GIOVANNI BOCCIA ARTIERI*

THE ITALIAN SENSE OF THE WEB
A Social History of the Culture of Connectivity: A Mediatization Approach

Abstract

The culture of connectivity in Italy is produced by the interrelation of social media and the evolution of social ties evolution. This article analyses this culture by highlighting the dynamics of power and participation, and overcoming the dichotomy between the "manipulative" and "democratization" media theses. It therefore focuses on the specific transition between web 1.0 and web 2.0, tracing a change, caused by the spread of social network platforms, in discourses on the social sense of connectivity: in other words, reconstructing an history of technological and communicative transformations coupled with specific events that can produce a different social consciousness of connectivity.

The approach adopted to analyze this transition in terms of the social history of the media will be periodization, while the mediatization approach will serve as the broader framework for understanding and interpreting the relation between the spread of social media and the evolution of the sense that social ties express the culture of connectivity. Linking periodization to mediatization will more specifically involve taking the temporal dimension into account on at least three levels: an events-based, micro-type temporality, capable of identifying specific media events or widespread media practices; a meso-type temporality, marked by a succession of media waves which underline the disruptive effect of certain ecosystemic configurations of media devices, which can alter significantly both market and cultural dimensions; and a macro-temporal dimension, suitable for tracing a succession of technological ages, such as the passage described in the literature as the transition from the age of the industrial revolution to the information or digital age.

This framework of mediatization through the lens of the periodization of Italy's digital evolution enables us to identify– in the context of a long-term perspective on the digital age – the countercyclical role of the digital, which, especially in the mid-period, both fostered and characterized the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0. By applying a short-term, "evenemential" logic to an analysis of the 2009 to 2014 period, it becomes possible to trace the way in which the mediatization of the social tie, thanks to the diffusion of web 2.0 in Italy, resulted in a swift transition from a rhetoric of "friendship" to a rhetoric of "participation" thatin turn was widely perceived as becoming, in a political sense, increasingly critical.

Keywords

Mediatization; culture of connectivity; media history; internet studies; networked publics.

* Università di Urbino Carlo Bo – giovanni.bocciaartieri@uniurb.it.

1. SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE MEDIA AS HISTORY OF SOCIAL TIES

The extension of the Internet as a space in which social networks and related content are produced and given visibility poses the question of the social construction of collective life in unprecedented ways.

In Italy we have witnessed the emergence of a public debate[1], on the centrality of the social media in collective processes which has ranged from the development and quality of political debate to the possibility of political participation[2], and from culture and information consumption[3] to their role in emergency situations[4]. The analyses have focused on the forms of relationship between social media and public opinion, by traversing the modes of communication and organizational dynamics in relations between the citizen and the institutions. However, empirical analyses of specific political, participatory, informative etc. phenomena, which are central to web analysis, point to a more general aspect of the change affecting core sections of society.

To investigate this change and to understand the "disruptive" effects of digital means probing to the root of the transformations brought about by the connection between social and medial at a time when the tendency to be online networked is assuming mainstream status, perceived as the norm rather than the exception[5]. In other words, we need to ask ourselves what sort of culture of connectivity we are developing[6].

It is a question that refers us to a tradition of studies which stretches back over the social history of the media, seen as a history of social ties[7], and which creates a tension between the power of the media and the possibility of participation: a tension between a "manipulative" and persuasive dimension and a dimension of "democratization"[8]. On the one hand, we find the theses on mass societies that maintain control and social cohesion through the reproduction of capitalist values by the culture industry, regulating them through the ideological contribution of the media to passive audiences. On the other hand, we find the thesis of the democratization of the media which attributes – firstly to the spread of the press and now to the Internet – the function of defending democratic rights and building an area of free speech and citizenship participation.

The aim of this essay is to analyze the culture of connectivity, produced by the interrelation of social media and social ties evolution, by highlighting the dynamics of power and participation – starting with the discourses in Italy – and overcoming the dichotomy between the "manipulative" and "democratization" theses. The essay therefore

[1] S. Bentivegna, ed., *La politica in 140 caratteri. Twitter e spazio pubblico*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2014; F. Chiusi, *Critica della democrazia digitale. La politica 2.0 alla prova dei fatti*, Turin: codice edizioni, 2014.

[2] L. Mosca, C. Vaccari, eds., *Nuovi media, nuova politica? Partecipazione e mobilitazione online da MoveOn al Movimento 5 Stelle*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2011; E. De Blasio, M. Sorice, "Radicals, Rebels and Maybe Beyond. Social Movements, Women's Leadership and the Web 2.0 in the Italian Political Sphere", CMCS Working Papers, 2, DOI: 10.978.886536/0187, 2014.

