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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1727124 since 2022-10-02T09:58:38Z

Published version:

DOI:10.1080/1369118X.2019.1645193

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12 October 2024

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Transmedia teens: the creative transmedia skills of Italian students

The objective of this article is to analyse the extent of creativity and autonomy of Italian teenagers' digital media practices and to link it to the new transmedia skills developed within their favourite digital environments (social media, video games, participatory cultures). The data studied emerged from the Transmedia Literacy project (European Commission-Horizon 2020) which involved eight countries from three continents: Spain, Australia, Colombia, Finland, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay. Through the analysis of information gathered with multiple methodologies (survey, in-depth interviews, workshops and media diaries), the article explores both the consuming and producing media practices of Italian teenagers and the ways in which they are connected with emerging transmedia skills (Guerrero-Pico, Masanet, & Scolari, 2019; Scolari, 2018a, 2018b). The data shows that Italian teenagers may still be considered quite traditional media users: their creative participation is limited and often they merely imitate or remix others' works, acting as "functional prosumers" rather than "critical prosumers" (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011). The outcome of the research reveals teenagers' meta-reflexive approach to media, an approach that seems to regulate and restrict their attitude towards creating and, above all, exposing their own creativity online. At the same time, teens demonstrate the acquisition of new and creative skills related, in particular, to the mechanisms of media industry and self-management.

Keywords: transmedia, teens, creativity, media skills, participation, web 2.0

Introduction

Participatory culture is characterised, above all, by how it allows users to experience complex consumption processes, encompassing various formats typified by the same content and involving a high level of autonomy and engagement (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006; Lange & Ito, 2010; Manovich, 2009).

New transmedia practices arise, related to how teenagers produce, consume, evaluate and interpret contents that evolve across books, videogames, TV series, films, music, etc. and across multiple social media and social networking sites (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013; Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2015; Scolari, 2009, 2013). In this context, an emergent transmedia literacy can be highlighted, that could be understood as "a set of skills, practices, values, priorities, sensibilities, and learning/sharing strategies developed and applied within the context of the new participatory cultures" (Scolari, 2018a, p.15).The paper studies the transmedia practices of Italian teenagers in depth, in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: to what extent do Italian teenagers activate creativity in such practices?

RQ2: what are the skills and informal learning strategies linked to both their media consuming and producing practices?

RQ3: what are the reasons, obstacles and facilitators that, at present, seem to influence such practices and skills?

The analysis is based on the Italian results of the Transmedia Literacy project[1], which was carried out from 2015 to 2018 in eight countries over three continents: Spain, Australia, Colombia, Finland, Italy, Portugal, the United Kingdom and Uruguay. The aim of the project was to understand how young boys and girls acquire transmedia skills in informal learning settings and how these skills can be used in schools. Thus the paper, by presenting the main results of the Italian fieldwork, aims to contribute to the pivotal debate on how to connect the issue of competence deriving from the formal and

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[1] TRANSLITERACY – 645238 / Horizon 2020 – Research and Innovation actions. Further information at the page: www.transmedialiteracy.org. The members of the Italian unit of the project were Simona Tirocchi and Gabriella Taddeo, all the presented analyzes are the result of the work of both researchers. In writing this contribution, Simona Tirocchi is responsible for the paragraphs " Introduction", " Methods" and "Results"; Gabriella Taddeo is responsible of the paragraphs "The challenging concept of digital creativity and participation", "Discussion. From consumption to creation, between social and self-control", and "Conclusions".

institutional world with the informal sphere of adolescents, their leisure time and their daily media practices (Eshach, 2007; Williamson, 2013).

The challenging concept of digital creativity and participation

The issues of the digital practices of teenagers and the implications thereof in shaping new skills have attracted increasing attention in the media studies agenda.

Ito et al.'s study (2008) showed three genres of participation that involve "new media" skills amongst youths, which are oriented to teenagers' ways of learning in non-formal and informal education contexts; these are: *hanging out, messing around*, and *geeking out.* Hanging out is characterised by a non-purposive way of learning new media skills, mostly among peers. Messing around implies a more self-directed way of learning based on trial by error as when beginning a new videogame or activating a new smartphone, or trying a new downloaded app; it is a way of tinkering and exploration. Geeking out is related to a more purposeful way of learning, as they engage with media and technology in an intense, autonomous, and interest-driven way to develop skills or to know more about something, by seeking advice and collaboration among peers.

