

Mitt Romney and “I Mormoni”

A 2012 Analysis of Italy’s Print Media

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Many Americans have encountered the expression “Mormon Moment” at some point, whether in newspapers, on television, or on the Internet. It is a catchphrase that nicely captures a period of time characterized by visible public interest and fascination with Mormonism as manifested in increased media attention through focused articles, interviews, and other media. As Matthew Bowman, a scholar of Mormonism, indicated, this expression was first employed in a *Newsweek* article dated September 2001, which highlighted the fact that the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics (to follow in 2002) would give the Utah-based church an unprecedented opportunity for greater publicity through increased national and international media attention.¹ Yet the “Mormon Moment” that many have heard about is a different one, largely encompassing the more recent years 2011 and 2012. Indeed, when one looks at the relatively short history of Mormonism, which spans less than two centuries, several Mormon moments can be identified, thus making the most recent moment only one of many, although a very significant one to be sure.²

1. “Matthew Bowman on the Mormon Moment We’re In,” Pjc Media: Judaism Reflected & Refracted, December 5, 2012, retrieved March 28, 2013, from <http://www.pjcmedia.org/archives/matthew-bowman/>; Kenneth L. Woodward, “A Mormon Moment: America’s Biggest Homegrown Religion Is Looking More Christian, but It’s Still a Different World,” *Newsweek*, September 10, 2001, 44–51.

2. Matthew Bowman, “Our Latest Mormon Moment,” *History News Network*, June 11, 2012, retrieved March 28, 2013, from <http://www.hnn.us/articles/146699.html>.

At the root of the most recent Mormon Moment's uniqueness lay Mitt Romney's candidacy for the presidency of the United States, his subsequent winning of the Republican nomination, and his campaign, ultimately unsuccessful, against President Barack Obama. Indeed, as a Latter-day Saint (Mormon) who has publicly recognized the significance of his faith, Mitt Romney has brought extraordinary attention to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). His Mormonism has been discussed, questioned, debated, and examined in its theological and political implications, even though it may have been less of a "problem" in the 2012 campaign than in his previous 2008 run for the Republican nomination.³ Yet there was more to the Mormon Moment than Mitt Romney's political campaign. Other high-profile Mormons—whether in politics, sports, or entertainment—have contributed to increase Mormonism's visibility, and the record-breaking Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon* has brought attention to the LDS Church in its own irreverent and sarcastic way.⁴ For its part, the LDS Church continues in its commitment to public relations, with the "I'm a Mormon" advertising campaign as only the latest development in this direction. In short, following the media's recent interest in the faith, it would seem unlikely that many Americans could still be unaware of Mormonism and of its basic tenets, but awareness and in-depth understanding are quite different matters.⁵

Obviously, Mitt Romney's loss in the 2012 presidential election has led many to wonder about the continuing status of this Mormon Moment. Is it to be declared officially closed, as some have indicated,

3. Joanna Brooks, "Mitt Romney's Style²—a Virtually Religion Free 2012 Contest?" *Religion Dispatches*, October 29, 2012, http://www.religiondispatches.org/dispatches/joannabrooks/6552/%E2%80%9Cmitt_romney_style%E2%80%9D%E2%80%94a_virtually_religion_free_2012_contest/ (retrieved March 28, 2013); Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Romney's Mormon Faith Likely a Factor in Primaries, Not in a General Election," November 23, 2011, <http://www.pewforum.org/Politics-and-Elections/Romneys-Mormon-Faith-Likely-a-Factor-in-Primaries-Not-in-a-General-Election.aspx> (retrieved March 28, 2013).

4. Misha Berson, "Mormons View 'Book of Mormon' More as Opportunity than Offense," *Seattle Times*, January 7, 2013, http://seattletimes.com/html/entertainment/2020067792_mormono6m.html (retrieved March 28, 2013).

5. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Americans Learned Little about the Mormon Faith, but Some Attitudes Have Softened," December 14, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Mormon/attitudes-toward-mormon-faith.aspx> (retrieved March 28, 2013).

or has it only experienced a temporary reduction in intensity?⁶ Time will tell what the long-term effects of the 2012 Mormon Moment will be on the U.S. public perception of the LDS Church, a question which undoubtedly will receive its due attention in future scholarly analyses. In fact, a growing body of literature is shedding much-needed light on the media’s coverage of the LDS Church in America, both in the present and in the past.⁷ Yet is this exclusive geographical focus sufficient in the context of a faith that is becoming increasingly international? As Princeton historian Neil Young indicated, “[Joanna] Brooks also noted to me that whatever public visibility the LDS Church has enjoyed in the U.S. of late needs to be considered within the faith’s ‘new global reach’ that is spreading Mormonism through countries around the world. Indeed, to think of an American ‘Mormon moment’ is to lose sight of the much more significant international developments the LDS Church is carrying out through its proselytizing efforts and its institutional expansion.”⁸ Furthermore, any election to the presidency of the United States is certainly noteworthy news in most corners of the globe, thus legitimating the exploration of possible public perception effects for Mitt Romney’s religion in different countries. Did other parts of the world also experience smaller-scale Mormon Moments?

My present task is to address this very question in a specific geographical context, namely my native country of Italy. More precisely, I am interested in examining the Italian media’s portrayal of Mormonism,

6. David Mason, “‘Mormon Moment’: RIP,” *Washington Post*, November 7, 2012, retrieved March 28, 2013, from http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/mormon-moment-rip/2012/11/07/de77bcca-2915-11e2-bab2-eda299503684_blog.html; Mandy Morgan, “Experts Consider Whether ‘Mormon Moment’ Over or Not,” *Deseret News*, November 12, 2012, retrieved March 28, 2013, from <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865566563/Experts-consider-whether-Mormon-moment-over-or-not.html>; and Neil J. Young, “Is the Mormon Moment Over?” *Huffington Post*, November 20, 2012, retrieved March 28, 2013, from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/neil-j-young/is-the-mormon-moment-over_b_2160270.html.

7. Sherry Baker and Daniel Stout, “Mormons and the Media, 1898–2003: A Selected, Annotated, and Indexed Bibliography (with Suggestions for Future Research),” *BYU Studies* 42, nos. 3–4 (2003): 125–89; Sherry Baker and Joel Campbell, “Mitt Romney’s Religion: A Five Factor Model for Analysis of Media Representation of Mormon Identity,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 9, no. 2 (2010): 99–121; and J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

8. Young, “Is the Mormon Moment Over?”

both in connection with Romney's candidacy and in broader contexts, by answering three primary questions, namely: (1) How did Mitt Romney's Mormonism affect the media's portrayal of his candidacy? (2) What historical, social, and theological images of the LDS Church emerged from these accounts? and (3) How did reports on the Italian LDS Church shape the broader treatment of Mormonism? I examine these questions both quantitatively and qualitatively in a specific time frame by exploring Italian news media between January and October 2012. Following a description of the study's methodology, I proceed with a general overview of my findings before moving to a more focused examination of each core question in light of the gathered data. A summative section then concludes the analysis through some final reflections and with questions for further research.

Methodology

To examine the Italian media's portrayal of Mormonism, I have conducted a content analysis of printed and online news material produced in Italy between January 1 and October 31, 2012, stopping about one week before the presidential elections in the United States. To be sure, a broader examination of all media, including radio and television programs, would have provided a more accurate picture of Italian public perceptions of Mormonism, but access to audio/visual data from Italy was complicated by the fact that I reside in the United States. Indeed, the whole process of data gathering was made possible by the invaluable assistance of the public relations office of the LDS Church in Italy, which kindly shared with me a considerable amount of information. The office has a contract with the media monitoring agency *Eco della Stampa*, one of the largest and oldest in Italy since it was established in Milan in 1901, through which it regularly receives data on Mormonism in the media. The PR office gave me access to all this data, thus enabling me to analyze it and categorize it according to my research questions.

Eco della Stampa scans newspapers, magazines, and news websites for the Church on a daily basis in order to identify those articles that contain one of three possible key words: "Mormone," "Mormoni," and "Chiesa di Gesù Cristo dei Santi degli Ultimi Giorni" ("Mormon," "Mormons," and "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints"). Then, the agency sends digital copies of all the identified articles to the Church's PR office in Italy, which in turn forwarded those articles dated January through October to me. In this way, I was able to examine a list of over four hundred articles that contained at least one of the three selected

keywords. Some of these articles, however, were "doubles," meaning that their content matched exactly the content of some other article previously examined. In some cases, these articles came from various local newspapers owned by a single national publisher or from web and print versions of the same newspaper, and in other cases different newspapers or news websites reported the same article that had first been issued by a major Italian news agency like ANSA. Once these "repeats" were accounted for, my best estimation resulted in 344 original articles to subject to further examination.