[3] L. Mazzoli, G. Zanchini, eds., *Info Cult. Nuovi scenari di produzione e uso dell'informazione culturale*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015.

[4] M. Farinosi, A. Micalizzi, eds., *NetQuake. Media digitali e disastri naturali. Dieci ricerche empiriche sul ruolo della Rete nel terremoto dell'Aquila*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2013; F. Comunello, ed., *Social media e comunicazione d'emergenza*, Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2014.

[5] G. Boccia Artieri, *Stati di connessione. Pubblici, cittadini, consumatori nella (Social) Network Society*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2012.

[6] J. Van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media*, Usa: Oxford University Press, 2013.

[7] F. Barbier, C. Bertho Lavenir, *Histoire des médias. De Diderot à Internet*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2000.

[8] L. Gorman, D. McLean, *Media and Society into the 21st Century: A Historical Introduction*, Malden, MA:Wiley-Blackwell, 2003.

focuses on the specific transition between web 1.0 and web 2.0 with a view to analyzing what is seen in the literature as a caesura between the characteristics of a unidirectional web and those of a "social" web[9], and to understand the evolution. It involves tracing a change, worked by the spread of social networking platforms, in the discourses on the social sense of connectivity: in other words, reconstructing an history of technological and communicative transformations coupled with specific events capable of producing a different social consciousness of connectivity.

The approach adopted to analyze this transition in terms of the social history of the media will be *periodization*, while the mediatization approach will serve as the broader framework for understanding and interpreting the relation between the spread of the social media and the evolution of a sense of social ties as an expression of culture of connectivity. In specific terms, linking the periodization perspective to the mediatization angle will involve taking the temporal dimension into account on at least three levels: an events-based, micro-type temporality, capable of identifying specific media events or widespread media practices; a meso-type temporality, marked by a succession of media waves which underline the disruptive effect of certain ecosystemic configurations of media devices, capable of significantly altering both market and cultural dimensions; a macro-temporal dimension, suitable for tracing a succession of technological ages, such as the passage described in the literature as the transition from the age of the industrial revolution to the information or digital age[10].

2. PERIODIZATION AND MEDIATIZATION

To overcome the tension between the dichotomous theses requires – in this perspective – an analysis of the relationship between media evolution and social ties, using the *periodization* method[11] that the new approaches to the social history of media propose[12]. In these approaches periodization critically addresses the dichotomy between manipulation and democratization, since it is aimed at identifying the traces of co-evolution between the social structure and the organization of communication and looking for connections between media diffusion and political, socio-economic and value changes. The advantage of such an approach is in highlighting the relationship between continuity and discontinuity, between segments and contradictions, thus ensuring that the interpretation will not be placed along a path of linear and deterministic media evolution.

The periodization approach leads to speculation as to the ways in which the specific

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[9] C. Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, London: Sage, 2014.

[10] M. Castells, *The Information Age. Volumes 1-3: Economy, Society and Culture*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999.

[11] Periodization is the attempt to categorize or divide historical time into discrete named blocks. Cfr. E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994; L. Besserman, ed., *The Challenge of Periodization: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives*, New York: Garland, 1996.

[12] P. Flichy, *Une histoire de la communication moderne. Espace public et vie privée*, Paris: La Découverte, 1991; P. Ortoleva, *Mediastoria. Mezzi di comunicazione e cambiamento sociale nel mondo contemporaneo*, Parma: Pratiche Editrice, 1995; F. Colombo, *La cultura sottile. Media e industria culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli anni Novanta*, Milano: Bompiani, 1998; F. Colombo, *Il potere socievole. Storia e critica dei social media*, Milan: Mondadori, 2013. On participation, see. N. Carpentier, P. Dahlgren, F. Pasquali, "Waves of Media Democratization: A Brief History of Contemporary Participatory Practices in the Media Sphere", *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 2013: 1-8.

connotation of digital evolution in Italy constructs particular forms of social ties, and particular symbolic and political orders of discourse.

If digital evolution is to be examined in terms of periodization, mediatization is the general framework adopted in order to analyze the way in which technological evolution relates to the culture of connectivity.

The mediatization approach is offered, not as a new paradigm or a mid-range theory, but as a guiding concept underlying an empirical analysis of social transformations sufficiently finely-tuned to gauge the extent to which the level of media saturation of social interaction has become more intense[13].

Mediatization can be read a) as a media-influenced, meta-process of cultural and social transformation, to be analyzed from an evolutionary viewpoint – like globalization – and, at the same time, b) as the media spreading their own formats and frameworks in spheres belonging to everyday lives and social relations[14].

