humbly.

Social Dominance Orientation

Social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto et al., 1994) is a psychological notion that measures agreement with questions concerning hierarchical and unequal societies (i.e., tending to believe in ideologies that legitimize various forms of group inequality, such as racism, nationalism, and conservatism; Pratto et al., 1994). An example of an item includes, "To get what you want, sometimes it is necessary to use force against other groups." Data on the scale of social dominance were submitted to a factorial analysis that confirmed a single-factor structure of the scale, with saturation higher than 0.40 on a single factor, and a good internal reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.78). The social dominance index score was then calculated (min = 1; max = 7; *M* = 3.03). For this index, the value of the median was used as a discriminant to distinguish high and low levels of SDO (participants with high SDO = 51%).

Self-Esteem

The Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem scale consists of 10 statements rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). Half of the items are phrased negatively and were therefore coded in reversed form. Example items are, "I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others." A factorial analysis on the self-esteem scale confirmed a single-factor scale structure whose items saturate greater than 0.40 on a single factor and had good internal reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.82). The self-esteem score (min = 1.8, max = 4, M = 3.17, SD = 0.48) was calculated. For that index, the median value was subsequently used discriminate high and low levels of self-esteem (participants with high self-esteem = 52%).

Moral Relevance

Moral relevance is a measure developed by Graham et al. (2011) that detects the importance of five moral domains (harm, fairness, in-group, authority, and purity). It detects participants' explicit moral reasoning with questions such as, "When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking?" An example of a "fairness" item is, "Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights." Participants then rated 10 moral relevance items (two items on each subscale) on a 6-point scale (1 = *never relevant*, 6 = *always relevant*). A factorial analysis on 10 items showed a good internal single-factor scale structure whose items saturate greater than 0.40 on a single factor and which has good internal reliability (Cronbach's α = 0.75). The moral relevance score (min = 3.1, max = 6; M = 4.59, SD = 0.66) was calculated by summing the 10 items across the five moral domains.

Check Measures

To check the participants' definition of humility, the survey included two open-ended questions concerning the definition of humble leaders and their communicative behaviors: (1) Can you define a humble leader? Use words or adjective that define a humble leader. (2) How does the politician express his/her "humility"? (Think about the speech, nonverbal expression, gaze, gestures, posture). The answers to the first question were grouped and codified as either appreciative or self-abasing humility (according to the Weidman et al., 2018, definition). Frequency analysis revealed that the 85% were viewed as appreciative humility, and only 15% self-abasing. The participants who defined humility as self-appreciative used the following words to define a humble leader: "kindness," "sincerity," "empathy," "simplicity," "admits mistakes," "listens," "puts self in other's shoes," "generous," "simple," "honesty," "goodness," "intelligence," "sacrifice," "available," "generosity," "sacrifice," "respectful," "tolerance," "selfless," "recognizes errors," "helpful," "honest." The self-abasing definition included the words "submissive" or "fragile."

The second question about how a politician communicates humbly was grouped by taking into account behaviors that could have a "positive," "neutral," or "negative" nuance. Positive behaviors include expressing positive emotions such as calmness and happiness, and thus humble politicians are frequently describes as having a "calm tone of voice," "moderate tone of voice," "low tone of voice," "quiet tone," "calm gestures," "soft gestures," "quiet speech," "smiling eyes," "smile," "smiling face," "with a gaze toward the interlocutor." These descriptions make up 84% of the total sample. Another 10% described humility without

reference to positive emotions or stance, such as "a person who blushes or lowers his voice," "with a downward gaze," "a shy person who sometimes looks away."' Only 6% of participants described the humble politician in a negative way, such as interpreting some expressions as "not a self-confident person," "head bowed, the tone of voice low as if he was afraid to make someone think his thoughts," "gaze into the void," "resigned posture." Participants were also asked to describe why, in their view, the politician could be defined as humble ("Describe why, in this video, the politician is humble").

In sum, 97% of the videos chosen by participants can be considered as being aligned with the definition of a humble stance, considering their communicative features (D'Errico & Poggi, 2019), and suitable to pursue the goals of the present study. The participants' answers to the open-ended question have been coded through content analysis, with two independent judges with a high level of agreement (Cohen's k = .078) by considering the features of empathy, equality, nonsuperiority, and familiarity. The content analysis pointed out that the video descriptions have the characteristics that fall within the typical expressions of the humble stance: The majority of the participants chose the video for the empathy expressed by the politician; 31% for supportive, generous, and polite gestures; and 19% for the expressions of equality or care for equality toward the people, toward weak people, or toward ordinary people. Also, the feature of nonsuperiority emerged from 19% of the participants' descriptions, which is present when politicians makes gestures that signal a peer relation with the audience. Finally, 16% of described the politician as humble simply because he or she is calm and clear during the speech, or, if he or she expresses "familiarity" with people using shared habits (13%). Only 3% of the descriptions can be related to the self-abasing definition of humility, where participants chose a moment of the politician's fragility.