Creation and media participation have also been increasingly highlighted as pivotal skills by policy makers and institutions, as proved by the Digcomp 2.0 framework (Carretero, Vuorikari, & Punie, 2017) as well as the map of 21st- century skills by the World Economic Forum (2015), in which creativity advanced its ranking as one of the top skills. The *DigCompEdu Framework* (Carretero et al., 2017), for example, described some specific digital educational goals, proposing 22 elementary abilities organised in six areas, which are: *Professional Engagement*; *Digital Resources*; *Teaching and Learning*; *Assessment*; *Empowering Learners*; *Facilitating Learners' Digital Competence*.

To provide another point of view, several scholars (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006; Jenkins, Ito, & boyd, 2015; Lankshear & Knobel, 2007) investigated criteria to understand the quality of the contributions coming from participatory practices, as well as the sets of skills, values and impact in connection with the social, cultural and civic growth of teenagers.

New forms of participation and media production have thus been explored from a critical perspective, questioning, for example, the access and distribution of such skills in relation to social gaps (Eynon & Geniets, 2016; Livingstone, 2013; Schradie, 2011; van Deursen & van Dijk, 2014; van Dijk, 2009), their real impact on social and civic engagement, as well as the effects of remixing on individual creativity (Jenkins et al., 2015).

According to Jaron Lanier (2010), for example: "Pop culture has entered a nostalgic malaise. Online culture is dominated by trivial mashups of the culture that existed before the onset of mashups, and by fandom responding to the dwindling outposts of centralised mass media. It is a culture of reaction without action" (p. 20). Therefore, according to the author, digital media can actually hinder, rather than help, creativity.

Starting from this theoretical framework, the aim of the paper is to analyse a specific aspect of teenagers' consumption patterns, namely the amount of creativity and autonomy performed by Italian teenagers through their practices of media consumption and production, highlighting the main transmedia skills which emerge from such behaviours and, on the other hand, obstacles and facilitators that may limit (or favour) a participatory approach.

Methods

The methodology of the "Transliteracy" project was designed in relation to the necessity to observe and analyse media practices within contexts of fruition as close

to reality as possible. In fact, the communicative practices of young people are increasingly complex and it is difficult to fully understand audiences' processes or study the way in which they use and rework media content (boyd, 2010, 2015). For this reason, the research developed a mainly qualitative methodology as well as designing a specific methodology based on ethnographic strategies that aimed to reveal the transmedia practices of teenagers (Pink & Ardévol, 2018). The methodology consists of several stages:

1. *Questionnaires* with semi-structured questions on the media consumption of teenagers and their opinions/attitudes regarding a few aspects of media content (97 Italian students involved);
2. *Workshops* on participatory cultures and videogames (16 workshops involving 103 students). The workshops were designed according to a multimethod approach, including quick ethnography (Handwerker, 2001), participatory design methods (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Halse & Boffi, 2016), visual-sensory ethnography (Ardévol, 2012; Pink, 2014), and design ethnography. The workshops were held in specially-prepared spaces in schools and not in classrooms. During the workshops, the moderators proposed creative/productive activities to the teenagers. For example, in the workshop on "participatory cultures", the teenagers were asked to invent a story using different materials or tools, while in the one dedicated to "video games" the researchers organised a game of *Trivial Pursuit* based on questions relating to video games, designed and invented by the teenagers themselves. This made it possible to observe the teenagers' media production practices in real time, especially in

group contexts, in which continuous negotiation and discussion are necessary.

3. *In-depth interviews* on the relationship that teenagers have established with participatory cultures and video games (39 students). The interviews explored three parallel areas: participatory culture, videogame culture, and social media practices.
4. *Media diaries* compiled by the teenagers on a weekly basis (24 students). The diary is intended to report teenagers' media routines, for example, when communicating with family and friends across different social media. The diaries were completed in paper form by the teens who were asked to write short sentences about their personal media experiences.
5. Online observation of teenagers' favourite websites, media celebrities, and online communities. Each country chose a digital environment to analyse (e.g. Instagram, Wattpad). In this specific phase, the project followed the short-term ethnography approach (Pink & Morgan, 2013).

Table 1 shows a summary of the research phases, providing the distribution of participants.