In short, mediatization is a meta-process of an ecological cast which cannot be attributed solely to single techno-communicative devices and therefore has a more abstract generalized value. At the same time, it does not incorporate a uniform and unitary (media) logic and can therefore be observed only through specific media practices. Thus mediatization is a long-term process aimed at analyzing how deep-seated social and cultural changes are brought about by the accumulated alterations in mediation processes produced by the success of various media types[15].

In this sense, digital mediatization indicates a social transformation in terms of structures, actors and objects, beginning with the forms of "irritation" produced by digital media at a technical, symbolic, and organizational level, including that of economic bodies[16]. This process generates mediated forms of experience[17] and a specific discursive regime with the circulation of specific meanings[18].

3. THE COUNTERCYCLICAL FUNCTION OF DIGITAL ITALY

The effect of mediatization which digital produces on social ties, by developing a widespread form of mediated connectivity, needs therefore to be contextualized within a broader evolutionary cycle capable of detecting the causes of the spread of digital in Italy and hence the reasons for the flood of devices which allow families non-stop connectivity through the Internet. In this sense, a moment of discontinuity in adopting media connectivity technology can be identified as coinciding with a particular socio-

[13] A. Hepp, "Mediatization and the 'Moulding Forces' of the Media", *Communications*, 37, 1 (2012): 1-28; A. Hepp, *Cultures of Mediatization*, Cambridge, England: Polity, 2013; N. Couldry, A. Hepp, "Conceptualizing Mediatization: Contexts, Traditions, Arguments", *Communication Theory*, 23 (2013): 191-202; S. Livingstone, P. Lunt, "Mediatization: An Emerging Paradigm for Media and Communication Research", in *Mediatization of Communication: Handbooks of Communication Science vol. 21*, edited by K. Lundby, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014, 703-723.

[14] G. Boccia Artieri, "Mediatizzazione e network society: un programma di ricerca", *Sociologia della comunicazione*, 50 (2015): 60-67.

[15] Hepp, "Mediatization and the 'Molding Force' of the Media"; Couldry, Hepp, "Conceptualizing Mediatization: Contexts, Traditions, Arguments".

[16] W. Schulz, "Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept", *European Journal of Communication*, 19 (2004): 87-101.

[17] G. Boccia Artieri, *I media-mondo. Forme e linguaggi dell'esperienza contemporanea*, Rome: Meltemi, 2004.

[18] R. Silverstone, "Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life", *New Literary History*, 33, 4 (2002): 761-780.

economic cycle: the recession which struck Italy in 2008, as a repercussion of the international financial crisis of 2007.

Figure 1 - *Media consumption index for large media families, 2002-2015 (index numbers: 2002=100). Censis data in relation to GDP*
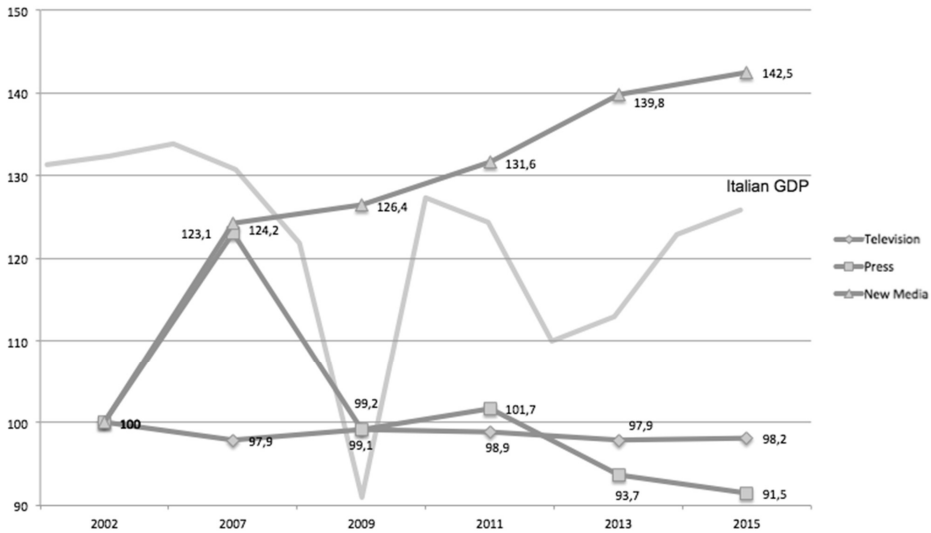
Indeed, it was at this critical moment that the web in Italy assumed a countercyclical character[19] which took the form of adopting new media and related media consumption which contrasts with the shrinkage typical of an economy in recession (Fig. 1). As print consumption falls in the years of the crisis and TV consumption remains largely stable, new media consumption grow is inversely proportional to the decline in GDP[20]. In particular, exprenditure of families on the purchase of digital communication technologies follows a strong growth trend, significantly more dynamic than the evolution of overall exprenditure. Generally speaking, in Italian families and especially among young people (14-29 years of age), the Internet and social media, given there mobility, serve as vehicles for a new series of consumer practices. Investment in digital technology and the growth of disintermediation practices in various consumer sectors[21] has constituted a response, both effective and symbolic, to the recession.