Dependent Variables

After this phase, participants filled in a semistructured survey of questions grouped into four clusters, by rating each item on a 5-points Likert scale (1 = *nothing at all*, 5 = *very much*):

1. Emotions associated with humble communication in everyday interactions (Question: "Imagine a person who communicates humbly in everyday life. Which emotions do you feel toward this person?")

2. Emotions associated with humble communication in politics (Question: "Watching the politician who communicates humbly, which emotions do you feel toward this politician?": attentive, curious, upset, irritated, relieved, uncomfortable, amused, disappointed, calm, embarrassed, envious, anxious, helpless, frightened, stressed, bored, I felt contempt, I felt compassion, disgusted, admiring, embittered, outraged, angry, enthusiastic)

3. Evaluation of the "humble" politician (Question: "Watching the politician who communicates humbly, how do you evaluate him or her?": strong, powerful, uninfluential, determined, dominant, authoritative, authoritarian, unsure, undecided, decision maker, competitive, charismatic, obnoxious, grumpy, cold, unjust, good,

incorrect, generous, altruist, unfair, dishonest, unselfish, incompetent, intelligent, skilled, knowledgeable, self-confident, charming, seductive, convincing)

4. Evaluation of humble communication on politics (Question: "How much is humble communication in politics useful/positive?": useful, positive)

Results

Only significant differences with their respective levels of significance are reported in the following tables. As to political orientation, an analysis of variance pointed out significant differences in associated emotions toward the humble politician (see Table 1a): right-wing participants felt higher emotions of contempt, sadness, and boredom; left-wing participants felt more calmness; and populist, "no-party" participants felt more pity and tenderness toward the humble politician.

Table 1a. Emotions Toward a Humble Politician as a Function of Political Orientation.

	Right		Left		No party		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p
Calmness	3.08 (a)	.35	3.83 (a)	.23	3.69	.50	.025
Contempt	2.17 (a)	.29	1.17 (a)	.19	1.33	.41	.015
Sadness	1.83 (ac)	.22	1.08 (a)	.14	1.83 (c)	.31	.020
Boredom	2.42 (a)	.32	1.17 (a)	.21	1.67	.45	.005
Dislike	1.44 (a)	.31	0.64 (a)	.21	1.60	.44	.05
Pity	2.08 (a)	.29	1.04 (a)	.20	2.17	.42	.015
Tenderness	2.58	.37	2.21 (b)	.25	3.50 (b)	.52	.035

Note. Letters in parenthesis graphically show the results of the post hoc Tukey test. a = right–left; b = left–no; c = no–right.

People with a conservative political orientation felt negative emotions, as opposed to liberals, who felt positive ones, like calm and agreeableness. Also, with respect to gender, men felt more negative emotions like sadness, contempt, dislike, pity, and enjoyment than women did (see Table 1b).

Table 1b. Emotions Toward a Humble Politician as a Function of Gender.

	Woman		Man		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p
Sadness	1.22	.16	1.63	.17	.03
Boredom	1.39	.24	1.84	.25	.05
Enjoyment	2.09	.21	2.68	.22	.005
Dislike	1.35	.23	1.74	.24	.05
Pity	1.26	.22	1.79	.23	.03

When testing the emotions felt in an everyday context, there were significant individual differences. The linear regressions reported in Table 2 show how participants with high levels of SDO feel annoyance, contempt, anxiety, hostility, boredom, and pity. Self-esteem affected positive emotions such as calmness, joy, and enthusiasm. Moral relevance more clearly affected positive emotion, and was the only predictor of admiration. Participants with a high level of moral concern had an enthusiastic emotional reaction. The emotional reaction toward a humble person is congruent with research showing how "humility is positively related to a wide range of moral relevant attitudes or qualities such gratitude, egalitarian attitude, moral identity, empathy, universalistic values and moral foundation and intuitions" (Wright et al., 2017, p. 16). With respect to social dominance and moral relevance, these results added the self-esteem attitude: people with high self-esteem felt calmness, joy, enthusiasm, and admiration toward the humble person, showing that people with high self-esteem attribute character strength more than a submissive attitude to humble persons. Reading the linear regression model shows that SDO was the best predictor for negative emotions of hostility, but both self-esteem and moral relevance had positive emotions of joy and enthusiasm, and moral relevance explained admiration (see Table 2). Regression models including gender and political orientation have been tested, but highlight only a significant contribution for admiration in women, who tend to show more admiration toward a humble person.

Table 2. Emotions Toward a Humble Person as a Function of SDO, Self-Esteem, and Moral Relevance.