Table 1: The sampling scheme in Italy

In Italy, the research project involved four schools. The schools were selected based on two criteria: 1) the geographical location of the schools: schools located in large urban centres and those located in non-metropolitan areas; 2) the technological level of the schools, with reference to factors such as the availability of infrastructure and technologies and previous involvement in projects focusing on digital technologies.

For data analysis the team relied on *NVivo 11 Pro For Teams*, a server-based software for qualitative data analysis, useful for organising, storing and retrieving data in different sets of sources, and which allows several users to work simultaneously.

Different kinds of multimedia source materials (such as photos of the billboards used during the workshops to present teens' media preferences) were combined into units of observation (*cases*) and analytical matrices have been created by cross-matching and merging data into *nodes*, so that the combination and comparison of nodes allowed the team to identify the skills both from a country-based perspective (the data referring to a single country) as well as from a cross-country vision (obtained from the analysis of the entire sample, including all countries).

Results

At the international level, the research team identified nine "transmedia skills" which refer to the complex system of digital media, social media, and videogames consumption and to the ability to connect and synthesize these practices into a new transmedia culture (Davies & Eynon, 2018; Guerrero-Pico, Masanet, & Scolari, 2018; Pereira et al., 2018). Using NVivo, the team identified general, cross-country skills: *production, risk prevention, performance, social management, individual management, content management, media and technology, ideology and ethics, narrative and aesthetics;* 44 subskills and 190 specific abilities. Furthermore, each country identified specific transmedia skills which reflect and interpret the cultural characteristics of the national context.

The presentation of the research results, focusing on the Italian context, is organized in two sections: in the first paragraph we will present data about teens' media consumption (quantitative data from the survey and qualitative data from interviews,

workshops and media diaries), while the second paragraph discusses the map of Italian teens' transmedia skills (qualitative data).

Media consumption

By analysing the collected data, we were able to observe a model of "passive" and conventional media use, allowing us to provide answers to the RQ1. The intention is not to necessarily attribute negative connotations to this term, but to stress that many Italian teenagers prefer to interact with media "as spectators" rather than as "creators of contents". Among teenagers, even those most accustomed to using digital technologies (and perhaps to using them creatively) also use conventional media. For example, Italian teenagers still watch a lot of television on traditional sets, even if they also watch TV series and films online.

Data from the Italian survey shows that most teens participate moderately in production activities. In general, teenagers seem to produce content, but they are less keen to publish their works excessively: 74% of respondents from the survey say they think twice before uploading a personal photo on the Internet, 46% of respondents think about the possible impact of uploading personal videos to the internet. If we consider a typical creative activity as making a video and posting it online, we observe that only 6% of teenagers say they enjoy doing so; however, the percentage rises to 10% when they are in the company of friends.

Among those users who are active producers, the quantitative data highlights that the most widespread creative practices are "sharing things with friends" (60% of teens like it) and "posting photos online" (33%).

Qualitative data, from media diaries and interviews, give more details on RQ1.

Social network sites are the most relevant digital environment, but it must be observed that, according to media diaries, teens dedicate a lot of their daily routine to

checking the notifications on their social profiles, in particular on WhatsApp and Instagram. Furthermore, the majority of teenagers stated that their main activity is watching the flow of online contents on social networks, rather than uploading original artefacts. An upper secondary school student from the province of Turin gives us an example: "I look at my notifications, if something has popped up... I don't know, invitations to events, that's really the only thing I look at. Then I look at... maybe the photos of evenings out that my friends post as well" [A, female, 15 years].

Moreover, traditional media content often represents an intergenerational bridge, constituting a common platform of use and conversation with parents and siblings. In this regard, one of the girls interviewed spoke of how she watches a Spanish soap opera with her mother: "I watch it as soon as I get home from school because it's on at that time. One day my mum wanted to see what I was watching, so we watched it together and I liked it" [T., female, 13].

Another example regards a secondary school student [M., female, 13 years] who regularly plays videogames with her father, using a "peer-to-peer" approach where there is no direct competition: "when we play together we collaborate so we can finish the level …" In this perspective, the girl's father plays with his daughter for purely recreation reasons.

In other instances, content (for example talent shows) is watched by young individuals for the purpose of imitation, as the programmes bring to life the dreams and aspirations of those watching. Reality shows, nevertheless, are appreciated as a macro-genre that also includes docu-reality and docu-drama shows and that has become one of the distinctive elements of consumption by teenagers.