Among Italians, the habit of connecting to the Internet increased from 45.3% in 2007 to 70.9% in 2015 and, in mobility, from 29.6% to 59.9%, also by integrating

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[19] Censis, Ucsi, eds., *Dodicesimo Rapporto sulla comunicazione. L'economia della disintermediazione digitale*, Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2015.

[20] These media consumption fluctuations occurred in a context of general decrease of media consumption due to the crisis. As evidenced by the Censis study (2015), set to 100 the total consumption index recorded in 2002, the value had reached 117.8 points in 2007, to go down immediately after reaching 112.8 points in 2015. So before the crisis began, consumption was reached maximum.

[21] The forms of disintermediation concerning consumer sectors such as information, purchasing and consuming music and books, audiovisual entertainment – including the web and mobile TV – searching for and booking leisure facilities.

different devices (2015 Censis data). It was in this time span that access to mobile connectivity, an increase in forms of online communication, and social network sites participation all came together[22]. And it was in this context that the connective tissue was formed for social ties capable of activating specific social networks and specific regimes of visibility in circulating, sharing, and interpreting content. In other words, the ability to structure *media circuits*[23] involves supporting social networks through forms of conectivity or interaction which, in the social media, refer back to the need to apply the distinction between public and private in complex ways – just as in the home environment, which is private vis-à-vis public spaces, but which nonetheless contains rooms which are considered public and used as such. So Italians started to become familiar with a communicative mode and social tie in which what is public and what is private is not simply determined by the regime of visibility in space: the connectivity developed over this period resulted in a situation which requires the constant, daily management of relations between private life and public life, in terms of a distinction which no longer depends so much on a spatial variable as on individual choice[24]. So it is not places which define the intimate and the public, but the communicative choices of the individual which reproduce this distintion *in* the places (including media places).

The choice of a periodization approach, like the one adopted, makes it possible to detect a corresponding – and therefore not deterministic – mutation between socio-economic structure and media system which sees digital and its connectivity at the centre of social-communicative behaviours and individual relations. In other words, it allows us to identify an historical context capable of highlighting a specific evolutionary course characterizing the change in social ties, a course marked by "connective" characteristics and the problematical distinction between public and private which is a corresponding form[25] of it. But if this represents the more general and abstract evolutionary course, we need to ask in what ways this specific feature of digital evolution in Italy produces distinctive social ties.

4. A MEDIATISED PERIODIZATION OF THE SOCIAL TIE AS CONNECTIVITY IN ITALY

Within the long-term transformation of the digital age, from a temporal perspective of the meso type, we can identify a particular moment of transition from a media wave founded on web 1.0 culture to the web 2.0 wave, in terms of a) a set of communicative practices directed towards connectivity which saturate social interaction and b) a set of social discourses on connectivity which generate a specific social consciousness. So, in a mid-term perspective, it is in the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0 that we have to situate a transformation in dialogues on the sense of connection, a process punctuated not merely by technological innovation but by events of significance both symbolically and in terms of forming a social consciousness, besides procedures and meanings (Fig. 2).

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[22] See Istat Report "Cittadini e nuove tecnologie" (Citizens and New Technologies) from 2008 to 2012. Si vedano i Report Istat "Cittadini e nuove tecnologie" dal 2008 al 2014.

[23] P.G. Lange, "Publicly Private and Privately Public: Social Networking on YouTube", *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13 (2007): 361-380.

[24] Z. Papacharissi, 'The Virtual Sphere: The Internet as a Public Sphere", *New Media and Society*, 4, 1 (2002): 9-27; S. Tisseron, "Intimité et extimité", *Communications*, 88, 1 (2011): 83-91.

[25] N. Luhmann, *Die Realität der massenmedien*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag GmbH, 1996.