Prior to examining the selected articles, I had listed seventeen distinct categories to be used as an instrument of classification (see table 1). These categories variously articulate the three core questions of my analysis, thus providing an initial visual indication of the possible directions of responses. Since these categories address more than one question, they are not mutually exclusive, meaning that a single article could fit several categories at the same time. I then tabulated each article according to these categories while also selecting specific quotations that would be especially illustrative in my attempt to answer the three research questions previously listed.

Finally, in relation to methodology and to the objectives of this study, some brief clarifications are in order. First, my research questions are worded in such a way as to lead to a broad overview of the Italian media's portrayal of Mormonism rather than to an in-depth examination with a narrower focus. Furthermore, and notwithstanding my desire to be as objective as possible, I must recognize that some of my personal hermeneutical assumptions are likely to emerge as I attempt to interpret the texts under examination. Lastly, given some recent studies indicating that relatively few Italians regularly read books or newspapers, one may wonder about the significance of these findings (emerging exclusively from print and online media) in shaping the Italian public perception of Mormonism.⁹ This is a valid concern, but it looks beyond the scope of this analysis. The objective of the present analysis is to describe and interpret what print and online media in Italy have recently communicated about

9. "Readers of daily newspapers are about one third of the population; . . . it should be noted that one fourth of these newspapers are sport-only papers like *Gazzetta dello Sport*, *Corriere dello Sport*, and *Tuttosport*." Tullio De Mauro, *La Cultura degli Italiani* (Rome: Edizioni Laterza, 2010), 239.

This is my own translation from the Italian original text. All other translations of Italian articles quoted in this paper are my own work.

TABLE 1. Summative Content Classification of Articles Examined

Category of Classification	Number of Articles
Chiesa di Gesù Cristo dei Santi degli Ultimi Giorni	76
Mormone or Mormoni	334
Positive appraisal of Romney because of his faith	9
Negative appraisal of Romney because of his faith	38
Ambiguous or divided appraisal of Romney because of his faith	28
Only “Mormon” ascription to Romney’s name	84
Mormonism described (beliefs, practices, history, and operation)	79
Central beliefs described	39
Controversial beliefs described	38
Positive evaluation of Mormonism	23
Negative evaluation of Mormonism	48
Ambiguous or divided evaluation of Mormonism	34
Doctrinal errors, misunderstandings, labels	36
General reference to LDS Church in Italy (history, buildings, members)	20
Reference to “Intesa” between Italian government and the Church	19
Reference to the building of the Rome temple	3
Reference to contract between FamilySearch and Italian National Archives	3

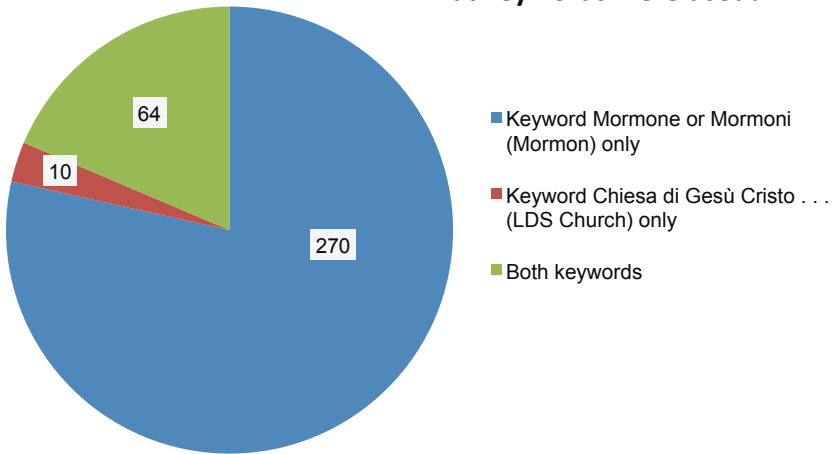
Note: The total number of articles examined was 344, including both print and online news sources. The articles dated from January 1, 2012, to October 31, 2012.

the LDS Church, with particular focus on the message. The separate question of how much this message was absorbed, retained, or ignored by the Italian “receivers” is not presently addressed.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 outlines the quantitative summative findings from all articles examined. As already indicated, most articles were “counted” or included in more than one single category because many categories did not represent mutually exclusive concepts. Hence, the sum total of all numbers adds to more than the 344 articles analyzed.

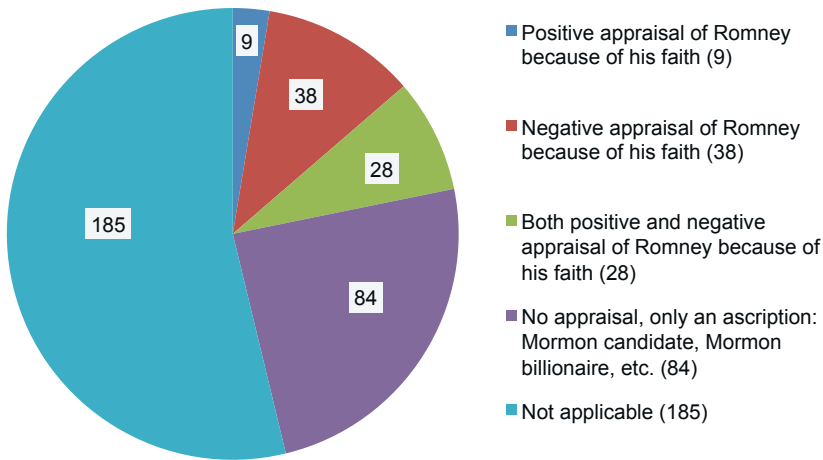
The first two categories, which have reference to the name used by the Italian media when identifying the LDS Church, provide some

FIGURE 1. What Keywords Were Used?

interesting findings. However, they are not necessarily relevant in addressing any of the three questions that are central to my analysis. My main reason for including this classification was the easiness of access to this information and my own personal curiosity about the nomenclature used by the media. For this reason, while I present a chart summarizing these findings at this point (fig. 1), I have relegated a more in-depth description, with associated examples and a brief reflection, to the appendix.

Question 1: How did Mitt Romney's Mormonism influence the Italian media's portrayal of his candidacy?

To measure how strongly the Italian media defines Mitt Romney by his Mormonism, I would probably need to include a comparison of articles that mention Romney's Mormonism with articles on him that do not mention it. However, since I did not have access to the latter information, I could only examine the connection between Romney and his faith as expressed by those articles on Romney that mention his Mormonism. For this purpose, I employed four mutually exclusive categories of classification that had a direct correlation with this question. First of all, through a simple calculation, it was possible to determine how many of the articles examined actually dealt with Mitt Romney. As illustrated in figure 2, the total was 159, which corresponds to 46.2 percent of all 344 articles. Among these 84, or 24.4 percent of the total, did not articulate Romney's connection with Mormonism beyond simple

FIGURE 2. Appraisal of Romney Because of His Mormonism

ascriptions like “the Mormon candidate” or “the Mormon billionaire.”¹⁰ In other words, only 75 articles, 21.8 percent of the total and 47.1 percent of the articles with reference to Mitt Romney, articulated any description or evaluation of Romney’s Mormonism.

How did these descriptions and evaluations reflect on the character and portrayed image of the Republican candidate? Only 28 articles, or a little more than a third (37.3 percent) of the articles addressing Romney’s Mormonism, either were completely descriptive and nonevaluative or expressed both positive and negative evaluations at the same time. In these cases it was difficult to determine whether these articles portrayed Romney’s faith as a liability or as an advantage to his public image, because writers purposely avoided judgment or equally identified both attractive and unattractive elements in Romney’s religion. However, 47 articles, or 62.6 percent of the articles addressing Romney’s faith

10. Massimo Introvigne distinguishes between “ascriptions” and “labels” in reference to religious affiliations by emphasizing the neutral nature of the former and the negative nature of the latter. Massimo Introvigne, “The Mormon Factor in the Romney Presidential Campaign: European Perspectives,” *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 2 (2009): 98–107. I am purposefully using the term ascription in this context, because the articles included in this total did not imply any specific evaluation of the title “Mormon.” Massimo Introvigne is the author of “Old Wine in New Bottles: The Story behind Fundamentalist Anti-Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 35, no. 3 (1995–96): 45–73; and *Les Mormons* (Brepols, 1991), discussed in *BYU Studies* 33, no. 2 (1993): 366–67.

beyond a simple ascription, expressed either positive or negative evaluations of him in direct relation to his faith. Obviously, with no access to writers' background knowledge and to their motivations, determining the exact direction of influence is almost impossible. Therefore, it is possible that in some cases the perspective on Romney was positive or negative because of prior opinions about the LDS Church, whereas in other cases Mormonism may have been judged positively or negatively because of prior opinions about Romney.

