«HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE SMARTPHONE»: MOBILE TECHNOLOGIES AND THE RE-COMPOSITION OF SMARTPHONE COLLECTIVE PRACTICES[1]

«COME HO IMPARATO A NON PREOCCUPARMI E AD AMARE LO SMARTPHONE»: LE TECNOLOGIE MOBILI E LA RICOMPOSIZIONE DELLE PRATICHE COLLETTIVE DEGLI SMARTPHONE

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ABSTRACT

In these last few years, the role of smartphones in the everyday lives of young people has become a widely-debated issue. This technological device has been

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[1] In compliance with Italian academic folkways, the authors acknowledge that Paolo Magaudda wrote paragraphs 1. Introduction; 2. The Smartphone and the re-composition of collective practices and 7. Conclusions; Tiziana Piccioni wrote paragraphs 5. Household conviviality: «In family lunches the smartphone should not exist» and 6. Studying with the smartphone: «You who took notes, come on, send them!»; Marco Scarcelli wrote paragraphs 3. Sentimental relationships: «A Romantic ally» and 4. Spending time with friends: «between me and the people».

called a disrupting force that can destabilise established relationships, routines and activities. This article departs from the idea that we are currently going through an early phase of social *domestication* of the smartphone in which people are establishing new acceptable routines and shared practices integrating this device in their lives and relationships. In order to empirically outline this process of early re-composition of smartphone-connected social practices, we present findings from a qualitative research study of 26 interviews with young smartphone users in Italy (ages 18-30). The findings concentrate on four social settings: (a) in sentimental relationships; (b) when spending time with friends; (c) in family relationships at home; and (d) when studying and doing homework. The results of this analysis bring fresh empirical evidence to the process of smartphone domestication in relation to different social practices, arguing that focusing on the efforts put into recreating shared practices connected to the smartphone represents a fruitful strategy to escape the wave of «moral panic» that characterises most of the public debate.

KEYWORDS

Smartphone, youths, social practices, domestication, qualitative interviews

SOMMARIO

In questi ultimi anni, il ruolo degli smartphone nella vita quotidiana dei giovani è diventato un argomento ampiamente dibattuto, poiché questo dispositivo tecnologico è stato riconosciuto come una forza dirompente, in grado di destabilizzare relazioni consolidate, routine e attività. Questo articolo parte dall'idea che attualmente stiamo attraversando una fase iniziale di «addomesticamento» dello smartphone nel contesto sociale, durante la quale cui le persone sono al lavoro per stabilire nuove routine e pratiche condivise per integrare questo dispositivo nelle loro vite e relazioni. Al fine di esplorare empiricamente questo processo di ricomposizione delle pratiche sociali connesse allo smartphone, presentiamo i risultati di una ricerca qualitativa basata su 26 interviste a giovani utenti di smartphone in Italia (età 18-30 anni). I risultati si concentrano su 4 contesti sociali: (a) le relazioni sentimentali; (b) quando si trascorre del tempo con gli amici; (c) le relazioni familiari a casa; e (d) quando si studia e si fanno i compiti. I risultati di questa analisi forniscono dati inediti per fare luce sul processo di "addomesticamento" degli smartphone in relazione a diverse pratiche sociali, sostenendo infine che concentrarsi sugli sforzi compiuti per ricreare pratiche condivise collegate allo smartphone rappresenta una strategia positiva per sfuggire all'ondata di «panico morale» che caratterizza gran parte del dibattito pubblico sul rapporto tra i giovani e lo smartphone.

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the smartphone has become a fundamental tool in the everyday lives of most people, inextricably intertwined with daily rhythms of millions of individuals and a basis for what has been defined as an age of «deep mediatisation» (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Indeed, starting with the introduction of the Apple iPhone in 2007, our everyday lives have become increasingly connected as a result of the spread of mobile digital technologies like the smartphone; as a consequence, social experiences have been quickly reshaped around the use of mobile portable devices, and people are constantly connected to the Internet and social media.

However, the adoption of the smartphone in social contexts has been addressed from different perspectives as a destabilizing force that is potentially harmful, especially for the younger generation. Consequently, smartphone use has assumed a crucial relevance in the public debate, where young people have been insistently described as primarily exposed to smartphone-connected dangers, like cyberbullying, social media addiction and widespread access to pornographic content. Hence, the smartphone has been frequently described as an unsafe and risky technology, which is linked to a set of worries raised with apocalyptic tones regarding the psychological and social lives of the younger generation.