Finally, the data show that this kind of media consumption is more relevant amongst females than males, as well as amongst older teens compared to the 11-13 age group.

But is teens' media consumption so passive? Are there any signals of active and creative behaviour amongst teens?

In the following section we will discuss the map of transmedia skills identified in the Italian research, where we can find some traces of a more creative approach to the media.

Transmedia skills

Starting from the existing theoretical frames, the fieldwork and suggestions gathered helped the research team build a comprehensive map of transmedia skills, expanded and updated compared to the previous ones.

Beyond the cross-country skills identified in the project, the Italian team found the following five main transmedia skills which were typical of the Italian sample:

1. reinventing some rules of the media industry;
2. playing videogames in a social way;
3. experimenting with creativity;
4. creating new ethical strategies;
5. managing mediated and non-mediated identity.

This paragraph will take an in-depth look at these skills and further analyse the relative subskills in order to answer RQ2 and RQ3.

Reinventing some rules of the media industry

These skills refer to the way in which teens approach the reading/writing practices subverting the traditional book industry rules, in several ways. We observed these practices and skills in particular during the ethnographic analysis on Wattpad, that is an online community of writers and readers where young people, especially, choose to read a book based on their own personal preferences.

The first specific skill within the main skill is "to experience a kind of bottom-up review" (see table 2). Teens take part in constructive criticism by adding comments to the text, giving the author suggestions about adjusting the plot, as well as proofreading for syntax and style. Thus, the review process is not meant as an attack or criticism against the authors, but rather to give them advice through simple interaction methods and a diplomatic use of language: as suggested by one of the girls interviewed "the first comment that was written to me is this: 'nice idea but the verbs are wrong'. In any case they told me my 'punctuation is nice and okay' " [A., F, 16 years].

Furthermore, teens do not limit themselves merely to a quality assessment of the media product but tend to participate emotionally in stories, collaborating empathically with the writing and revision processes.

Other subskills are related to the development of personal literary tastes: the ability to proclaim the success of a work without reference to the authority of teachers, parents or other influencers, as well as creating global communities of readers who are open-minded and interested in different cultures (e.g. Korean, South American). Finally, some teens who produce stories are also able to understand and lead several marketing strategies, to promote their works online.

Table 2: Skills and subskills about the rules of the media industry (Source: Transmedia literacy, data from the Italian context)

Playing videogames in a social way

Videogames develop many skills strictly connected to the management of identity and social relationships. From this point of view, video games help to face fear and conflicts (especially offline) and give suggestions about the creation and management of rules and behaviours. In the analysis of the relationship between teens and video games,

we can observe the central role of *Youtubers*. An emerging cultural consumption amongst teenagers is, in fact, watching *Youtubers* playing: this would fall under the sub-skill "mixing passive and active entertainment" (see Table 3). During this activity, teens mix broadcast entertainment (watching *Youtubers* game performances) with moments of participation and imitation where they are both active consumers and producers (they make online comments, for example, or chat together). The *Youtuber* is a mediator between individual and social spheres of emotion; one that allows a sort of "social ritual of the emotion" and dynamics of identification. Furthermore, since everyday life offers us few occasions to experience the full range of emotions, videogames help youngsters feel them and experiment with the consequences.

In this group of skills we can find the specific sub-skill "breaking the rules", referring to crossing boundaries that is difficult in real life as well as coping and exploring with negative emotions such as fear, frustration in losing, the temptation to cheat.

In the game *Need for Speed* (in which players race with cars even in a clandestine way), players are able to go so far as to destroy objects or other cars on the track: "the police chase you but don't try to stop you: I am shaking with fear but I don't stop. I could never actually do this in real life" [L., female, 13 years].

Table 3: Skills and subskills in playing (Source: Transmedia literacy, data from the Italian context)

Experimenting with "social" creativity

New forms of creativity are highlighted, mainly based on remixing content from varying sources: for example, the reinterpretation of aesthetical and communicative styles given by *Youtubers, Instagrammers, Wattpadders* and the adaptation of them to their own situation and to the specific contexts. Teens adopt an interactive and "participatory"

design of their own productions (e.g. *Snapchat* videos, *Wattpad* works, *Tumblr* memes), asking for friends to comment, revise and tweak their work, from an external point of view. In this sense, creativity also means having a certain social awareness in deciding which audience to address, starting with closer circles of friends and gradually broadening their horizons.

