Title: Social Media and the construction of Italian transnational identity in London. Online communities and virtual togetherness

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Abstract

In migration studies, when talking about pluralism and inclusion, the terms 'immigrants' and 'adaptation' frequently found together, and the general impression is that the latter seems the only appropriate approach in understanding migrant's stages of settlement inside the host country. The common use of the 'adaptation' framework mainly derives from the view that it is the initial stage for immigrants, followed by their acculturation, assimilation, and ultimately integration into the local society. This perspective seems to identify the immigrant as a passive 'receptor' of the host culture, and to ignore how in contemporary times social media have changed the panorama towards a more active participation of diasporic minorities in terms of visibility and public engagement.

This paper is based on a three-year research conducted online and offline within the Italian young community based in London. The main and ultimate purpose is to understand how digital technologies can be seen as modes of identity recognition and visibility. The central hypothesis is that online communities such as *ItaliansofLondon.com* sustain the process of immigrant's integration by linking and creating a network of ethnic solidarity within Italians living abroad.

Following this perspective, new media seem to actively cooperate in defining spaces of communication and virtual togetherness where immigrants can speak their own language and debate issues of engagement with the local community. In a certain way and based on my data, the opportunity of relying on social media as comfort zones during the first and challenging stages of integration, can facilitate the construction of a transnational identity and therefore the process of public visibility in the host society. What we can deduce is a new model of creative media consumption specific for diasporas and ethnic minorities, which can hopefully be used as a theoretical pattern that goes beyond specific ethnicities and can be variously applied in one of the most urgent issue of present times: immigrants' participation and visibility.

Title: Digital throwntogetherness and cultural citizenship: young Londoners negotiating the co-presence of various 'others' on social media

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Abstract

In this paper that considers everyday experiences of urbanity among young Londoners, grounded experiences of co-presence of we-ness and other-ness in digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube will be reconsidered using Doreen Massey's notion of the "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005, p. 11). Throwntogetherness refers to contemporaneous intersecting ethnic, religious and class multiplicities, among others, observable in contemporary global cities. The throwtogetherness of urban space, according to Massey is constituted by the "contemporaneous existence of a plurality of trajectories", sameness and otherness are both present in a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (2005, p 11.). The notion of throwntogetherness, I propose, can be productive to give an account of general online experience. Contemporary online/offline urban multiculture juxtaposes entangled, internally heterogeneous axes of difference including gender, age, ethnicity, class, religion and urbanity. The question arises how users make do with a situation of throwntogetherness that can be said to characterize digital culture.

Identifications performed on digital media platforms are tangible results of micro-political action, as one can make public whether one emphasizes difference or identifies with ethnic/religious/cultural others. More specifically on the topic of cultural diversity and digital practices, the decision to identify – or not – with others and otherness online can be seen as an example of "identity alignment": through practices of identification, the subject can align with or against this other (Ahmed, 2004). Thus far, the ways in which diverse identities digitally encounter, contest, appropriate and negotiate one another remain understudied. Empirical data was gathered among young people from working, middle and upper class families in the three distinct London boroughs of Haringey, Hammersmith-Fulham and Chelsea-Kensington respectively. The fieldwork consists of three phases, starting of with qualitative in-depth interviews with 90 young people between 12 and 18 years old (30 in each borough), secondly a virtual ethnography with a selection of 30 informants and thirdly a digital methods analysis that contextualizes user patterns. Based on informants reflections on the normalcy of diversity

as well as racial abuse in their urban online/offline everyday life, this presentation will offer greater insights into whether intersecting identities performed across digital spaces corroborate growing pan-European sentiments of failed multiculturalism and ethnic segregation, or whether they showcase conviviality, cross-cultural exchange and cultural hybridization proving that digital space can be considered as a training ground for cultural citizenship and belonging.

Title: Making Do with Social Media

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Abstract

In recent years, social media have been the object of profound and multidirectional criticism by media scholars. Work exposing the commercial and administrative imperatives built into the structure of social-media platforms, the predatory, manipulative and exploitative practices of extracting monetary value from users' personal data and actions online has mounted. It has been demonstrated beyond doubt that the enticing of users to conduct the bulk of their social interactions within the delimiting architecture of social media platforms has contributed to the cultivation of identities and relationships with marked neoliberal character. Critical analyses in this vein have been conducted from the perspective of Marxist theory and political economy, the ideas of the Frankfurt School, autonomous Marxism, Foucauldian theory, Actor-Network concepts, postmodernist and feminist approaches and other positions belonging to the wide and diverse church of Critical Theory.

What has remained sidelined in this critical surge has been the notion of user resistance. A simple analogy with the earlier generation of media studies suggests the question: to what extent is it justified to think of social media users as dopes who have given in to the manipulative strategies of platform operators? What happened to the active audiences of the mass media and the active users of media technologies of years past? Has the prevalent kind of activity characterising social media use or "produsage" (Bruns, 2008) of social media content turned user activity itself into a force of self-disciplining and subordination to the platform imperative? Has the room for resistance completely evaporated from the world of social media? Have the tactical maneuvers of the powerless so stubbornly pursued throughout countless other territories governed by the powerful lost their drive and their foothold?

This paper explores the ways of operating (de Certeau, 1984) enacted by social media users in their effort to meaningfully appropriate the public voice and public connection offered to them by social media. A range of social media practices– from tactical tailoring of friendship lists to organizing protest campaigns are examined through the eyes and the situated rationalities of the users involved drawing on individual interviews and focus group

discussions. The tug of war between subordination and subversion in which users are constantly involved is identified as the actual process in which user activity can be found.