Figure 2 - *Chronology web 1.0 – web 2.0*
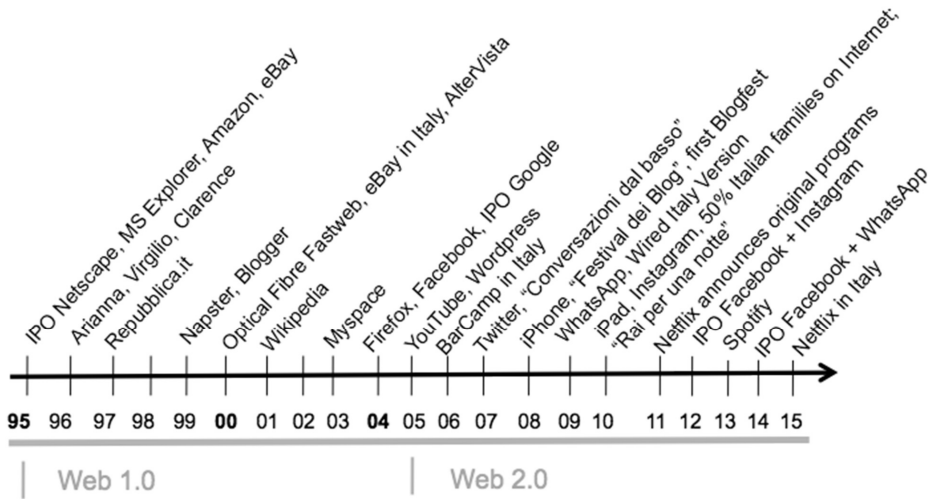
The web 1.0 stage is marked by thousands of users-clients relating to a limited number of supplier-servers in order to gain free or paid access to content, according to a model of web broadcastization[26]. In a broader overview, 1995 was the year which marked, both symbolically and literally, the start of commercial Internet, with Netscapes's stock exchange listing, the appearance of search engines, and the first mass trading sites like Amazon and eBay. This led to the dot-com public rhetoric, which was to see a slump in market confidence in 2001. In Italy, 1996 saw the birth of Arianna, the first Italian search engine, and Virgilio, the first Italian directory, with less than 3% of Italian families accessing the Internet: it was not until 2010 that half of all Italian families had access (52.4%, Istat data). The same year saw the formation of the first online Italian community around the Clarence information portal, founded by Roberto Grassilli and Gianluca Neri who shared a common background in satirical writing for the weekly magazine, Cuore, which influenced their approach to the new project.

In 2005, with the well-knowndefinition of web 2.0[27], a new discourse emerged which increasingly described the web as a participatory platform enabling users to produce and distribute content. In Italy this rhetoric first started circulating in 2006 in the self-summoning form of BarCamps enabling bloggers and web enthusiasts to meet from time to time in different places to discuss specific issues. This practice was accorded early visibility and social legitimacy through interest in academic circles, with events like "Conversazioni dal basso" (2007) and the "Festival dei Blog" (2008), organized by the Science of Communication faculty at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo, which saw the attendance of researchers, bloggers and the public, discussing social media questions and sharing experiences. This cultural phenomenon strengthened its hold in 2008 with the first Blogfest, held at Riva del Garda, where a single stage hosted everything that revolves around the net, especially blogs, social networking and communities. It was

[26] G. Balbi, P. Magaudda, *Storia dei media digitali. Rivoluzioni e continuità*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2014.
[27] T. O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0. Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software", 2005, http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html.

sponsored principally by Windows Live and Telecom Italia, whose CEO, Franco Bernabè, was present to confirm the importance of the event and to discuss the new digital Italy with bloggers. The mainstream dimension of web 2.0, its determination to gain popularity by appealing to experts and non-experts alike, was reflected in the event's "night-of-the-oscars" evening, devoted to the "Macchianera Blog Awards"[28], with prizes going to various categories decided on by the users who took part in the nomination and chose the winners online.

But 2009 was the year when web 2.0 gained substance and visibility through more widespread forms of appropriating social networking sites[29] and the production and sharing of content. It is the starting point for a preliminary "evenemential" investigation[30], beginning with an annual analysis tracing the complexity of the evolutionary trend marking the social presence of social media between 2009 – when the social web first emerged as a real talking point in Italy – and 2014 – when the processes of disintermediation, furthered by the adoption and spread of digital technologies, were confirmed (Censis 2015), as we have seen, as exercising acountercyclical action in the face of economic recession (Fig. 1). Indeed, it is by holding to the short-term view, with a evenemential dimension, that we can see how certain events not only alert the public, users and society to an ongoing transformation, but consolidate and extend it.

In 2009, web 2.0 gained a higher profile in the public sphere, too, with the Italian high school diploma exam containing a question on "Social network, the Internet, new media", and the first issue of the monthly magazine, "Wired Italy", which deals with innovation and digital culture and proves that these subjects are less of a niche interest and now enjoy a far broader appeal. We can see 2009 as the year when connectivity took on the guise of "friendship", when the social networks sites discarded the traces of elitism associated with early adopters (often blogosphere users) in favour of greater heterogeneity. From a cultural viewpoint, everyday conversations and "domestic" practices were increasingly influenced by social networking realities: there was talk of tracing old friends thanks to social networks sites, of one's newsagent starting up a group on Facebook, of receiving "friendship" requests which needed to be thought about before accepting or rejecting, of the frustration of discovering that an acquaintance had been on Facebook for some time without asking for your friendship, and so on[31].