Looking at these negative representations of the smartphone, it is not far from truth to argue that in the last few years, smartphone adoption has been characterised by a sort of «moral panic». This concept dates back the mid-1960s, when sociologists like Howard Becker (1963) developed «labelling theory»; in the following decades, the concept became especially popular to refer to deviant youth phenomena — often related to music, drugs and sexual behaviour — and how these are constructed by the media as dangerous for society as a whole (Cohen, 1972; McRobbie & Thornton, 1995). The moral panic that today characterises the public discourse regarding the relation between youth and the smartphone reflects a set of collective worries connected not only to specific challenges related to family relationships, education or interactions with friends, but also more widely to the disruption of a whole set of collective values imbued in our social order (Goggin, 2006; Mascheroni, 2014).

In order to contrast and rebalance this negative framing in today's public debate, the primary aim of this article is to present original research evidence to reveal how young people are actively working to *normalise* the presence of the smartphone in their social lives. Indeed, far from being passive adopters of the smartphone, young people emerge as actively involved in a process of *domestication* (Silverstone & Hirsh, 1992; Haddon, 2018) of this device, aimed at harmonizing its uses within their relational practices and relationships.

In order to do this, this article departs from the acknowledgement that we are currently experiencing an early phase of smartphone integration in ordinary social practices and interactions. Hence, we will address how young people are actively working to establish new routines and shared practices regarding smartphone use. In presenting our qualitative data, our basic purpose is to counter-bal-

ance those public discourses that see the smartphone as a dangerous technology and young people as passive and subjugated by this device. In other words, we aim to describe — quoting in the article's title Stanley Kubrick's movie on the collective paranoia over the danger of nuclear technology and the unfolding of a potential world conflict — how young people's smartphone adoption is characterised by an active reconstruction of collective social practices.

In order to reach these aims, this article presents and analyses empirical findings from a qualitative research study that focused on young smartphone users in Italy. More specifically, it concentrates on four distinctive social settings in which the smartphone has a relevant influence and a potential disrupting power in establishing sentimental relationships, when spending time with friends, at home with family and when studying. Theoretically, the analysis relies on a dense notion of *social practice*, referring to an ongoing sociological stream of research based on *practice theory* (Shove et al., 2007; 2012) and also focusing on how this approach is being integrated in the study of media and digital communication technologies (Couldry, 2012; Couldry & Hepp, 2017). Before turning our attention to the analysis of the empirical findings, in the next section, we further develop some of the reflections and theoretical insights that support this work and detail the methodology adopted for the research.

2 | The Smartphone and the re-composition of collective practices

In the current social context characterised by what Nick Couldry and Andreas Hepp (2017) call «deep mediatisation», smartphones have become a powerful technological prosthesis in youth daily reality, which is so powerful that alarms linked to the use of these technologies have increased consistently both in public debate and scientific analysis. In the last few years, newspapers and television have recursively described the potential dangers and actual problems generated by smartphones on youth personality, school conduct and family relationships, including phenomena related to cyberbullying (Lee & Shin, 2017) and addiction to social media (Mascheroni, 2018). In scientific debates, one of the most emblematic alarms was raised by Sherry Turkle (1995), author of one of the most influential interpretations of the Internet as a tool of personal freedom in the mid-1990s. In recent years, Turkle has focused on the consequences that digital media, such as the smartphone, have produced on young people as, for instance, a decrease in their ability to converse and interact deeply with other people. As Turkle wrote in 2015, «if we text rather than talk, we can have each other in amounts we can control. And texting and email and posting let us present the self we want to be. We can edit and retouch. I call it the Goldilocks effect: We can't get enough of each other if we can have each other at a digital distance — not too close, not too far, just right» (p. 27). There are few doubts that the rapid diffusion of new digital technologies in society has deeply affected some fundamental

aspects of our social experiences. However, stances like the one formulated by Turkle have been considered too pessimistic towards the ability of young people to recreate meaningful social interactions through digital devices.

Indeed, scientific literature on smartphone adoption has repeatedly addressed how this device is rather at the centre of an active collective process of domestication and integration in everyday routines. For instance, Marsha Barry and Max Schleser (2014) gave an initial overview of the creative practices related to the smartphone, highlighting the ability of this tool to expand the condition of *co-presence* well beyond the traditional forms of face-to-face interaction. More recently, another group of scholars led by media sociologists Jane Vincent and Leslie Haddon (2018) offered an up-to-date exploration of smartphone practices, adopting a socio-anthropological perspective, that focused on understanding the experiences of users. In this case, authors highlighted the versatility that characterises the smartphone compared to the television or the traditional cell phone, underlining how this feature constitutes one of the most peculiar traits of the instrument, which can be articulated in different forms and practices, in relation to different contexts and user needs. The consequences of the smartphone can be quite reasonably described in the light of a metaphor focused on the notion of ambivalence, because, as outlined by Alan J. Reid (2018), although «many smartphone users are critically self-aware of their technological habits, and yet they grapple internally with what can be described as the *smartphone paradox*: that this mobile device is simultaneously liberating yet controlling, unifying yet polarizing» (p. 7).