A specific skill is the ability to transfer online information into practical tips for improving life, for example creating and watching tutorials according to a *Do-It-Yourself practice*: make-up, bricolage, kitchen ideas, but more unusual ideas are also transferred from the screen to reality.

Table 4: Skills and subskills in creativity (Source: Transmedia literacy, data from the Italian context)

Creating new ethical strategies

Teens work unconsciously to create and share moral and ethical issues that they discuss in an informal way. They face ethical issues by using, for example, irony, parodies, memes or "challenges": they often convey their point of view in the debate against sexual or racial stereotypes or other controversial issues.

Challenges, for example, are performances in which users film themselves taking on a dare and then distribute the video through social media sites, often inspiring or nominating other users to repeat the challenge. For example, the *Ice Bucket Challenge* (a social media event described by the teens of our research) was a charity-driven effort where one person "tags" three other people over social media, inviting them to douse themselves with a bucket of ice-cold water, in order to achieve awareness of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), or to donate money to the *ALS Association*.

Through challenges, the use of irony and even funny memes, teens develop "ironic and funny approaches as strategies for also delivering strong ethical issues in a socially-accepted way" (see table 5).

Table 5: Skills and subskills in ethics (Source: Transmedia literacy, data from the Italian context)

Management of online and offline identity

This transmedia skill reveals the strategic role of the media in the management of teens' identities. In some cases, media production and belonging to a media community is a strategy for coping with intimate unrest - seeking new strategies to receive help, support and empathy. A specific sub-skill in this group is "managing unrest through creative production" (see Table 6). For some of the interviewed teens, Wattpad is the right place to look for support from the peer group, to trust that particular sense of unease and discomfort. Alexandra [female 16 years] wrote a collection of stories regarding teenage problems (Self-harm - Anorexia - Bulimia - Depression - Love) that she used to encourage herself and her peers: "Yes, as I fought and struggled all the time, I would write it in all my comments: keep on fighting!"

Furthermore, youngsters know very well what behavioural codes are suitable for each digital environment: they model their behaviour according to such rules.

Table 6: Skills and subskills in identity management (Source: Transmedia literacy, data from the Italian context)

Discussion. From consumption to creation, between social and self-control

The results have shown that some elements can be highlighted in response to the research questions while others can be added in this discussion section.

Regarding which consumer attitudes are developed by young people in transmedia practices (RQ1), we can summarize that they appear to prefer consumption to the direct production of online content: sharing by online activists is, in fact, the minority. Youth digital practices, however, contain various aspects of activism, aimed above all at interpreting creativity as a social tool. This appears coherent with much literature on online sociality (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012) and also with the theoretical assumptions of research regarding transmedia practices (Black, Castro, & Lin, 2015 Jenkins et al., 2006; Sefton-Green, 2011).

Regarding RQ2 on the skills behind such practices, we can underline that there are two informal skills that most commonly and transversally connect Italian teenagers: the *knowledge of the media industry* and the *management of self through digital media*. Teens seem to develop a huge knowledge of the media and marketing rules of the participatory and transmedia cultures, and to learn how to use these rules for positioning themselves at individual and social level.

These skills also appear to be intertwined at the complex set of motivations and constraints which teens experience during online participation (RQ3).

Many teens, for example, love to play together by making short videos, as for example parodies of their parents and teachers, or little video challenges, but they usually do it merely for personal entertainment; they don't consider it "video making" and they don't upload them online, preferring to share them between themselves.

E., for instance, says: “when [my friend and I] are together, we love to make parodies of our mums, imitating the style of *Pantellas* Youtubers. We laugh a lot, but we don’t show them to anybody, we just make them to laugh at ourselves” [E, female, 14 years old].

The reasons for which teenagers say they produce very little differ, ranging from practical to mainly social and cultural reasons.

One practical reason that was often quoted was linked to an increasing lack of free time as teenagers got older. In particular, high school students stated that the older they get, the less time they have to devote to media, dedicating more time to school commitments and real-world rather than virtual socialising. In this respect, M. says: “When I was little, I was obsessed with video games. I spent all day online, playing online with other people, participating in forums; fortunately, I now have other things to do… school is hard work, I go out with friends” [M., male, 17].

Furthermore, in the 12-14 age bracket, digital production is considered more as a ludic and self-expressive activity, while older teens tend to consider it more seriously, as a “professional” activity, and thus to feel more social pressure toward self-censorship as “amateur” producers.