Only nine of the articles (12 percent of those that explicitly address Romney's religion) draw a positive or favorable connection between him and his faith. These connections are usually implicit, and they emerge from some Mormon practices and philosophies that possibly facilitated the development of specific character traits in the Republican candidate. For example, one writer draws a connection between Romney's generosity in charitable contributions and the LDS Church's requirement for the regular payment of tithing.¹¹ Another underlines the service he has performed in the Church, whether as a missionary or as a bishop, which is likely to have enhanced his work ethic and altruism.¹² A third writer indicates that Romney's love for his family is a "Mormon" characteristic with solid roots in the candidate's own ancestry of Mormon pioneers.¹³ The best example of a positive connection between Romney and his faith is probably found in an interview with a man from Turin, who, as a young man, had participated in a study abroad program in the United States. Specifically, while in America, he lived for some time with the Romneys in Michigan (Mitt's parents and their family), an experience he still remembers with fondness.¹⁴ In a recent interview, he expresses his unequivocal support for the Republican candidate and also states that "the Romney family is always very attentive to the needs of the poor, not just because of their character but because of their faith. Mormons help people a lot."¹⁵

11. G. Meroni, "Romney? Ricco ma generoso," *Vita.it*, February 2, 2012.

12. F. Sasso, "Contro Obama, Romney 'arruola' Gesù," *Il Secolo XIX*, August 31, 2012, 7.

13. N. Sipos, "Candidato formato famiglia," *Chi Magazine*, March 21, 2012, 42–48; N. Sipos, "Benvenuti a casa Romney," *Chi Magazine*, September 12, 2012, 80–84.

14. A. Rossi, "Io, il fratello torinese di Mitt Romney," *La Stampa*, March 19, 2012, 54.

15. "Il 'fratello' Italiano di Romney: 'Finalmente é venuto fuori il vero Mitt,'" *Tiscali.it*, October 5, 2012a.

Yet about half of the articles—38 to be precise, or 50.6 percent—that draw a connection between Mitt Romney and his religion do so in a clearly negative direction. Some articles criticize both Romney’s and the LDS Church’s wealth by implicitly or even explicitly associating the drive for success and its accompanying wealth with corruption or other moral failures.¹⁶ Given Italy’s well-known political scandals, often involving billionaire and past Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, some reporters obviously sing a resonating tune to their readers when they identify the dangers of a rich man aspiring to political power. Other articles embrace the fears of a Mormon conspiracy by underlining the historical Mormon search for the U.S. presidency, with Mitt Romney as the latest representative following his father and Mormonism’s founder, Joseph Smith. These articles often include references to such speculative and historically questionable statements as the White Horse prophecy,¹⁷ implying that Mormonism is dangerous because it purportedly seeks power both politically and economically.¹⁸

Other articles focus their criticism more pointedly at the Republican candidate’s service in the LDS Church, particularly as a bishop. For example, it is claimed that Romney pressured a single mother to give up her baby for adoption rather than raising the child without a father. The point being made was that he clearly overstepped his bounds as a

16. M. Chierici, “Romney, un Mormone a Washington?” *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, October 16, 2012, 22; A. Mucci, “Se l’impero entra alla Casa Bianca,” *Europa*, July 28, 2012, 5; A. Mucci, “Quel tesoretto dei Mormoni (e di Romney),” *Il Mondo*, September 14, 2012, 22–24.

17. This prophecy, purportedly uttered by Joseph Smith, claims that the U.S. Constitution would one day “hang by a thread” and that it would be saved in part by a white horse, usually interpreted to mean the Mormons. The LDS Church has reiterated that this “prophecy” is not embraced as Church doctrine, being only a matter of speculation. Newsroom of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Church Statement on ‘White Horse Prophecy’ and Political Neutrality,” January 6, 2010, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/blog/2010/01/church-statement-on-white-horse-prophecy-and-political-neutrality.html>. See also Don L. Penrod, “Edwin Rushton as the Source of the White Horse Prophecy,” *BYU Studies* 49, no. 3 (2010): 75–131.

18. A. Aquaro, “I temuti Mormoni,” *La Repubblica*, August 28, 2012, 17; D. Fabbri, “La profezia Mormone che imbarazza il ‘cavallo bianco’ Romney,” *Unimondo.org*, July 2, 2012; S. Kramar, “‘Romney President’: lo dice la profezia,” *Il Giornale*, February 2, 2012, 15; “L’ombra Mormone sugli USA,” *Lettera43.it*, April 28, 2012; F. Rampini, “Romney l’ex vescovo miliardario che vuole l’America,” *La Repubblica*, July 13, 2012, 48–52.

clergy member and that he abused his authority, but Romney's church is depicted as equally guilty since, it is claimed, it had provided the mistaken ideology that ultimately lies behind the action.¹⁹ One writer quotes both Romney and an LDS Apostle as they similarly emphasize the importance of faith vis-à-vis secularism in America. Again, both are judged to be intolerant, because they purportedly represent dangerous theocratic ideals.²⁰ Therefore, most articles do not allude to a primary target in their criticism of Romney and of his LDS religion: both are problematic, both are judged negatively, and both are viewed as representing the same actions and ideas, which are subject to condemnation.

In some cases, however, the rejection of the candidate Romney explicitly appears to follow the authors' hostile perspective on Mormonism. For example, during Romney's first failed run for the Republican nomination, Jacob Weisberg made the following controversial statement: "I wouldn't vote for someone who truly believed in the founding whoppers of Mormonism. . . . Romney has every right to believe in con men, but I want to know if he does, and if so, I don't want him running the country."²¹ Six years later, an Italian writer echoed the same sentiment on the website Agoravox, which is described as participatory journalism, powered by citizens. After asking the rhetorical question "How can you trust someone who believes in such absurdities as what Mormons believe?" he concludes with the indicting statement, "We cannot be Mormons; . . . we are children of Greece and that Hellenistic culture which has taught us to think and reflect."²² An even better illustration of how a core prejudice against Mormonism, based on much distorted information, can lead to an utter rejection of a Mormon candidate is worth quoting at length:

How will the U.S. change if Mitt Romney becomes president? Mormons who ride their bikes in Italy are young men with short hair, shirt, and tie, well trained in the shyness that is recommended for missionaries around the world numbering more than 30,000. As soon as a baby

19. F. Rampini, "Colpo grosso di Mitt il capo dei vescovi USA 'benedirà la sua corsa," *La Repubblica*, August 27, 2012, 15; "Romney Mormone. Elettori diffidenti," *La Sicilia*, October 25, 2012, 24.

20. "USA, anche i Mormoni attaccano il secolarismo," *Uaar.it*, April 7, 2012.

21. Jacob Weisberg, "Romney's Religion," *Slate*, December 20, 2006, http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/the_big_idea/2006/12/romneys_religion.html.

22. A. D'Antrassi, "Può un Mormone diventare veramente presidente degli Stati Uniti?" *Agoravox.it*, February 18, 2012.

boy is born, the Mormon family puts aside money so that when he grows older he can go to faraway lands to preach the updated Bible of the prophet Joseph Smith. Mandatory paramilitary service: that is what this is. The mission will often include strange endeavors: missionaries will ask European dioceses, which have no funds, to microfilm records that collect the names of the faithful, from the 1800s to today. They will take home copies and then rebaptize them in the temple to make of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Hindus, dead or alive, Mormons. Then they gather their information in antiatomic bunkers in Granite Mountain, Salt Lake City. . . . The capital of Utah is not only a rich business center, it is the capital of a state where religion administers people's lives. The Church takes care of everything: babysitter, schools, sports. . . . The gospel teaches pragmatism, especially the rejection of worldly temptations. In Utah, it is risky to smoke, and alcohol is prohibited, even though some authorized stores (well hidden) open bottles of California wine sold at very high prices. . . . Young Romney also served as a missionary in sweet France, a special destination because he was the son of the Mormon governor of Michigan. He is driven by a faith that encourages careers in corporate and fiscal paradises. The religion does not consider it sin, because profit is a blessed gift of God and taxes represent the violence of those who limit the freedom of believers. . . . Best wishes Obama.²³

There is no question that the author sees Romney's Mormonism as the obvious liability that makes him ineligible.

In conclusion, my analysis confirms that the Italian media often used Romney's Mormonism to shape his public image during his 2012 run to the U.S. presidency. On the one hand, more than half of the articles on Romney only ascribed to him the title "Mormon" without delving into any description of the term's meaning. On the other hand, of the remaining articles, which described and evaluated Mormonism to some degree, about half clearly made it a liability for the Republican candidate's image. Finally, only one in ten articles that drew any connection between Romney and his faith did so positively, thus suggesting that Romney's religion functioned as a detriment to his public image in Italy.²⁴ Whether these numbers are to be considered positive or negative

23. M. Chierici, "Romney, un Mormone a Washington?" *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, October 16, 2012, 22.

24. As one observer indicates, similar findings would likely emerge from studies in other European countries where very high percentages of citizens would have voted for President Obama over his Republican counterpart. Robert Bennett, "Religion and Politics in Europe vs. America," *Deseret News*,

obviously depends on the evaluator's expectations and on her views of Romney and Mormonism. Still, most impartial observers would conclude that if negative evaluations are largely built on incorrect information, findings of this nature become problematic. I will revisit the issue of accuracy of information in the next section of my examination, where my focus shifts from the image of Romney in the Italian media to the wider issue of the image of Mormonism in Italy.

