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LEGACY MEDIA RELOADED: AN INTRODUCTION

1. LEGACY MEDIA AND INTERNET USERS

In 2019 the 50th anniversary of the birth of Arpanet (1969) was celebrated; in 2021 it will be 35 years since the first Italian connection (1986) and 30 years since the birth of the World Wide Web (1991). In the meantime, the Internet has become the main global digital infrastructure through which it is possible to access a constant and ever-growing flow of information and textual and audiovisual contents. Its development, in these fifty years, has contributed to redefine forms, spaces and times of daily life, social interaction and institutional organization (political, economic, cultural) for billions of people and entire communities. Internet users in the world are more than 4.5 billion individuals, with 59% penetration of the global population, although with important regional and national differences: Northern America 88%, Europe 95% (Northern Europe) to 78% (Eastern Europe), Eastern Asia 63%. Same statistics indicate the US at 87%, Italy at 82% and China at 59%¹.

In this period of time, media system has been changing along the lines of long or medium-term processes such as globalization, digitalization, convergence, personalization, prosumerism, platformization. Both media production and consumption changed, as Internet has become a meta-medium² hosting and embedding *new* media, such as streaming services and social network sites, as well as *old* media, such as radio, television, and press. The same distinction between *old* and *new* media, already questioned at the end of the century³, seems by now to have lost its meaning and heuristic usefulness⁴; with it, even a central notion in media studies, such as that of *audience*, has been subjected to criticism and discussion, to the advantage of that of *user*⁵. This change is

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¹ “Digital in 2020”, We Are Social, Accessed May 11th, 2020, <https://wearesocial.com/digital-2020>.

² A. Kay, A. Goldberg, “Personal Dynamic Media”, in P.A. Mayer, ed., *Computer Media and Communication: A Reader*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, 111-119.

³ R. Silverstone, “What’s New about New Media?”, *New Media & Society*, 1, 1 (1999): 10-12.

⁴ Proof of this is the progressive replacement of the term *old* media with *legacy* media, also adopted in the title of this special issue; a quick analysis of the presence of the term *legacy media* in the title and topics of the scientific articles reviewed by Web of Science reports its first appearance in 2003; of the 154 articles identified, 74% are concentrated between 2016 and 2020, and almost 30% in 2019.

⁵ S. Livingstone, R. Das, *The End of Audiences? Theoretical Echoes of Reception amidst the Uncertainties of Use*, 2009, Paper presented to the conference “Transforming Audiences 2”, London, september 2009; I. Picone, “Conceptualizing Media Users across Media: The Case for Media User/Use as Analytical Concepts”, *Convergence*, 23, 4 (2017): 378-390.

particularly relevant from the point of view of the millions of people reported in statistics as anonymous percentages: Internet and media *users* who “combine, juggle and move almost seamlessly between various media platforms and services to pursue information and entertainment, carry out professional responsibilities, communicate about and act on demands in their everyday lives, and not least to interact with each other”⁶. In carrying out these daily practices, they continually, and often inadvertently, cross the boundaries between legacy media (such as print, film, radio and television) and new media. Legacy media are still a significant part of media consumption practices, but in the digital environment they are accessible in multiple forms and are used in different ways. Their uses are affected by both the diffusion of Internet based streaming practices, and the consumption of media contents on multiple devices, or through Internet web sites and apps. Internet as a meta-medium drives and supports this process by promoting cross-media practices, patterns of media use across legacy and online media, and media repertoires between legacy, social and digital media. The special issue hereby presented focuses on this process of ‘digital reloading of legacy media’ by people from Europe, US and China, as grasped through the “Peoples’ Internet (PIN)” research project’s results.

2. “THE PEOPLES’ INTERNET (PIN) PROJECT”

In European media research, the above processes have been the focus of intense and passionate study and research over the last thirty years; many scholars have been confronted around them. Some research platforms and networks have played a central role in this effort of understanding; one of these has certainly been the COST Action IS0906 “Transforming Audiences, Transforming Societies” (TATS) which ran from 2010 to 2014 bringing together more than 300 researchers from 33 countries. Great merit of TATS Action has been to go beyond the paradigm of the ‘social impact’ of the Internet on the media. The aim of the action was, in fact, the revitalization of audience studies, crossing disciplines and bridging long-established boundaries in the field, such as ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, mass communication and group communication, production and reception⁷.