Social factors also have a pivotal role in regulating the creative processes and, in particular, teens’ sharing online. Pressure by peers and parents to be “modest” and not expose oneself too much is very strong in Italian culture and also influences teenagers to limit self-exposure online. This is coherent with recent literature which highlights an emerging sensibility towards the risk of online vulnerability, defined as a detrimental experience at the psychological, reputational and physical wellbeing level, as a result of online activities (Gui, Fasoli & Carradore, 2017; Turkle, 2011).

It is also confirmed by other recent anthropological research about the Italian context (Nicolescu, 2016) in which it emerges that parents play a fairly important role in setting both symbolic and material limits on direct media exposure. For example, in the type of situations as shown below, the dynamics of self-censorship appear quite evident:

"For example, [my parents] don't want me to publish photos that are too ... well, for example, if I have photos with my friends or, for example, with my boyfriend, I'm not allowed to publish them if they're … if we're too close" [F., female 17 years].

[Interviewer] "If you're kissing, things like that?"

"Yes, but not even for my friends. Also because they [my parents] say that if two or three years later you change boyfriend because you don't like him anymore, and then people say: look who she's with now; she's changed boyfriend again. It's quite logical really".

[Interviewer] "So they make you delete it?"

"Yes, but it's not me who publishes them."

In some cases, peer pressure is also a factor: exposing yourself online, boasting more or less explicitly about what you're doing, where you are, how you're dressed and revealing parts of your body for the purpose of being liked, are all considered uncool ways to communicate or act socially by many of the interviewees, both males and females, with no distinction of age.

For example, D. [male, 16, Italy] says: "looking at my friends' pages, I see certain photos that make you think: - what are they doing?- Some girls like to show their breasts and sometimes their mouth, adding really philosophical phrases such as – Oooh, look at my mouth - … I really detest this kind of thing".

The limited creative use of the Internet due to lack of time and a certain amount of modesty in exposing oneself directly online, has also been sufficiently confirmed in

other literature (Bird, 2011; boyd, 2014; boyd & Hargittai, 2013; Brake, 2014; Jenkins et al., 2013; Jenkins et al., 2015; Livingstone & Sefton Green, 2016; van Dijck, 2009); however, the analysis carried out in this research also reveals a third, particularly interesting reason, linked to a kind of increased meta-reflection by teenagers.

It appears, in fact, that the propensity of teenagers to exert a certain amount of self-control and social control regarding media production is also based on the fact that over the years they have developed extremely high levels of aesthetic judgment and critical consumption. Indeed, the same skills of management of the self through media and knowledge of the media industry seem to influence teens in reducing their production or self-exposure online.

We observed such interesting meta-reflexive attitudes both in quantitative data (40% of teenagers states they pay close attention to how a film has been made - scenes, colours, filming, etc.), and in qualitative findings.

Many of those interviewed feel that they do not have the skills required to be part of the social media "star system": this low sense of self-confidence is rarely related to technical issues (for example the ability to edit a video) and, in the majority of cases, is based on a rigorous and often sophisticated critical judgement about the quality of media content, the recognition of the several features and characteristics needed to be successful in the social media arena, and therefore the self-assessment that one lacks the creative and artistic qualities to be appreciated online. F. [M. 14 years], gives us an example: "We filmed some challenges, such as the "Ice bucket challenge", but we didn't post them online since we are neither famous nor amazing enough to go online". Following a similar argument, M., [F. 12 years] stated:

"I would like to be a creator, but […] not a boring one… there are some people who are so boring, they talk about how they decorated their bedroom, their schedule, it is

something nobody is interested in… you must be a little bit crazy to entertain, not just stupid. I'm not like that".

We can thus highlight how, in our sample, attention to aesthetics and critical sense seem to work against spontaneous production from the bottom up.

If we look at this dynamic within the specific context of video production, for example, we can see that only four of the 39 interviewees admitted to having produced, with moderate frequency, audio-visual content. Of these four examples, only one said that he produced his work for a general audience, and not just for his circle of friends, and for this reason he spent time on the product's packaging and assembly, taking note of and interacting with the comments.

All of the others, on the other hand, only produce and circulate their content within narrow circles of friends, spending little time on production and post-production and creating a product that is easy for them to share within these small circles.