Question 2: What historical, social, and theological images of the Latter-day Saint Church emerged from these accounts?

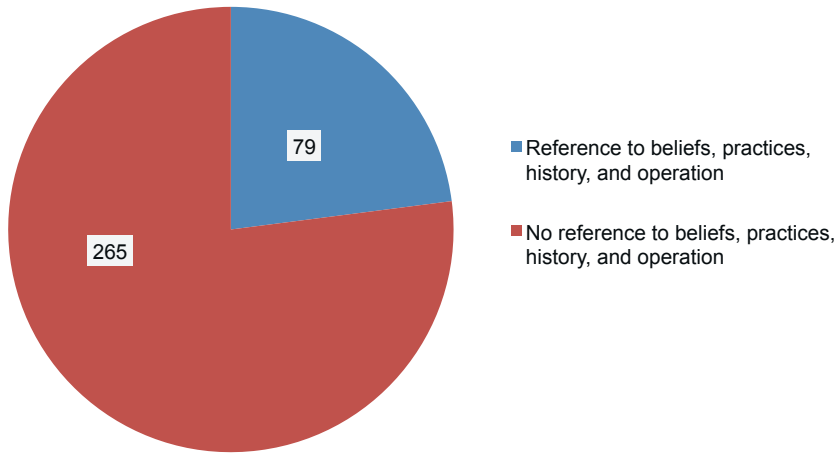
Although the United States presidential election was one of the key events of 2012, I expected the Italian media to address Mormonism also in contexts unrelated to Mitt Romney. Thus, my second question is specifically aimed at addressing the historical, social, and theological image of Mormonism that the Italian media presented in the year 2012. To facilitate my analysis, I have broken down this question into five smaller subquestions in order to provide a more clear and complete picture when suggesting an answer. They are:

1. How often is Mormonism described in terms of beliefs, practices, history, and so forth?
2. When beliefs are described, are they central beliefs of the faith or secondary/controversial beliefs?
3. How often and in what way is Mormonism evaluated?
4. How prevalent are doctrinal errors, false labels, and other misunderstandings?
5. What are the most common areas of error or of distorted perspective?

I will proceed to address each of these questions before summing up my findings to address the broader key question.

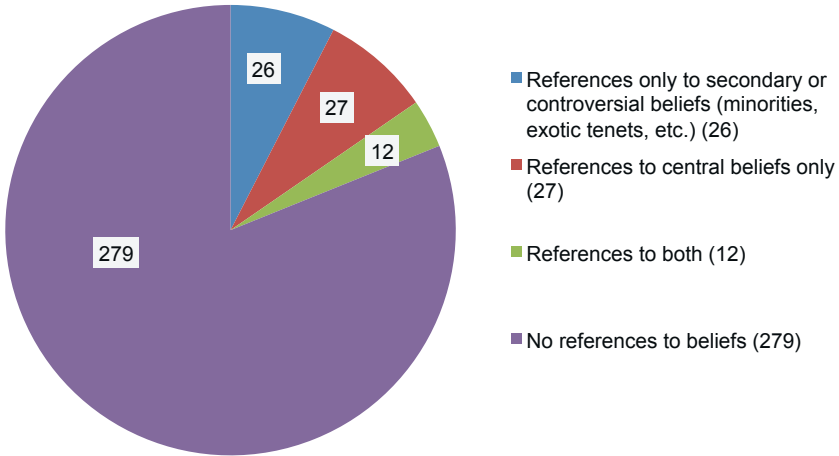
Only 79 articles out of a total of 344 had any reference to Mormon history, beliefs, and practices (fig. 3), with the great majority of them (65) providing some degree of description of LDS beliefs. Articles addressing Mitt Romney's run for the U.S. presidency as well as articles with a very different focus were included in this count. When I pose the question

October 29, 2012. Yet Europeans' usual preference for Democratic candidates may have at least as much to do with political ideology as it does with the religious beliefs of Republican nominees.

FIGURE 3. Was Mormonism “Described”?

of which LDS beliefs are described in these articles, I am interested in determining whether the beliefs identified would be considered central to the faith by a practicing Latter-day Saint or whether they would be considered secondary. For this purpose, a central belief would be one that is regularly discussed in official church settings, such as Sunday meetings, official magazines, general conference speeches, or LDS missionary discussions. Secondary beliefs, by contrast, would be those that do not receive much focus in current Church instructions, manuals, or authoritative sermons. These are not necessarily false or repudiated beliefs, neither are they inevitably controversial, but they generally tend to receive greater attention among “external” observers because they are unique or more interesting, or because they focus on emotionally charged issues. Yet most Mormons would not primarily define their faith by these tenets. In this context, I have taken the liberty of making this classification between primary and secondary beliefs by using my own discernment as a practicing Latter-day Saint. Although some may disagree with aspects of my categories, I am confident most practicing Mormons would come to similar conclusions.

Of the 65 articles describing Mormon beliefs, 26 articles (40 percent) referred to secondary/controversial beliefs only, 27 (42 percent) described central beliefs only, and 12 (18 percent) addressed both (fig. 4). Most of the secondary beliefs identified had to do with the LDS Church’s approach throughout its history to the rights of women and minorities, including African Americans and homosexuals. Yet this classification

FIGURE 4. Which Mormon Beliefs Are Described?

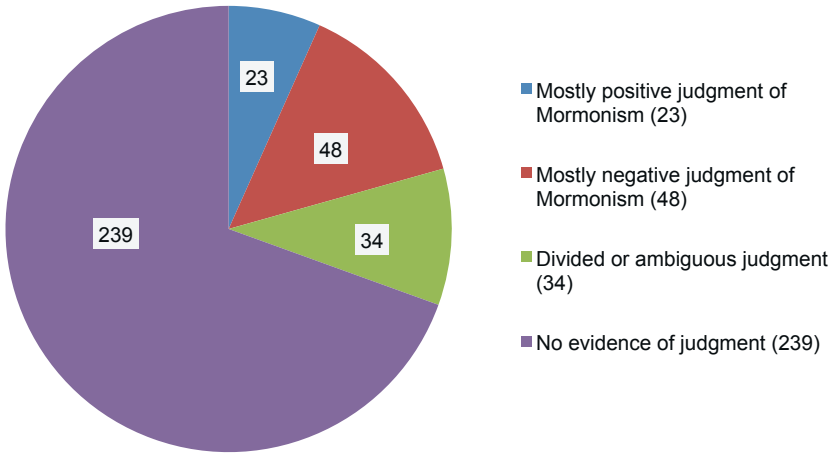
was determined as much by the breadth of the perspective as by the topic. Thus, if an article focused solely on the historical fact that the LDS Church has always denied the priesthood to women, pointing only to discrimination and rejection, the article was classified as focusing on secondary/controversial beliefs only. Instead, if in addition to this fact the article also mentioned the Mormon belief in the complementarity of the genders, the ideal of equality in the home, and the role of the Relief Society (the LDS Church's organization for women), I classified it as dealing with a central belief. Whether Mormons live up to this ideal is obviously a different matter, but an article describing LDS beliefs about women only in terms of what they cannot do—namely, holding the priesthood—would fit the category of secondary beliefs because, although correct, the concept provides a partial picture or a caricature. Finally, an article including central and secondary beliefs would be an article that mentions, for example, both the LDS belief in the Book of Mormon (central) and the belief that the Garden of Eden was located in what is now Missouri (secondary at best).

The resulting picture is somewhat encouraging, since about the same number of articles presented Mormon beliefs as strange and condemnable as the articles that presented them as peculiar but mostly harmless. Italian Latter-day Saints can find reason for optimism in this finding by noticing that at least half of the accounts describing their church's beliefs attempt to maintain some kind of balance and fairness. It is further interesting to notice that many of the articles that focused

on central beliefs contained interviews with Italian or U.S. Mormons who were asked to speak about their faith. It is also of interest that several articles dealing with secondary or controversial beliefs used quotations from LDS bloggers or ex-Mormon bloggers who underlined their rejection of some mainstream LDS perspectives (on women or homosexuals, for example). What these dynamics indicate, I believe, is that the debates internal to the LDS Church concerning its present beliefs and theological directions are as much a complicating issue in the definition of Mormonism (from inside out) as are the different areas of focus and attention emerging from those external to the faith who want to describe it (from outside in).