Among the many fruits of TATS COST Action, the first edition of “The Peoples’ Internet (PIN) Project” should be mentioned; it was a comparative study of media and Internet use in nine European countries lead by Klaus Bruhn Jensen and rooted in a model of communication covering one-to-one, one-to-many, as well as many-to-many forms of interaction. This model interpreted the Internet as “a new communicative infrastructure and cultural forum on a global scale”, a “distinctive kind of medium comprising different communicative genres”⁸. The results of this first project, based on an online survey ran in 2013, were published in 2015 in a special issue of the *International Journal of Communication*⁹.

⁶ S. Lomborg, M. Mortensen, “Users across Media: An Introduction”, *Convergence*, 23, 4 (2017): 343-351.

⁷ F. Zeller, C. Ponte, B. O’Neill, “Introduction: Revitalising Audience Research: Innovations in European Audience Research”, in Id., eds., *Revitalising Audience Research*, New York-Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

⁸ K.B. Jensen, R. Helles, “The Internet as a Cultural Forum: Implications for Research”, *New Media & Society*, 13, 4 (2011): 517-533 (517).

⁹ R. Helles, K.B. Jensen, “Audiences across Media: A Comparative Agenda for Future Research on Media Audiences”, *International Journal of Communication*, 9 (2015): 291-298; R. Helles, J. Ørmen, C. Radil, K.B. Jensen, “The Media Landscapes of European Audiences”, *International Journal of Communication*, 9

A second wave of “PIN Project” started in 2016 and concluded in 2019; its aim was to compare social uses of the Internet across different countries and regions of the world through a mixed methods approach. Its core consisted of representative surveys of the online population in China, the US, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and the United Kingdom; alongside the surveys there were analysis of the available data about Web traffic; an ethnographic fieldwork in China, the US, and Denmark aimed at explore how patterns of communication relate to both everyday routines, cultural traditions and participation; a review of the existing national and international legislation and policies; the analysis of the national digital ecosystems and regulatory regimes. By geographical point of view, it was adopted as a criterion that at least 50% of the population must be at least occasional users of the Internet, in order to grant a certain stage of maturity of internet use. Furthermore, countries have been selected in order to represent different cultural and historical backgrounds and distinctive types of state organization, from a federal republic to a socialist one-party state, to some sovereign nation-states within a federalist framework.

Referring to media systems theory¹⁰, considerations of the various roles which the state can play in regulating, funding, and operating media have been included in order to ensure systemic diversity. Six different types of media system have been represented: Northern system, defined by “highly professional journalism, an inclusive press market, powerful public broadcasting, and generous press subsidies”¹¹, was represented by Denmark; UK and Germany instantiate the Central type, with “strong public broadcasting, strict ownership regulation, and low press subsidies”¹²; Italy, with its “highest degree of political parallelism with the least professional journalism and the least inclusive press market”¹³, is an example of the Southern type, while Hungary belongs to the Eastern type, characterized by “the highest levels of political parallelism combined with the lowest investments in and the lowest audience of PSB [...] lowest rates of press freedom and relatively high levels of foreign ownership”¹⁴; US share with other countries from the Western type a strict regulation of ownership and “a very low level of public broadcasting and press subsidies, both of which are exceptionally low in the case of the United States”¹⁵; finally, China is an example of ‘authoritarian’ system, combining a one-party state organization with a market-based media sector, and a distinctive kind of internet governance, characterized by censorship and surveillance, that has been named “networked authoritarianism”¹⁶.

(2015): 299-320; N. Vittadini, M. Micheli, F. Pasquali, P. Aroldi, “Spaces across Europe: Where People Use Media”, *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 1 (2015): 412-434.

¹⁰ D. Hallin, P. Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; M. Brüggemann, S. Engesser, F. Büchel, E. Humprecht, L. Castro, “Hallin and Mancini Revisited: Four Empirical Types of Western Media Systems”, *Journal of Communication*, 64, 6 (2014): 1037-1065; L.C. Herrero, E. Humprecht, S. Engesser, M. Brüggemann, F. Büchel, “Rethinking Hallin and Mancini beyond the West: An Analysis of Media Systems in Central and Eastern Europe”, *International Journal of Communication*, 11 (2017): 4797-4823.

¹¹ Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, Castro, “Hallin and Mancini Revisited: Four Empirical Types of Western Media Systems”:1056.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Herrero, Humprecht, Engesser, Brüggemann, Büchel, “Rethinking Hallin and Mancini beyond the West: An Analysis of Media Systems in Central and Eastern Europe”: 4810.

¹⁵ Brüggemann, Engesser, Büchel, Humprecht, Castro, “Hallin and Mancini Revisited: Four Empirical Types of Western Media Systems”: 1057.