In these cases, the remixing of popular contents, parodies, as well as generic landscape pictures or memes are the most produced contents, since they allow teenagers both to express their feelings in a mediated way and to shape them according to successful media and social formats, thereby managing their approach to and presence within the media system.

Through such strategies, teens seem to be aware of, regulate and cope creatively with the psychological needs relating to social connectivity and also to the fear of social ostracism, a phaenomenon known as FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) (Buglass, Binder, Betts, & Underwood, 2017).

These patterns of consumption are integrated with the skills we identified because they demonstrate that young people have gained awareness about some media rules of the participatory culture: on the one hand, they manage the mechanisms of the

cultural industry and, on the other, they demonstrate their ability to use media for the construction and management of their individual and social identity.

Conclusions

Given that creativity appears to be a fundamental asset in the desired skill-set of future citizens (Lin, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2015), the creativity of Italian teenagers appears, in this specific research context, to be quite limited and often modelled on remixing and imitation. The main barrier to participatory creativity seems to be the same dynamics of social media audiences, their increasing power in defining social norms, as well as critical thinking and self-reflection skills that teenagers have acquired in relation to Web 2.0. The pressure of social norms in the use of media seems to weigh heavily on Italian teenagers: these pressures prompt moderate and critical attitudes, not so much as consumers (where passive use can easily go unnoticed and anonymous), but in their role as active producers of content.

We have seen that we can redefine this issue if we take a look at the emerging creativity skills that social media, participatory cultures and video games help to build.

Thus, we come to define a different concept of creativity regarding media and cultural consumption. Within this perspective, creativity refers not only to an “active” and “spontaneous” use of media in the traditional sense of the term, but to the ability to use media to face up to and improve one's own reality and to manage one's own identity, at an individual and social level.

We can conclude that Italian teenagers contain their participation as creators and often limit themselves to just imitating or remixing, acting as “functional prosumers”, by complying with what is already offered and pre-packaged by the market through simple adaptation: they find a space to expose themselves that is not excessively demanding on

an aesthetic level and therefore socially acceptable, while, contemporarily, finding successful models they can identify with and through which they can communicate.

Although most creative restraints stem from the indirect censorship imposed by relatives and peers - in the name of private demeanour - a significant amount also stem from the rules and aesthetics of online production, which implicitly appear to automatically regulate production from the bottom up by setting symbolic thresholds.

Going back to Chen et al.'s (2011) model, teenagers seem to have moved from being consumers to being critical consumers; however, the passage from prosumer to critical prosumer, and therefore to being original, seems to be more delicate, in that the critical skills acquired and associated with more sophisticated and meta-reflexive consumption act as a brake on creativity being a purely personal, expressive and communicative exercise.

For future research on these topics, we will have to further investigate such a complex intertwining of competences that regulate and, on the other hand, promote creativity and participation online, by also analysing the role of social factors as well as school background in shaping this balance among different teens.

Other concerns regard the environment in which the research team gathered the data: the media consumption and acquisition of media skills amongst teenagers occur especially during leisure time, in informal settings, away from school or institutional spaces, and, in many cases, even away from the mediated spaces visible to adults.

So, future research should explore the homes and bedrooms of teenagers, moving beyond the online arenas in which digital productions are exhibited, in order to discover new forms of teenager creativity: those which are at the moment "invisible", and performed in private and informal spaces.

A critical view should also be opened in relation to the phenomena that have emerged in the fieldwork: investigating if, for example, the growing connection of creativity with an economic rationale, due to the "creativity-popularity-productivity" syllogism, is bringing teenagers to downsize their creative desires in function of how much can be evaluated and appreciated by Web 2.0 media rules (Jenkins et al., 2015)

More research could be thus dedicated to investigating such new parameters of "accountability" of the creativity that emerges from the Web 2.0 bottom-up cultures, which make up, or, in some cases, interfere with, those coming from school and formal educational institutions.

Finally, the research highlighted the emergence of some unusual and "divergent" creative strategies by young people which may be of great interest at educational level.

Past research, as seen, has focused on and brought evidence of the connection between creative digital practices and relational and identity aspects (boyd, 2014; Lange & Ito, 2010; Papacharissi, 2010). To be more deeply aware of new cultural approaches and the emergent informal learning strategies of teenagers is therefore a precious element in approaching the juvenile cultural universe and plan media education activities in the future.

Acknowledgement section

This work has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Actions under Grant Agreement Number 645238.

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