My objective with the third question was to explore the issue of judgment or evaluation of Mormonism inclusive of but also beyond the articles concerned primarily with Mitt Romney. I discovered that 105 articles (30.5 percent of all 344) provided some evidence of judgment or evaluation of the faith, a number larger than the total number of articles (79) that provided a description of Mormonism's history, beliefs, and practices. In other words, whether positive or negative, 26 articles evaluated without describing or judged without providing solid justification for their judgment. Of the total number of evaluative articles, almost a fourth—23 (or 22 percent)—expressed a mostly positive evaluation of Mormonism, whereas a little fewer than half—48 (or 46 percent)—expressed a mostly negative evaluation of the faith. The rest of the articles—34 (or 32 percent)—presented an evaluation that was divided, ambiguous, or evenly split, thus being neither primarily positive nor primarily negative (fig. 5). Admittedly, this particular classification was especially difficult to standardize in a very predictable or purely objective manner, and an element of personal bias was probably unavoidable. However, I hope to have made bias negligible by erring on the side of positivity. In other words, if a positive evaluation was not countered by strong negativity but only by minor and measured criticism, the article remained categorized as “positive.”

Positive evaluations usually focused on the actions and lifestyles of Latter-day Saints rather than on Mormon beliefs per se, even though actions and beliefs are usually interlinked. For example, a reporter interviewed the Tuscan host of a group of four hundred young Latter-day Saints from Italy, who participated in a summer program called “Especially for Youth.” She expressed her praise with the following words: “I am not just happy but enthusiastic about the behavior of these youth. The word exemplary would not do justice to their upbringing. They are truly a model of sobriety and respect that should be envied. I hope to be

FIGURE 5. How Was Mormonism Evaluated?

able to host them again, this time with their families.”²⁵ Other articles highlighted the fact that Mormon missionaries and members devote hours of service to the community, while a few others informed readers of community-focused events hosted in LDS churches, such as blood drives, English classes, and cultural events.²⁶ In the realm of interreligious cooperation, it is also of interest to note that when some Catholic media reported on various interviews with San Francisco Archbishop Cordileone, they included his praise for Latter-day Saints, particularly in consequence of their efforts to promote religious freedom and the traditional family.²⁷ On a somewhat humorous note, an article advocating

25. G. Capecchi, “I Mormoni abbracciano la maremma la carica dei 500 a Principina,” *Corriere di Maremma*, July 27, 2012, 11.

26. “Appuntamento a Torino per l’armonia e il pluralismo religioso,” *Comunicati.net*, February 2, 2012; “L’esercito dei ‘volontari della pala’ per ripulire le città,” *Corriere di Romagna*, February 5, 2012, 5; R. Della Maggesa, “Il ‘buon mercato’ sotto piazza Cavour. Dove la spesa è gratis,” *La Nazione—Ed. La Spezia*, April 1, 2012, 2–3; A. Goio, “Alla stessa mensa,” *Vita Trentina*, May 16, 2012; “Donare il sangue: Incontro,” *La Sesia*, January 27, 2012, 38; “C’è un corso per tutti,” *L’Unione Sarda*, September 3, 2012, 15; V. Medagliani, “Pregare a modo proprio,” *BJ Business Liguria Journal*, April 1, 2012, 26–31; G. Tomasin, “Cittaviva, 140 volontari per tenere aperti i musei,” *Il Piccolo*, March 18, 2012, 34.

27. Michael Drake, “Intervista a mons. Cordileone nuovo arcivescovo di San Francisco,” *Corrispondenzaromana.it*, July 30, 2012; B. Frigerio, “Obama viola la costituzione ma l’America ha a cuore i temi etici,” *Tempi.it*, February 15, 2012.

the use of helmets when riding bicycles commends Mormon missionaries for being the only ones in Italy who do so.²⁸

On the negative side of the evaluative equation, a prominent object of severe criticism was the LDS practice of baptism for the dead. Several articles highlighted the discovery that some Jewish victims of the Shoah, including the parents of Simon Wiesenthal, had been baptized posthumously in Mormon temples. Notwithstanding the apology issued by the LDS Church and the fact that these baptisms were performed by a Church member in defiance of Church policy, which has forbidden the baptism of Holocaust victims since 1995, the voice of condemnation toward the Church was univocal. Indeed, the insensitive and offensive nature of this act was usually portrayed as only the latest Mormon blunder in connection with a practice that many consider highly controversial.²⁹ As a side note on temple baptisms, one newspaper reported that a Mormon sued the Church for feeling pressured to perform two hundred baptisms and consequently injuring his back after so many immersions.³⁰ Other negative evaluations usually centered on the LDS Church's policies concerning gender, race, or sexual orientation, whether in the past or in the present.³¹ For example, a Sicilian politician responded to an article claiming that Sicily is not a safe place for gays by denying the accusation and adding that there are no Mormons in Sicily.

28. R. Damiani, "Subito un casco anche per chi usa la bicicletta. Si salvano vite, non ha piu senso perdere tempo," *Il Resto del Carlino*—Ed. Pesaro/Fossombrone, August 1, 2012.

29. "Mitt Romney e la salvezza delle anime," *Agoravox.it*, February 17, 2012; D. Fabbri, "I battesimi postumi imbarazzano Mitt," *Il Riformista*, February 17, 2012, 6; "I Mormoni e il battesimo postumo," *L'Osservatore Romano*, February 18, 2012, 6; "L'ultima frontiera delle conversioni coatte," *Paperblog.com*, February 16, 2012; F. Rampini, "Battesimi agli ebrei la chiesa Mormone imbarazza Romney," *La Repubblica*, February 16, 2012, 38; "Anna Frank è stata battezzata Mormona," *Rivistastudio.com*, February 22, 2012.

30. "In breve—USA, troppi battesimi fa causa ai Mormoni," *La Provincia*—CR, August 27, 2012, 6.

31. A. Mollica, "La pelle di Gesù. Un problema per Romney?" *Giornalettismo.com*, July 28, 2012; J. Horowitz, "Il Sogno dei Mormoni," trans. Fabrizio Saulini, *Internazionale.it*, June 4, 2012; G. Dell'Arti, "Che cosa significa votare Mitt Romney," *Il Foglio*, September 3, 2012, 1; A. Lombardy, "Ry Cooder," *Il Venerdì (La Repubblica)*, August 10, 2012, 122–23; F. Rampini, "Battesimi agli ebrei la chiesa Mormone imbarazza Romney," *La Repubblica*, February 16, 2012, 38; "USA, i Boy Scout confermano discriminazione contro i gay," *Uaar.it*, July 19, 2012.

Although this later statement is incorrect, the clear implication of the response is that Mormonism supposedly oppresses minority groups.³²

Some interesting findings also emerge from the category of mixed or ambiguous judgment. A good example of a divided evaluation of Mormonism is Rupert Murdoch's unequivocal condemnation of Scientology followed by the comment, "Mormonism is a mysterious enigma but Mormons are not evil."³³ A different example of ambiguous judgment appears in articles that report on some Latter-day Saints' participation in a gay pride parade in Salt Lake City. These Mormons are openly praised for their intellectual "dynamism" vis-à-vis the majority of their coreligionists, but the overall evaluation of Mormonism remains ambiguous.³⁴ A similar pattern is evident in other articles reporting on "progressive" Mormons and on their websites, such as the Feminist Mormon Housewives and Joanna Brooks blogs. On the one hand, these particular Latter-day Saints are usually described favorably, and their status as Mormons facilitates a positive evaluation of the LDS Church by underlining the presence of more liberal perspectives within Mormonism. On the other hand, judgment turns out to be more ambiguous when reporters, or the bloggers themselves, claim that their views are in the minority within the Church or when they criticize some traditional Mormon perspectives.³⁵

My last two questions are closely interlinked since they deal, respectively, with the quantity and the quality of doctrinal and historical errors. Of the 79 articles that provided some description of Mormonism, 43 (about 54 percent) contained no recognizable mistake or misunderstanding about the faith (fig. 6). However, 36 articles contained incorrect information, faulty descriptions, or questionable labels that an average Latter-day Saint would recognize as problematic. Specifically, I was able to identify four areas or topics where misunderstandings were common, namely, plural marriage, the church, the temple, and minorities. I identified at least 15 articles with misleading statements on plural marriage,

32. "Irispress guida Frommer's avverte gli americani: 'Sicilia pericolosa per i gay, promosse Roma e Milano,'" *Irispress.it*, June 19, 2012.

33. "Murdoch si sfoga su Twitter: Scientology È un 'culto inquietante,'" *Larena.it*, July 2, 2012.

34. "I Mormoni vanno al gay pride," *Giornalettismo.com*, June 5, 2012.

35. A. Alberti, "(In)certi giorni," *Marie Claire Magazine*, May 1, 2012, 376–77; S. Gandolf, "E' nata una femminista. Lo 'scatto' di Elisabeth, neo mamma Mormone," *Corriere.it*, April 2, 2012; C. Spadoni, "Cosa (non) sapete dei Mormoni?" *Marieclaire.it*, April 26, 2012.

FIGURE 6. How Prevalent Are Doctrinal Errors, Misunderstandings, and Labels?