2010 saw the rapid growth of practices aimed at personalizing the use of the media, a trend reflected in collective experiences in connectivity milieux. It was in March of that year that the media event, "Rai per una notte", was held. It was the brainchild of the journalist, Michele Santoro, in collaboration with the Italian National Press Federation (FNSI) and the Union of Rai Journalists (USIGRai),in protest at the top-level Rai decision to suspend broadcasting political talk shows in the lead up to the regional elections. It also marked the first attempt at crowdfunding an Italian production, with five thousand people contributing €2.50 a head to make the programme. It was broadcast live from the "PalaDozza" stadium in Bologna by national and local analogue and digital

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[28] The MBA were started in 2006 with the Italian multi-author blog, "Macchianera", founded by Gianluca Neri, patron of Blogfest and later of the Festa della Rete.
[29] Facebook, which is the most popular, is known to 90.3% of youngsters and YouTube, the most used, by 67.8% – Censis data.
[30] The analysis takes account of structural data from the annual Istat reports, "Cittadini e nuove tecnologie", from the annual "Rapporto Censis-Ucsi sulla comunicazione", and ethnographic data from online and offline self- and hetero-observation, collected and commented in the blog mediamondo.wordpress.com which since 2004 has been a data analysis centre for social and cultural changes linked to digital innovation.
[31] https://mediamondo.wordpress.com/2009/02/03/facebook-e-lascesa-della-cyberborghesia-1/.

broadcasters, in streaming via the web, on online news sites and on giant screens set up in city squares. It was the first event to involve the networked publics[32] on such a scale. As we read on Twitter: "@ezekial: never seen anything like it in Italy, we're at nearly 4000 tweets an hour, people abroad are wondering what's going on here #raiperunanotte […] for Iran we were around 3000-4000, for disasters like Haiti or Chile from 5000 to 8000 […] @ezekiel: by the end of Luttazzi's monologue, 5700 tweets an hour, I think it's an absolute record in italian"[33]. It was an event which can fairly be described as a dress rehearsalfor what will become Italian social television.

The rhetoric on the forms of "connected personalization" comes to signify "participation" in the course of 2011, the year in which a revocatory referendum was held on two issues: one concerning local public services of economic importance and the other about the setting of water rates. We witnessed the development of a mutual account, in the media and among Italian citizens, of a return to forms of participation which seemed to be channelled through the web: 83.8% acknowledged that Internet allowed everybody to express themselves freely (94.1% among young people); the web was considered a powerful aid to democracy (according to 76.9%, and 82.9% of young people – 2011 Censis data). Commenting on the referendum results, the *Il Sole 24 Ore* newspaper ran the headline: "Referendum, the Facebook and Twitter generation makes itself heard"[34]. It was an account which emphasized how social networks –in that mingling of connectivity power and development of mass interpersonal relations – acted as a spur to participation, revealed a social climate conducive to involvement, and successfully relaunched information by using language which was less politicized and could relate to the everyday lives of young people through their network walls. A lot of people followed the referendum extremely closely, certainly not because of mass media coverage, but through friends who conscientiously tagged in notes, invited on pages, wrote on Facebook walls, persuaded to put badges on personal profile photos, or sent videos in support[35].

Online and offline media collapse was experienced by Italians for much of 2012, in the shape of networked conversations on the earthquake in Emilia Romagna, the first disaster in which Twitter played a major role in disseminating content, eye-witness accounts, and controversies[36].

The participatory rhetoric was further reinforced between 2013 and 2014, the year in which the social networks sites werw invaded by a critical mass of Italians and the Internet continued to gain ground as a vital means of participating in the social and political life of the country. The experience of the 2013 Italian general election led political observers and journalists to reflect on the function of the social web, and Twitter in particular, as a thermometer to measure voters' possible choices[37], to the point of describing it as "the first 2.0 election"[38]. The main candidates and parties opened their campaigns and bolstered them according to a logic of disintermediation, exploiting the connected

[32] D. Boyd, "Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications", in *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites* (ed. Zizi Papacharissi), 2010: 39-58.

[33] https://mediamondo.wordpress.com/2010/03/.

[34] http://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/notizie/2011-06-14/referendum-generazione-facebook-twitter-160126.shtml?uuid=AaVaCmfD.