	Beta coefficients									
	Annoyance	Contempt	Anxiety	Hostility	Pity	Boredom	Calm	Joy	Enthusiasm	Admiration
SDO	−.39**	−.29*	.36**	−.31*	.33**	.39**	.06	.07	.13	−.12
Self-Esteem	−.08	.02	.11	−.10	.01	.06	.27*	.22*	.24*	.09
Moral Relevance	−.14	−.08	.02	.06	−.11	−.25*	.09	.28**	.27**	.23**
R^2	.40**	.29	.38**	.34*	.33	.43**	.27	.25	.29	.31

***$p < .001$; **$p < .01$; *$p < .05$.

Similar emotional reactions were expressed in relation to the humble political stance. Here, SDO is the only predictor of negative emotions of annoyance, contempt, anxiety, and boredom. Different from everyday life contexts, self-esteem in political communication has a relative weight because it explained the positive emotions of joy. Moral relevance causes positive emotions such as curiosity, joy, enthusiasm, and admiration, and is the best predictor for them (see Table 3). Regression models tested with gender and political orientation show a nonsignificant contribution, except for admiration being higher for women and enjoyment higher for right-leaning political orientation.

Table 3. Emotions Toward a Humble Politician as a Function of SDO, Self-Esteem, and Moral Relevance.

	Beta coefficients									
	Annoyance	Contempt	Anxiety	Hostility	Boredom	Calm	Curiosity	Joy	Enthusiasm	Admiration
SDO	.44***	.27*	.46***	−.28*	.40**	−.27*	−.25*	.12	.09	.17
Self-Esteem	−.04	−.11	−.03	−.13	.13	.11	−.02	.22*	.11	.11
Moral Relevance	.07	.03	.08	.05	−.02	.07	.24*	.24*	.28**	.31**
R^2	.44**	.29	.46**	.34*	.42**	29	.25	.37*	.33*	.37*

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

The regression analysis on different items of a humble politician evaluation pointed out that SDO mostly affects a negative evaluation, sees the politician as a hypocrite, negative, not authoritative, submissive, and unpleasant (see Table 4). Thus, people who agree with stratified and hierarchical societies and roles presumably associate the humble stance with humiliation (Exline & Geyer, 2004), and thus they evaluated the humble politician as submissive, untruthful, negative, and even hypocritical, because the humility of a politician can be seen as false. This is not true for people with high self-esteem, who evaluated the humble politician positively, as being trustful, pleasant, and also authoritative, associating the positive psychological features of humility (Weidman et al., 2018) because they evaluated as more authoritative and trustful a politician who acknowledges one's own limits and shortcomings or treats others as peers, by involving the audience to change the situation. High scores on moral relevance affected an evaluation of a loving, pleasant, and charismatic person, someone who really cares about the audience's interests.

Table 4. Humble Politician Evaluation as a Function of SDO, Self-Esteem, and Moral Relevance.

	Beta coefficients								
	Trustful	Submissive	Negative	Stupid	Hypocrite	Authoritative	Pleasant	Charismatic	Loving
SDO	−.27**	.27*	.37***	.22	.52***	−.28*	−.21*	−.05	.02
Self-esteem	.32**	−.05	−.44***	−.32**	−.13	.38**	.47***	.53***	.36**
Moral Relevance	−.043	.05	.05	.09	.17	.00	.023*	.27*	.25*
R^2	.41**	.28	.57***	.39**	54***	.47***	.52***	.56***	.42**

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05.

When participants reflect on the general function of humility, SDO remained the unique predictor of viewing the humble political stance as useless and negative (see Table 5), whereas self-esteem and morality do not significantly affect any item.

Table 5. Political Humility Evaluation as a Function of SDO, Self-Esteem, and Moral Relevance.

	Beta coefficients	
	Positive	Useful
SDO	−.30*	−.28*
Self-Esteem	.04	−.04
Moral Relevance	.15	−.19
R^2	.36*	.38*

*$p < .05$.

Discussion

The present study was aimed at understanding how a humble political stance can positively contribute to persuade potential voters by taking into consideration their psychological features—namely, their self-esteem, moral relevance, and SDO.

The humble stance can be psychologically evaluated as a positive notion because it can be linked to the awareness of a possible area to improve (Tangney, 2002). In this sense, positive psychology acknowledged so-called appreciative humility. This notion has been investigated in organizational and economic contexts (Li et al., 2016; Liu, 2016), pointing to how it can promote employee performance, engagement, job satisfaction, and voice behaviors, but it has been neglected in political psychology. The major part of studies in the political field instead was focused on the persuasive strength of political leaders' competence, warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Leone, Murro, & Crescenzi, 2015), power, and dominance (Ellyson & Dovidio, 1985; Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a) by pointing out how the more competent, emotionally warm, and dominant a political leader is, the more persuasive. Nevertheless, the study of these features did not delve into the role played by a humility in political persuasion processes by neglecting the voters' emotional and evaluative processes induced when a political leader communicates with a humble stance, being imperfect, but aware and horizontally oriented.