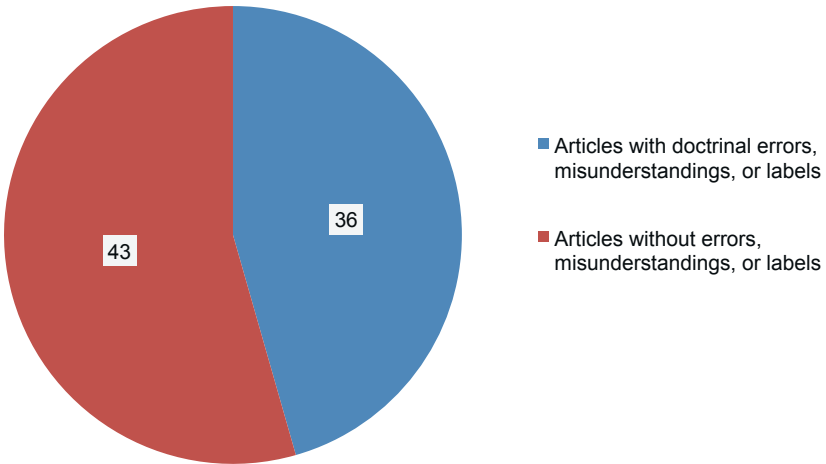
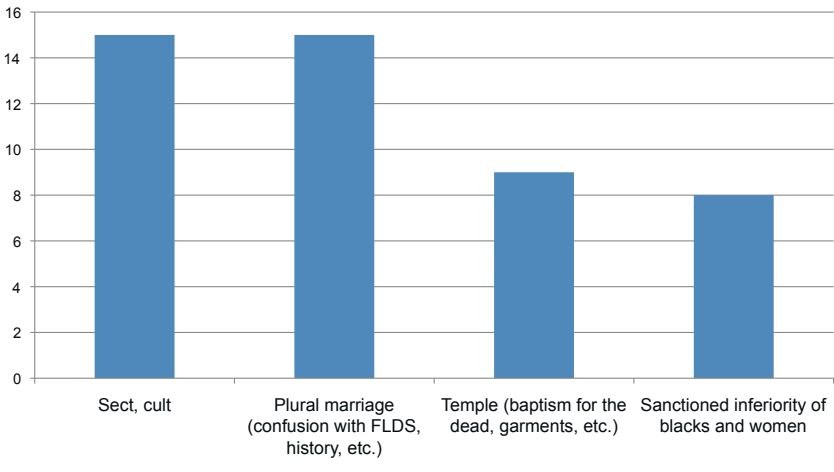


FIGURE 7. What Are the Most Common Areas of Misunderstanding?



15 that identified the LDS Church as a sect or cult, 9 with questionable descriptions of temple practices, and 8 with claims indicating that the LDS Church has sanctioned the inferiority of blacks and women (fig. 7). While a few other topics also gave rise to problematic descriptions, the ones I just listed were undoubtedly the most common. It should also be noted that some particular articles contained more than a single error,

as evidenced by the fact that the total number of faulty claims exceeds the total number of articles with questionable information.

Plural marriage, and its present status within the LDS Church, is still a subject on which the Italian media presents a confusing picture. While many articles recognize that the Church ceased to sanction the practice more than a century ago and that immediate excommunication is applied to any member who is guilty of polyandry, some still fail to distinguish mainstream Mormonism from the break-offs that have historically emerged from it. This is especially true in the case of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whose members openly advocate and practice plural marriage. Although the two churches have a similar name and they clearly share a common historical foundation, they are completely separate religious entities that are not in communion with each other. Thus, articles become misleading when they almost exclusively display pictures of Fundamentalist LDS, whose attire often resembles an Amish dress style, while focusing on mainstream Mormonism in the text.³⁶ Similarly, an article that mixes stories of ex-Fundamentalists who have escaped the oppression of their splinter group with stories of ex-Mormons who have left the LDS Church for a variety of reasons suggests a connection between the two groups that is unwarranted.³⁷ Perhaps the ultimate example of lingering historical and theological confusion is found in an article by Vittorio Zucconi, a prominent Italian journalist, who errs three times in the same sentence by stating first that George Romney, Mitt's father, was an ex-Mormon; second, that George was a fan of plural marriage; and third, that the practice of polygamy was encouraged in the LDS Church until 1971.³⁸

In turning to the category of misleading labels, I must clarify that several articles simply reported that many Americans do not recognize Mormonism as a Christian church. Thus, when they use the term cult or sect, they claim to do so to be descriptive of public opinion. However, since these articles do not usually provide a Mormon counter to this claim, the implied denial of legitimate religious status was sufficient reason for me to

36. W. Kirn, "Confessioni di un ex Mormone," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, October 24, 2012, 81–90; A. Scarpa, "Scusate, ci siamo persi a Durango" *Vanity Fair*, October 17, 2012, 294–98; S. Sinclair, "Questa è la nostra vita," *Vanity Fair*, September 12, 2012, 2–5.

37. G. Privitera, "Da quella vita noi siamo scappate," *Vanity Fair*, September 12, 2012, 152–58.

38. V. Zucconi, "Tutte le donne del presidente," *La Repubblica delle Donne (La Repubblica)*, September 22, 2012, 114–22.

include them in the list of articles that contain misunderstandings.³⁹ As far as temple rituals are concerned, a few articles describe LDS baptisms for the dead as a forceful practice aimed at obtaining converts and at inflating membership numbers.⁴⁰ However, Mormon doctrine claims that the efficacy of the baptism is dependent upon the departed soul's acceptance of the vicarious ritual. Thus, the choice of the departed remains unknown, and deceased individuals are never included in membership numbers that are published by the Church. Another common misleading statement about the temple is the use of the term "magic underwear" to refer to the undergarments Mormons regularly wear after their first visit to the temple.⁴¹ While some Latter-day Saints may believe that these clothes possess physical protective power, the standard interpretation of their purpose has more to do with ongoing remembrance of one's commitments than with magical repulsion of evil and danger.

Finally, some articles with misleading information focus on the LDS Church's stand on women or minorities. These articles claim that Mormons have "sanctioned" women and blacks to be inferior, but they never provide actual quotations to support this conclusion. A few articles underline that these prejudicial policies have now been abandoned, but one is still left to wonder about what exact historical statements have been used to make these human hierarchies supposedly "official," particularly in relation to women.⁴² Indeed, many articles that touch on the subject of women or minorities do not pinpoint any nuanced aspects of the Church's position but choose to focus on the theme of "rejection" or

39. M. D'Eramo, "Ombre Americane" *Il Manifesto*, September 1, 2012; M. Molinari, "L'edizione—Romney: cambiamo l'America," *La Stampa*, August 31, 2012, 12; M. Molinari, "Romney: un manager per l'America," *La Stampa*, August 31, 2012, 12; G. Trotta, "La grande notte di Romney: 'O la va o la spacca,'" *Il Secolo d'Italia*, August 31, 2012, 8.

40. M. Chierici, "Romney, un Mormone a Washington?" *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, October 16, 2012, 22; "L'ultima frontiera delle conversioni coatte," *Paperblog.com*, February 16, 2012; "Anna Frank è stata battezzata Mormona," *Rivistastudio.com*, February 22, 2012.

41. "Mitt Romney e la salvezza dell'anima," *Agoravox.it*, February 17, 2012; "La macchina del fango," *Il Sole 24 Ore.*, October 1, 2012, 20.

42. "Che cosa significa votare Mitt Romney," *Il Foglio*, September 3, 2012, 1; F. Rampini, "Battesimi agli ebrei la chiesa Mormone imbarazza Romney," *La Repubblica*, February 16, 2012, 38; F. Rampini, "Romney, l'ex vescovo miliardario che vuole l'America," *Il Venerdì—La Repubblica*, July 13, 2012, 48–52; M. Ventura, "Che America sarebbe con un mormone alla Casa Bianca," *Panorama*, March 5, 2012, 78–80.

even "hatred." Obviously, all Mormon beliefs can be criticized by any observer, including alleged prejudice, but there is clearly no semblance of fairness in an account claiming that the Christus statue in one of the Mormon Visitors' Centers in Salt Lake City points to the racist nature of the LDS Church because it is white in color, or in another report stating that Mormon men used to beat, rape, and burn their wives in the mouth with cattle branding irons.⁴³ At the same time, I found several inconsequential mistakes in descriptions of Mormon beliefs and practices that are understandable misconceptions among external observers of the faith.

Having addressed the five explorative questions, I can now return to the larger question with which this specific section is concerned: What image of the LDS Church emerges from recent Italian media accounts of it? The picture is somewhat mixed, with both praise and criticism, although the latter, intermingled with suspicion, is certainly more prominent. Obviously, different observers will offer various perspectives when determining how many negative evaluations of Mormonism or incorrect descriptions of its beliefs ultimately lead to a false understanding of the LDS Church. The only (perhaps banal) conclusion I can offer is that communication on the real nature of Mormonism to the Italian public certainly retains much room for improvement. My hunch is that the U.S. media's depiction of the faith is a degree more accurate than the Italian media's portrayal, although I do not have comparative data to support this conclusion. Perhaps Mormonism in Italy also suffers from the perception of being an American phenomenon, thus subject to the same suspicion that other things American are likely to encounter, in some circles at least. At the same time, recent events are bringing the Italian LDS Church a little more to the forefront of public attention, and perhaps it will not be too many years before Italians will recognize the faith in its localized form. It is then to this last issue, namely the analysis of Italian Mormonism as it appears in the Italian media, that I now turn my attention.