[35] http://www.apogeonline.com/webzine/2011/06/21/lo-scarto-culturale-che-si-inizia-a-percepire.

[36] https://mediamondo.wordpress.com/2012/05/20/il-terremoto-che-corre-su-twitter-tacendo-i-media-tra-fatti-e-testimonianze-organizzate-dalla-timeline/.

[37] G. Boccia Artieri, "Un tweet non fa l'elettore", in *Un salto nel voto. Ritratto politico dell'Italia di oggi*, edited by I. Diamanti, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2013, 167-182.

[38] Press agency AdnKronos, 27 February 2013.

spaces through a participatory rhetoric which aimed at a more direct relationship with the citizen-voter, with a possible media return for every tweet or Facebook post. The real novelty was the appearance for the first time in a general election of the 5 Star Movement which had chosen to be web-centred and developed an ideology of the web and its potentialities to the extent of treating it as a utopia where the answers are to be found to all the Italians' new needs. This continued to be given widespread coverage in the general media even after the election campaign.

But political communication seems to have developed less through the "strength of the web" than through the dynamics of personalization and television presence, boosted by the practice of the double screen and social television. If we analyze the bulk of online conversations about the general election, we find that the evening TV debates, their repercussions the following day and the related #hashtags were the real driving force propelling the campaign issues. Or, rather, the election programme issues were left in the shade by comparison with the politics and fandom polarizations over the candidates. The TV-centric culture of Italian politics and its pop character[39] warmed to the social networks as places of informative entertainment and discovered a perfect environment in which to take root, ideally compatible with content dictated by the television. This culture was enhanced by two drivers: online accounts of televisiontalk showswhich, in 2013, developed strategies aimed at engaging the networked publics (suggesting #hashtags, stimulating conversations, launching summaries and questions for the audience during thelive programme); and the newspaper journalistswho follow the TV talk shows, relay them via Twitter accounts for their readers.

But it was precisely in this climate of enthusiasm for web engagement that we witnessed the emergence of a parallel, antithetical attitude of Italians critical of the rhetoric of web participation, especially over political questions. In fact, only 19.8% noted improvements in citizen participation due to the new media, while only 15% thought that the expansion of digital technologies had brought about improvements that year in the organization of political movements (35.3% detected a deterioration) and the forming of political opinions (28.8% felt there had been a regression – Census data).

Disintermediation was more marked in 2014, encouraged by the spread and adoption of digital technologies which the Italians used – again, in acountercyclical logic *vis-à-vis* the recession – for goods and services, holiday purchases, cultural visits and car insurance.

5. CONCLUSIONS: CONNECTED MEDIA PERSONALIZATION

As we have seen, the Internet, social media and mobile services are jointly accountable for producing disruptive innovation in Italian life, due to their ecosystem ability to significantly alter both market and cultural dimensions. For about a decade now, the idea of "disruption" has been a familiar issue in discourses concerning social media and personal digital devices[40]. Digital's power to transform has been analyzed in various social spheres: from journalism to music publishing, from the assets and services market to the

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[39] G. Mazzoleni, A. Sfardini, *Politica pop. Da "Porta a Porta" a "L'isola dei famosi"*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009.
[40] R.H. Jones, A. Chik, C. Hafner, eds., *Discourse and Digital Practices: Doing Discourse Analysis in the Digital Age*, New York: Routledge, 2015.

educational system etc.[41]. These are the discourses which bear witness to the growth of power structures and the logic of dominion which "the digital turn" has produced. This meaning reflects Foucault's notion of discourse as an historical and cultural product of systems of knowledge and belief which shape our behaviour and are, in turn, shaped by it[42]. What we have to engage with is therefore communicative action based on practices: indeed, it is on the level of media practices that we can see how digital media work on social contexts and situations and how they interact with other social practices[43].

In this sense this essay is overcoming the dichotomy between the "manipulative" and "democratization" theses about digital media analyzing the culture of connectivity through an historical approach of media periodization and the frame of mediatization, thus identifying a co-evolution between the social structure and the organization of mediated communication. This approach has allowed us to identify connections between media diffusion and mutations in the political and socio-economical fields, as well as in culture and values. In particular this research shows how digital technologies in Italy has a countercyclical function, in terms of investment in technology and in growing disintermediation practices which has constituted a response, both effective and symbolic, to the recession.

Tackling the question of digital change in Italy has therefore involved pitching the analysis at a level capable of reconciling the divergences of a double vision: one that takes into account both the reality of the practices *with* digital – which generate discourse on *disruption* – and the mediation processes enacted *by* digital, because this is the sphere in which we find the forms of symbolic appropriation which lead us to reinterpret media technologies, and it is through the media that social discourses and meanings are circulated and shaped[44].