In particular, this study aimed at looking at voters' stable traits, how their level of dominance, moral reasoning, and own worth evaluation can be associated with the management of informational uncertainty that can arise from a political humble stance.

Humility is both an epistemic and interpersonal stance (D'Errico & Poggi, 2019), which is based on an acknowledgement of one's own mistakes and limits (Tangney, 2000, 2002; Weidman et al., 2018) on a particular issue (epistemic stance), and also on an acknowledgement of a peer status of the interlocutor who is equally involved in the potential decisions (interpersonal stance). This political stance can, on the one hand, reinforce voters' sense of efficacy because it gives them decisional power, responsibilities, and political agency, seen as "the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process" (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1954, p. 187), but on the other hand, it can also alert voters about the potential incapability of politicians' use of "error management" rather than a prompt solution to the problems.

The humble political stance can be positively evaluated in the case of participants with high self-esteem because people with a positive subjective emotional evaluation of their worth and capabilities

(Baumeister et al., 2003) can emotionally regulate criticism, open questions, uncertain decisions, and potential failure (Sitkin & Weingart, 1995) by highlighting the "utility of humility" (Weiss & Knight, 1980) exerted in our results by high self-esteem individuals, and promote positive emotions (calmness) and a positive evaluation of the humble politician (who is seen as intelligent, authoritative, charismatic, loving, and pleasant).

Participants and potential voters who have a negative evaluation of their own capability will tend to delegate political action to a presumptively powerful and dominant leader (Pratto et al., 1994), and will feel negative emotions for and negatively evaluate a horizontal leader, who gives them potential power of action.

The results on moral sensitivity in political communication are coherent with the literature in positive psychology that show how humility is correlated with a wide range of "moral attitudes" (Wright, Nadelhoffer, Thomson Ross, & Sinnott-Armstrong, 2018), and people with high moral sensitivity felt positive emotions, which ranged from calmness and joy to enthusiasm and admiration, because they see in humility an affective stance toward the truth and can also view a humble politician as a witness of a particular moral virtue and wisdom (Grossmann, 2017), judged, then, as charismatic and loving.

Finally, people who tended to privilege power and social hierarchies felt mainly negative emotions both in interpersonal and political contexts, ranging from boredom and pity to annoyance, contempt, hostility, and even anxiety. In this sense, individuals with high levels of social dominance negatively evaluate the provisional limits of a humble politician, such as modesty and a self-abasing stance, and they evaluate that politician as being submissive, distrustful, unpleasant, and even hypocritical.

In general, this contribution sheds some light on the relation between positive affect and humility, drawing a complex framework. Though recent studies in positive psychology have stated that positive emotions are correlated with humility (Wright et al., 2018), but only partially in organizational contexts (Liu, 2016), the present study will interpret the possibility that positive effects are elicited only in relation to high levels of self-esteem, moral relevance, and low levels of social dominance of the voters. Nevertheless, some limitations in the present research need to be acknowledged. First, from a methodological point of view, the study is based on a three-factorial design without a control condition, where participants, for example, can choose a "nonhumble" video. The videos chosen by participants are given ecological validity because they were based on their ideas of politician humility, which were controlled for with check measures; but in future studies, it may be helpful to use a video with an actor as the same stimulus for all participants in which humble leadership is evoked.

Furthermore, reflecting on these results in the light of the recent advances on leadership studies, which deal with the social identity approach (Haslam et al., 2015) and give importance to the group and situation features for leadership persuasiveness, could be important to empirically test whether humble communicative acts match for different cultural groups (collectivist vs. individualistic cultures; Hofstede, 1980). These studies show the limits this current study could have—for example, under particular socioeconomic contexts, as in the case of heavy political or economic crises (Bligh, Kohles, & Meindl, 2004), would the humble stance still affect positive emotions with the described psychological features? Future studies could also assume a longitudinal perspective to give a larger perspective on and answers to these possible research questions.

Finally, in applicative terms, these results highlighted that it is important to educate and train future voters to appreciate uncertainty and complexity, thus giving them the ability to appreciate a humble stance—a politician who is aware of his or her potentiality but also shortcomings. By doing so, voters can promote their political awareness, agency, and responsibility. This is different from a dominant stance, in which a solution is generally given that emphasizes the politician's power to solve the problem (Poggi & D'Errico, 2010a), but removes responsibility from the voters of improving, along with other fellow citizens, their own community.

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