Question 3: How did reports on the Italian LDS Church frame the Italian media's broader treatment of Mormonism?

Before looking at specific ways in which reports about Italian Mormonism shape the overall portrayal of the LDS Church, I must address the

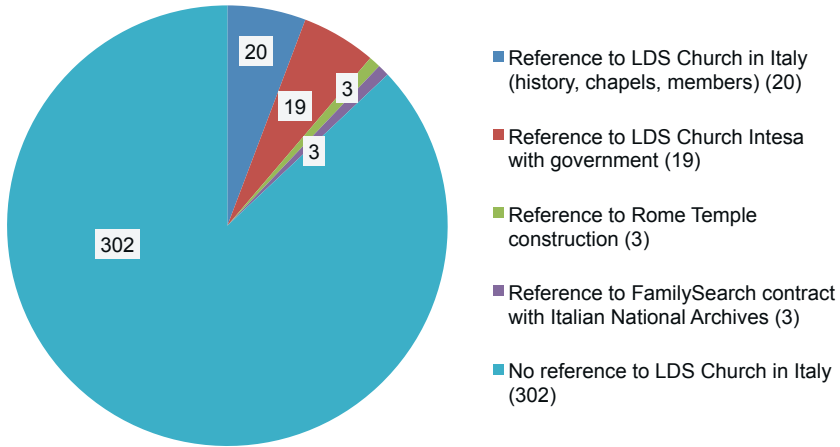
43. "La pelle di Gesù. Un problema per Romney?" *Giornaletismo.com*, July 28, 2012; R. Hofstadter, "Lo stile paranoico nella politica Americana," *Rivista di Politica*, March 1, 2012.

preliminary question on the frequency of these reports, which the data indicate is relatively slight. Indeed, out of 344 articles examined, 302 (about 88 percent) make no reference to the LDS Church in Italy at all. This leaves only 42 articles that address Italian Mormonism to some degree. As I further examined these particular articles, I was especially interested in assessing the relative weight of three significant events that have recently taken place, or are in process, in the context of Italian Mormonism. The first historic event was the signing into law of the “Intesa” between the LDS Church and the Italian government in the summer of 2012. This agreement makes the LDS Church a partner of the state, thus equating it to Catholicism and to other major churches in receiving full recognition in all its interactions with the Italian government. A second historic event, which is presently in process, is the construction in the Rome metropolitan area of the first LDS temple in Italy, which is scheduled for completion in 2015. The third key event of 2012 was the signing of a contract between FamilySearch (the genealogical organization operated by the LDS Church) and the Italian National Archives, which allows FamilySearch to digitize all the records of the Italian archives. It is quite evident that all three events represent major developments for Mormonism’s presence in Italy. Did the Italian media reflect this significance? (fig. 8).

Of the three events, the Intesa between the Italian government and the LDS Church was certainly the one that received the most coverage by the Italian media. I found 19 references to it, most of which only listed it as new legislation without any further elaboration. However, a few articles commented on the implications of this agreement, which the government also signed with a few other religions at the same time.⁴⁴ On the other hand, the ongoing construction of the Rome temple was not the focus of much attention at all, since I identified only three references to it. Three is also the number of articles addressing the contract between the Italian National Archives and FamilySearch.⁴⁵ It may be surprising to see such a low number of articles mentioning these

44. “In discussione alla camera l’intesa dei Mormoni,” *Buonanotizia.org*, June 18, 2012; “Senato: Definitiva approvazione intese con tre confessioni religiose,” *Buonanotizia.org*, July 20, 2012; S. Ceccanti, “Un passo in avanti verso la libertà religiosa,” *L’Unità*, August 9, 2012, 15; F. Giansoldati, “Buddisti, mormoni e ortodossi ammessi all’otto per mille,” *Il Messaggero*, September 14, 2012, 17.

45. E. Rosaspina, “I Mormoni costruiscono online l’archivio degli antenati in Italia,” *Corriere della Sera*, October 26, 2012, 31; S. Sansonetti and R. Gaggiardini, “Mormoni pronti a schedare l’Italia,” *Italia Oggi*, October 25, 2012, 12.

FIGURE 8. How Visible Is the Italian LDS Church?

historical events of Italian Mormonism; however, I should provide some qualifications to place these findings in their proper perspective. First, since the groundbreaking for the Rome temple took place in 2010 and completion is expected in 2015, the year 2012 fits in the middle of the interim period of construction, which does not usually attract much media attention. Second, all three references to the contract between FamilySearch and the National Archives appeared in late October, thus closely approaching the end date of my survey. It is likely that the time frame of my analysis simply did not allow the event sufficient time to receive significant media attention. Only an examination of articles from November and December 2012 could establish whether this was indeed the case.

At any rate, the 42 articles identified included 20 references to Italian Mormonism that were unrelated to these historical events. Usually the focus was either a description of activities that had taken place in local congregations or interviews with a handful of selected local members. As already alluded to in a previous section, those articles that reported on Italian Latter-day Saints were generally positive in their overall evaluations of the faith. For example, one article interviewed two Italian LDS families who are well known among Latter-day Saints in northern Italy; it was published in the prominent weekly periodical *Panorama*, which is listed as the top-selling news magazine in Italy. Despite sarcastic remarks about the high number of children in the families, their conservative dress, and their dietary practices, the article

shows that Mormons, even though strange in some of their practices, are good and decent people.⁴⁶ The only article that was unambiguously negative reported that an unnamed political candidate claimed a group of Mormons had offered 700 votes in exchange for 5,000 Euros.⁴⁷ Sergio Zicari, the LDS Church representative responsible for communications with the press, immediately responded with a written message that both expressed dismay for the defamatory accusation and issued an invitation to the reporter for further dialogue.⁴⁸ I do not know if this meeting ever took place, but I have been told by the Church's Italian public relations office that individual contact with reporters, as would be expected, tends to facilitate understanding and better relationships with the media. It is also of note that local media reported extensively on the construction of the new church building in the city of Pordenone.⁴⁹

In conclusion, the articles that focused exclusively on Italian Mormonism were, as a whole, more positive in their evaluation of the faith than the many others that approached Mormonism in its American setting, whether in relation to Mitt Romney or not. What I gather from this evidence is a confirmation of the fact that a phenomenon studied from a distance and in a foreign setting is likely to give rise to more suspicion and prejudice than when the same phenomenon is observed locally. Thus, although only 12 percent of the articles described Mormonism in its Italian setting, the mostly positive portrait of Italian Mormons demonstrates that this is probably the most effective direction of development for the public relations of the Italian LDS Church. To be sure, the present cumulative prevalence of negative evaluations of Mormonism that I found in my analysis of Italian media in 2012 is not counter-balanced by the infrequent positive picture of Italian Mormonism. Still, I believe that Mormons in Italy have reason to be moderately optimistic about the future.

46. C. Abbate, "I comandamenti di una famiglia tipo," *Panorama*, March 7, 2012, 82–84.

47. "Il nostro voto non è in vendita, così ci offendete," *Corriere del Giorno di Puglia e Lucania*, April 19, 2012, 17.

48. "Il nostro voto non è in vendita, così ci offendete," 17.

49. C. Benotti, "Mormoni, nuovo tempio da tre milioni di Euro," *Messaggero Veneto—Ed. Pordenone*, May 13, 2012; V. Silvestrini, "Mormoni, con la decima è nata una nuova chiesa," *Il Gazzettino—Ed. Pordenone*, May 23, 2012, 8.

Conclusion

The purpose of the present analysis has been to identify the key contours of the Italian media's treatment of Mormonism within the January to October 2012 time frame. I have achieved this objective by focusing my examination on 344 media articles that contained at least one of three possible keywords, "Mormon," "Mormons," and "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." I subsequently classified these articles according to specific categories of content and proceeded to examine the data in light of three specific questions that inform the larger issue of the Italian media's treatment of Mormonism.

Massimo Introvigne, an Italian sociologist of new religions, wrote the following conclusion to his own analysis of the Italian media's portrayal of Mormonism in connection with Mitt Romney's failed run to the Republican nomination in the 2008 presidential elections:

The fact that most scholars of religion do know the basic facts about Mormons and polygamy does not easily translate into general or media awareness. Ultimately, scholarly articles, press releases by the LDS Church, and even *Big Love* (as far as parts of it are not lost in translation) will not change this situation. Only a significant presence of main-line Latter-day Saints in Italian and Central and Southern European social, cultural, and religious life will make the general public familiar with what 21st-century Mormonism is really all about. And perhaps persuade the media that it is not that unusual for a male Mormon politician to have only one wife.⁵⁰

I can only concur with Introvigne's key point, but I also see evidence of improvement where no "significant presence" has yet been achieved. For example, Introvigne found that almost 90 percent of the web articles he examined in 2008 contained historical or doctrinal errors in relation to the subject of plural marriage. Yet my own study showed that only 20 percent of the 2012 articles that discussed Mormon beliefs contained faulty information on the connection between the LDS Church and polygamy. Notwithstanding the obvious differences in the methodology, breadth, and depth of our two studies, a quick comparison between them indicates the Italian media perception of Mormonism has likely moved in the direction of more correct understanding.