It is not to much to say that what we find "disruptive" about the digital transformation is due to hindsight which mainly registers the evolutionary discontinuities which typify not merely a change in the business models, but also – and principally – a social and cultural transformation. But we know how, at one and the same time, digital contains within itself both features indicating a break with the past and others which point to a continuity which can sometimes assume conservative traits[45]. Hence the need, as explained in the introduction, to adopt an interpretative stance capable of historicizing the interweaving of the technical, cultural and social dimensions. With that in mind, it is important to contextualize the "conservative media revolution"[46] – as a relationship between techno-media evolution and pratices –within a framework which allows us to register this complex transformational result, taking into account the relation between the long term and epiphenomena. In this article, that framework is provided by the me-

[41] J. Jarvis, *What Would Google Do?*, London: Collins, 2009; G. Granieri, *Umanità accresciuta. Come la tecnologia ci sta cambiando*, Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2009; K., Jahangir, W. Zhiping, "The Role of Dynamic Capabilities in Responding to Digital Disruption: A Factor-Based Study of the Newspaper Industry", *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 32, 1 (2015): 39-81; P. Wikstrom, R. De Fillippi, eds., *Business Innovation and Disruption in the Music Industry*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2016.

[42] M. Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I. La Volonté de savoir*, Paris: Gallimard, 1976.

[43] N. Couldry, *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*, Cambridge, England: Polity, 2012

[44] R. Silverstone, *Why Study the Media?*, London: Sage, 1999; F. Colombo, *Introduzione allo studio dei media. I mezzi di comunicazione fra tecnologia e cultura*, Rome: Carocci, 2003.

[45] Balbi, Magaudda, *Storia dei media digitali*.

[46] A. Fickers, "The Emergence of Television as a Conservative Media Revolution: Historicising a Process of Remediation in the Post-War Western European Mass Media Ensemble", *Journal of Modern European History*, 10, 1 (2012): 49-75.

diatization used through a periodization approach to digital evolution in Italy which has enabled us to detect – in the context of a long-term perspective on the digital age – the countercyclical role of digital in Italy which, especially in the mid-period, both fostered and characterized the transition from web 1.0 to web 2.0. More specifically, by adopting a short-term, evenemential logic to analyze the time span from 2009 to 2014, it has proved possible to trace the way in which the mediatization of the social tie, achieved by the diffusion of web 2.0 in Italy, resulted in a swift transition from a rhetoric of "friendship" to a rhetoric of "participation" which was widely perceived as becoming, in a political sense, increasingly critical. This all took place within a context in which the principle of disintermediation and personalization worked by the webcoexists alongside a collective imagery which is still TV-centred. In this sense, the countercyclical role of the web appears to have been of decisive importance in forging a social tie.This tie exemplifies, not so much a collectivist type of participation, as individualized approaches to disintermediation – disintermediation which assumes the form of "connected media personalization" in the twin senses of:

a) acquiring increasingly personal access devicesin working out one's own media, information and communication diets, in connection with others. The social network sites, in particular, are used not merely to manage relations with one's network of friends, but as a means of taking part in civic life, with a fifth of all users taking an active interest in politics and social questions and expressing their views online, and 10.4% taking an active part in online voting (2014 Istat data);

b) uses and consumptions that take account of growing media hybridization which creates a continuity between mainstream and non-mainstream, in which media experiences related to information and entertainment steadily produce forms of convergence and integration[47] (e.g. social television practices[48]) and equivalent alternatives (e.g. watching network television, but also practising streaming). This is achieved in the course of a developing relationship – at once visible and self-aware – between persons-publics, by means of alternate practices of synchronous and asynchronous communication.

Thus, if mediatization is the frame within which contemporary experience is shaped, it is also true that this meta-process is observable both in the evolving context of society and its fields of operation and in the media practices, which denote how the web is perceived and used by individuals, according to the approaches which this article has sought to identify.

[47] L. Barra, M. Scaglioni, "TV Goes Social. Italian Broadcasting Strategies and the Challenges of Convergence", *Journal of European Television History and Culture* , 3, 6 (2014): 110-124.

[48] A. Marinelli, R. Andò, "Multiscreening and Social TV. The Changing Landscape of TV Consumption in Italy", *Journal of European Television History and Culture* , 3, 6 (2014): 24-36; F. Giglietto, G. Boccia Artieri, L. Gemini, M. Orefice, "Understanding Engagement and Willingness to Speak Up in Social Television: A Full-Season, Cross-Genre Analysis of TV Audience Participation on Twitter", *International Journal of Communication*, 10 (2016): 2460-2480.