¹⁶ R. MacKinnon, “Liberation Technology: China’s ‘Networked Authoritarianism’”, *Journal of Democracy*, 2 (2011): 32-46.

Online surveys have been conducted in summer 2018 in US and Europe by an international provider (YouGov); in China CTR Market Research carried out the face-to-face surveys through multi-stage cluster sampling from December 2018 to March 2019 in order to cover internet users across the country, including both rural and urban areas. The sample, weighted by age, gender, education, and geography, was made of 10772 respondents: China (n=1617), Denmark (n=1510), Germany (n=1511), Hungary (n=1505), Italy (n=1514), the UK (n=1610), and the US (n=1505).

Population survey aimed to gather data about the use of media and communicative patterns across countries in order to analyze them in terms of frequency, intensity and purposes and identify trends and user characteristics. Questionnaires contained 54 questions about media usage, communication with other people, Internet uses, social media and message applications, socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. In order to map the relationship between formally organized and informal aspects of citizens' social engagement, also participation in various social and cultural activities has been investigated.

3. THIS SPECIAL ISSUE

Three essays compose this special issue, all of them are based on the data collected through the online survey and aim to give an overview of how Internet users operate a digital reloading of legacy media.

In *Combining Old and New: Patterns of Media Use across Legacy and Online Media in Germany*, Julia Behre, Sascha Hölig and Uwe Hasebrink describe how German media users combine contacts with different legacy and online media into a comprehensive pattern of exposure that makes sense within their everyday life. The authors examine media repertoires from a holistic perspective, including legacy media (television, radio, printed newspapers, magazines and books) as well as online media (streaming services, games, podcasts and social media). Moreover, the article describes how Internet use for personal, practical and professional purposes is part of media repertoires of German users. Via factor and cluster analysis, the authors identify five distinct media repertoires that differentiated in terms of socio-demographic variables. In different media repertoires legacy media still play a dominant role in Germany. However, the analysis brings out the presence of specific combinations of legacy and digital media in different part of the German population and – according to the authors – these combinations should be studied in further research projects.

In *The (Italian) "Peoples' Internet Project". A Picture of Cross-Media Audience over Old and Digital Media*, Piermarco Aroldi and Linda Lombi provide the main evidences of how Italian Internet users draw on legacy and online media to meet their communication and daily needs. The authors analyze frequency, intensity and purposes of different media uses of Italian population. The analysis shows that online and digital media have not replaced legacy media; rather, the latter coexist with the former in new media constellations. While Tv and social media are so widespread and frequently used that they constitute a new configuration of mainstream media: the meta-medium function performed by the Internet allows the extension of some legacy media in the digital media arena, giving them new life such as audio and video streaming, e-books, and podcasts. The authors suggest, finally, that a different analytical approach should be implemented to collect together similar "styles" of use, so as to define a typology of media repertoires shared by some differentiated groups of Internet users.

In *Four Italian Media Repertoires between Legacy, Social and Digital Media*, Francesca Pasquali and Nicoletta Vittadini describe four clusters of Italian users based on factor and cluster analysis. The authors describe the clusters in the light of their digital and legacy media use and their socio-demographic variables. The analysis shows that, if the age variable defines the consumption of younger and older clusters, the variables referring to a high social and cultural capital seem the most relevant in defining the more differentiated and comprehensive media repertoires: Mainstreamers and All-rounders. The most comprehensive and differentiated clusters are also characterized by a higher consumption of entertainment and news media paid services confirming that this kind of services are growing in consumption, but their use is still conditioned by socio-demographics variables.

Furthermore, the article shows how the uses of social media differ within these clusters. In most of clusters, Tv and social media work in mutual integration and not in a substitutive perspective. For instance, the consumption of news media through social platforms appears a widespread practice between different clusters. The authors suggest, finally, that it might be useful to analyze in a further research a set of variables (interest in news related to politics, religion, public issues, or belonging to organizations etc.) that might be connected with everyday agency oriented to “public connection”, defined as a shared orientation to a public world where matters of common concern are addressed.

Cross country comparison shows differences but also some similarities. Legacy media still play an important role in German and Italian media repertoires. The digital arena host and enhance legacy media consumption (for example, e-books, podcast). Finally, authors highlight the need of further studies aimed to deepen the study of the distribution of media repertoires in the population including different style of use of differentiated groups of Internet users and widening the set of variables used to describe clusters including also agency or other behaviors.