50. Introvigne, "Mormon Factor in the Romney Presidential Campaign," 98–107.

Obviously, more studies are needed, both in the specific Italian context and in other international contexts, to address broader and deeper questions regarding the world's perception of Mormonism and the role of the media in shaping it. Then, with more data and with studies available from a variety of international contexts, future research could move in the direction of comparison between American and international media approaches to Mormonism. Similarities and differences would likely emerge, with great potential for analysis of several interesting questions in areas as varied as ecclesiology, missiology, and inculturation. For the time being, the year 2012 and Mitt Romney in particular have helped to put Mormonism on the Italian media's map. As an Italian Latter-day Saint, I cannot help but hope for more similar years in the future to further bring the Church out of obscurity and into the limelight.

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His heartfelt gratitude goes to three undergraduate research assistants at Brigham Young University—Giulia Cacciatore, Giuseppe Vinci, and Christian Maynes—for their invaluable help in reviewing, categorizing, and referencing the high volume of articles examined in this study. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Mormon Media Studies Symposium at BYU. Special thanks also go to those in attendance at the symposium, especially the conference organizer, Sherry Baker, for suggestions that improved the quality of this analysis.

Appendix

My analysis clearly shows that the Italian media does not generally use the full name of the LDS Church when writing about its members or about its beliefs. In fact, 270 articles, or 78 percent of all the sources examined, use only the more commonly recognized term Mormon, in both singular and plural forms, to refer to the religion and to its adepts. An additional 64 articles, or 28 percent, use both "Mormon" and the full name of the Church in their nomenclature. Only 10 sources, or 3 percent of the total, use exclusively the full name of the Church, but these articles are not typical media reports, because their focus is new legislation, usually quoted in its official form, with little or no accompanying commentary. Indeed, these articles are official reports of the signing of the Intesa between the LDS Church and the Italian government. These findings are not surprising, since the overwhelming prevalence of the term "Mormon" in the media is probably not unusual in any part of the world, with the only possible exception being the Intermountain West area of the United States.

However, other findings point to unique uses of the term "Mormon" that are not as likely to occur in the United States. For example, the Italian media automatically associates the state of Utah with Mormonism and therefore speaks of the local professional basketball team, the Utah Jazz, as "the Mormons" or comments on the high attendance at one of their games with expressions indicating that the arena was full of Mormons.⁵¹ Furthermore, a few articles described the construction of a National Security Agency facility in Bluffdale, Utah, as an illustration of "Mormon espionage" rather than as a government project.⁵² Other articles confuse the religion of the Amish with the religion of Latter-day Saints, a mistake that was solidified several years ago by the unfortunate Italian dubbing of the popular 1985 Hollywood film *Witness*, in which the term "Mormons" is used in reference to the Amish. Articles that do not clearly distinguish

51. E. Campana, "NBA, da Oklahoma grande basket . . . with Love," *Pallarancione.com*, March 24, 2012; E. Campana, "NBA, Dwight Howard vuole la testa di coach Van Gundy!" *Pallarancione.com*, April 6, 2012; "Folle corsa nella Western Conference," *Paperblog.com*, April 6, 2012; "NBA: Jazz ai playoffs, Suns fuori," *Paperblog.com*, April 25, 2012; "Utah Jazz: Contro tutti i pronostici!" *Parrotized.it*, April 3, 2012.

52. "La città delle spie," *Giornaletismo.com*, March 16, 2012; S. Trinca, "Tutti gli spioni nel mondo," *Il Secolo XIX*, April 5, 2012, 41–42; "La città delle spie," *Taggatore.com*, March 16, 2012; "Il grande fratello? La sua casa è nello Utah," *Corriere.it*, March 16, 2012.

between fundamentalist Mormons and mainstream Latter-day Saints further contribute to the confusion with pictures that highlight similarity in dress in Amish and Fundamentalist women.⁵³

It is also interesting to review the various contexts or topics that emerge from media references to Mormonism, whether correct or incorrect. Some tourist-guide articles point to historical markers relating to Mormon history,⁵⁴ while a few other articles focus instead on Mormon contributions to technology.⁵⁵ One article eulogizes the recently deceased LDS mechanical engineer Roger Boisjoly, well known for his unheeded opposition to the *Challenger's* fatal launch. However, in reference to Boisjoly's critics, the writer quickly adds, "How can one blame them? Who would believe the words of a Mormon?"⁵⁶ Another article, which probably belongs to the thematic category of popular culture, makes a puzzling comment on "Las Vegas style weddings in Mormon chapels."⁵⁷

Finally, many other articles with references to Mormons or Mormonism derive from the world of music and entertainment. In addition to the expected coverage of the Broadway musical *The Book of Mormon*, several writers highlight the Mormon connection of actors, actresses, and singers.⁵⁸ The most famous celebrities mentioned are actors Katherine Heigl and Ryan Gosling, whose parents were Mormon, as well as lead singer

53. "Berlino 2012: I nostri premi," *film-review.it*, February 17, 2012; P. Mastrolilli, "Il nuovo 'Girls' power erede di 'Sex and the City,'" *LaStampa.it*, April 15, 2012; S. Sinclair, "Questa è la nostra vita," *VanityFair*, September 12, 2012, 2–5.

By way of personal anecdote, as a young high school student growing up in Italy, I remember a geography lecture focused on the Western part of the United States. The teacher then decided to speak about the Mormon presence in the West for a few minutes, but the presentation in its totality was really about the Amish.

54. G. Barbieri, "California dreamin," *Caravan & Camper*, February 1, 2012, 102–7; M. Venturi, "Mandelli a capo nord, Merigo nel West," *Bresciaoggi*, September 2, 2012, 14; "Il Mississippi in Kayak: Faresin incontra Variati," *Vicenza-Più.com*, January 24, 2012.

55. "Università Americana di Mormoni ricrea l'arpione motorizzato di Batman—Immagini e video," *Gadgetblog.it*, April 26, 2012.

56. "Roger Boisjoly (1938–2012)," *Paperblog.com*, February 14, 2012.

57. L. Bresciani, "Il matrimonio perfetto," *Madre Magazine*, April 1, 2012, 44–46.

58. A. Curtolo, "Mormoni caustici e ballerini," *Domenica (Il Sole 24 Ore)*, February 26, 2012, 45; "I Mormoni star di Broadway," *Italia Oggi*, March 13, 2012, 12; "I Mormoni star di Broadway," *Yahoo.it*, March 13, 2012.

Brandon Flowers from the rock band The Killers.⁵⁹ Other less well-known singers are also mentioned, but almost in all cases the individual's level of identification with the faith remains undefined.⁶⁰ Reviews of popular books contribute a few Mormon references, although the faith never appears to be in the forefront, and the brief allusions only add to the ambiguity.⁶¹ To end on a musical note, one writer demonstrates good knowledge of LDS hymnody in her commentary on the lyrics of the hymn "Jesus the Very Thought of Thee," which, she adds, is also sung by the Mormons.⁶²

59. W. Boswell, "The Killers Brandon predica al deserto," *Rolling Stone Magazine*, October 10, 2012; B. Giurato, "Alternativi ma conservatori, boom dei roccettari Mormoni," *Il Giornale*, September 19, 2012, 29; "Ryan Gosling," *Parrotized.it*, May 30, 2012; "Se non sei Mormone non sei una star," *Tempi.it*, February 2, 2012; "Ryan Gosling, star già a 11 anni," *TgCom24.it*, June 20, 2012.

60. M. Matteotti, "Jessica Hoop: se il talento ha . . . Quattro facce della medaglia," *Il Giornale di Brescia*, July 7, 2012, 61; C. Fistone, "19 Febbraio '12: Elita Sundaypark e il barcamp di Torno Giovedì," *MondoRosaShocking.com*, February 17, 2012.

61. S. Ginzberg, "Il cielo in una storia," *La Repubblica*, August 31, 2012, 45; M. Middles, "Lecture," *Rumore Magazine* August 9, 2012, 100–1; M. Paziienza, "Il segreto della genesi," *Paperblog.com*, April 26, 2012; U. Splendore, "Profumo di lavanda profumo di libertà," *Luna Nuova*, February 7, 2012, 3.

62. L. Cervigni, "Gesù dolce ricordo di dolcezza," *L'Emanuele*, September 1, 2012, 17–20.