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EDITORIALE

SMARTPHONES IN FAMILIES, SCHOOLS, AND ACROSS GENERATIONS: THEORIES, METHODS AND GOOD PRACTICES

The ubiquity of handheld devices, above all *smartphones*, has transformed the ways in which individuals learn and communicate; build, maintain, negotiate, and interrupt their relationships, in their everyday life and throughout the life-span. The implications of these transformations are still under exploration and far from having reached definitive conclusions. As extensively discussed by Vincent and Haddon in their recent publication, *Smartphone Cultures* (2018), smartphones present strengths for their versatility, their «mobility and range of capabilities» (p.190), which allow social actors for the support and amplification of their individual and social practices across time and spaces; however, their usage has raised progressive concerns. Smartphones' dark side has been associated with overuse, distraction, lack of memory and attention, namely a set of behavioural problems which, in some cases, have been labelled with the misleading terms of nomophobia or *addiction* (Griffiths, 2000; Livingstone & Smith, 2014). Public debates and some scientific literature have framed this phenomenon in terms of a «generational issue» pertaining to younger generations and their lack of capacities/immaturity in *dis-connecting* from screen devices. Accordingly, most governmental and educational institutions have embraced the logic of restriction banning the usage of smartphones in schools. Parents, as role models and «safety mediators», show ambivalent perceptions and mediation practices towards the regulation of smartphones usage, being torn between the concern for smartphones' impact on their children's health and the urge to rely themselves on smartphones for their own needs and goals.

This special issue builds upon the proceedings of a conference held in Parma on the 3rd June 2017 at the conclusion of a two-year research project led by Marina Everri, and funded by the European Commission under the Marie

Skłodowska-Curie Actions. The project was titled *Adolescents, parents, digital media: Looking for the pattern that dis/connects* and involved families and adolescent children recruited through Italian secondary schools. The conference invited sociologists, psychologists, educators, parents and adolescents to contribute to an open debate on the role of mobile digital devices, especially smartphones, in their everyday lives. Four main questions emerged at the conclusion of the conference:

- What are the *continuities and changes* smartphones brought about in families and schools?
- What *methods* can be used to better understand the process of incorporation of digital devices in everyday life routines and tasks?
- What *new theoretical frameworks* can be embraced to leverage insights on the role of smartphones across different settings and contexts?
- What *good practices* can be put into place to harness the potential of smartphones for identity, learning, and communication as well as media literacy practices?

The contributions selected for this special issue comprise five research articles and five experiences of good practices which provided answers to the above-mentioned questions and grounded their argumentations on transdisciplinary models and methods. Taken together, these articles provide an outstanding overview of the state-of-the-art research and practices surrounding smartphone usage as well as media literacy in everyday life and across generations and contexts.

The focal points of the papers

The first article of this issue, by Messina, Everri and Mancini, introduces the study of smartphones in the context of family relations building upon the Couple and Family Technology Framework (i.e., technologies' impact on family structure and process dimensions) and adopting a cross-generational lens to compare parents and early adolescents' representations. Findings showed that smartphones have re-shaped parent-child everyday life routines and tasks and families' rules and roles more than intimacy and formation and maintenance of relationships. Additionally, more similarities than differences were found between parents' and children's representations on smartphones, thereby showing the attribution of shared meanings and functions of the device regardless of generations.

Dinh and O'Neill's contribution reiterates on parent-child dynamics and smartphone usage providing evidence on parental mediation practices through an extensive data collection from the Net Children Go Mobile Project, which involved children aged 9-16 in seven European countries. Parents tended to favour strict mediation and rules over active mediation, but these were associated with reduced children's online activities and digital skills, thereby challenging the possibility to identify effective strategies that don't impede children's freedom

to access the online world and avail of online opportunities. The next two articles of the issue provided interesting insights in this direction.

The qualitative study by Magaudda, Piccioni and Scarcelli, focussed on the analysis of interviews with young adults (18-30 years), illustrates smartphones domestication processes in relation to different social practices (relationships with families, friends and partners, and during homework and study time). Magaudda and colleagues argue that the possibility to recreate shared practices connected to the smartphone can be considered as a «strategy» to escape «moral panics» surrounding smartphone usage and youth wellbeing. Gui, Fasoli and Gerosa, instead, present a large-scale investigation (3,600 secondary school students), the Digital Wellbeing - Schools project, aimed at tackling the issue of smartphone overuse. Building upon a randomized controlled trial and the usage of a monitoring app (RescueTime) that allowed students to reflect on their habits related to smartphone usage, the authors showed a significant reduction of smartphone overuse among the treated participants.

The impact of technologies on people's health and wellbeing is also at the core of the last contribution of the research section. Redmond frames the investigation of media literacy in the ecojustice pedagogical approach, which is aimed at building awareness and empower students to address environmental injustice as it relates to unchecked technology use and the impacts for our world's communities. In addition, the author's arguments on media literacy pave the way for the contributions of the section on good practices. In fact, the definition of practices for a positive use of smartphone brings the need to broaden the discussion to media literacy and media education practices with respect to digital technologies as well as the involvement of different stakeholders such as children, families, schools and the broader community.

As claimed by Orban de Xivry and Falconi in their European TANDEM project, it is possible to build collaborations between families and schools through co-design methodology for the definition of media literacy pathways. In addition, while discussing the levers and obstacles of school-family collaborations, the authors acknowledge the role of media educator as a facilitator for this collaboration.

If schools can be considered as the primary educational context to promote media literacy and a positive use of technologies, the usage of smartphone at school has always been considered as problematic. Yet, De Marco's contribution builds upon the BYOD approach to provide evidence on successful application of smartphone usage with secondary school students and the value of this device for the sharing of didactically effective experiences. Primary school students can also be supported to develop computational skills and a positive approach to ICTs, as reported by Guadalupi's project «I communicate with things and tell it». Pupils used videos made with Powtoon to learn about the topics programmed and create simple algorithms to deal with the unplugged activities (first approach to coding). Digital tools were used as an input to stimulate creativity both in the editing of the story and in the creation of short dialogues among the characters,

made with the recorded voice of the children themselves. The last two articles on good practices provide further evidence on how technologies can empower youngsters as well as become a useful support for the development of learning and social-emotional skills. Cappennani presents a media education project with an adolescent child, diagnosed with mild to medium autism and discrete communication and relational abilities, based on the production of an animated short film made with the stop motion technique entitled *BeneMaleBene*, winner of the *Giannatelli 2018 Prize*. Similarly, Ponzo's article illustrates the usage of filming for an educational intervention, *Becoming orators – A debate about art*, aimed at engaging pupils in a role play to understand the meaning of being an orator in the Roman period.

In conclusion, both the research and practice articles call the reader's attention to possibilities for harnessing the potential of smartphones as well as other technologies in everyday life contexts such as families and schools. From the reshaping of family relations to their didactic usage in secondary schools and applications to treat overuse, smartphones can be used to respond to individual, educational, and social needs.

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