Departing from this literature, which contributes to rebalance the interpretation of smartphone consequences on young lives, we develop our interpretation by adopting a distinctive theoretical understanding of *social practices*. The theoretical roots of the theory of practice bring back the emphasis on praxis over mental space characterising the philosophies of Wittgenstein and Heidegger, as they have been reinterpreted by Theodore Schatzki (1996; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & Von Savigny, 2001). At the same time, social sciences scholars such as Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and Anthony Giddens (1984) put emphasis on a new balance between structural constraints and individualistic agency to understand social behaviours. Bourdieu elaborated the concept of *habitus* and popularised the notion of *practice*; Giddens placed attention on the recursive interactions between structure and agency by the means of his *structuration theory*. On these bases, cultural sociologist, Andreas Reckwitz (2002), proposed an operative definition of *practice* that is more suited for empirical research; practice is not understood as the opposite of abstract and theoretical activities, but as a distinctive «configuration», consisting «of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, «things» and their use, a background knowledge in the forms of understanding, know how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge» (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249).

On the basis of this definition, a more specific application of practice theory has been elaborated by a group of scholars led by sociologist Elizabeth Shove (Shove et al., 2007; 2012), who defined social practices as the dynamic out-

come of the linkages between three distinctive dimensions: *materials*, including things, technologies, tangible physical entities; *competences*, encompassing skills and know-how implied in the practice; and *meanings,* which include symbolic meanings and ideas (see Shove et al., 2012, p. 14). Thus, studying social reality from a practice theory perspective means focusing on the way technologies, competences and meanings change and crystallise as stable and socially-shared configurations, as it has been done in recent years by analysing a variety of contexts, from sports (Shove & Pantzar, 2005) to consumption (Warde, 2005), and from photography (Hand, 2012) to music (Magaudda, 2011). This literature also intersected with the call for a new paradigm in media research, aimed at incorporating this «practice turn» elaborated in social theory in media research (Bräuchler & Postill, 2010; Couldry, 2012).

The implications of a practice theory perspective for the study of the reshaping of smartphone practices are manifold and include, first, the idea that smartphone consequences do not depend just on the attitude of individual users, but by the way new collective practices that emerge by integrating the smartphone as a normalised technology. In this regard Couldry and Hepp (2017) have observed that, in relation to the smartphone, the pressure «to «be available» shapes an emerging practice that is different from earlier modes of media consumption based on intermittent communication and a clear distinction between mass media and interpersonal media» (p. 113). Therefore, following this theoretical framework, in the subsequent empirical sections, we will focus on the way smartphone practices related to specific situational settings — flirting, friendship, household and studying — are at the centre of a reshaping process emerging from tensions and problems experienced by the young people we interviewed.

Methodologically, the analysis is based on empirical research carried out in the 2017-2018 biennium, during which we interviewed young men and women residing in various cities of the Veneto region, in order to investigate in depth some particular aspects of the smartphone use. The most significant part of the empirical work was represented by 26 qualitative in-depth interviews, involving 15 young men and 11 young women aged between 18 and 30 years. The research utilised the «discursive interview», which brought to light narratives, experiences and judgments about the role of the smartphone in their lives. Interviews lasted between one hour and fifteen minutes and two hours and involved a population composed of individuals with different qualifications, including students and workers. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed on the basis of a specific coding scheme, following the principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

3 Sentimental relationships: «A romantic ally»

The smartphone represents an important part in the lives of young people, even in terms of sentimental relationships. From first contact to the flirting phase and then to the management of a relationship, the smartphone offers an impor-

tant element of support for the interviewees. Next, we will focus on the first three steps of a romantic relationship where a smartphone is involved: first contact, study and flirting.

By focusing on the use of smartphones in relation to the affective-relational sphere, we can identify two groups of platforms that are actively integrated in affective practice and that permit young people to construct and manage their relationships: online dating apps and social network apps. According to our interviewees, online dating apps seem to be not so appreciated as they are frequently connected to occasional sexual intercourse or the incapability of managing face-to-face interactions. On the other hand, the interviewees held more open views regarding social network apps. Indeed, according to them, the smartphone becomes meaningful and useful in two different ways, which we define the «research» and the «mugshot».

The first one consists of using a small amount of information (usually the name) to find (using social network sites and other information that the internet permits access to) the girl or the boy that one likes and, then, to collect information (the study step) and, ultimately, to contact that person. The second one is another strategy that consists of taking a picture of the young man/woman that generates interest (making sure that they do not know they are being photographed) in order to ask the interested party's friends for more information about the person, so that one can proceed to the research phase. One of our interviewees, Simone (20 y.o.), offered an example of this phase:

> I saw that girl when I was with my friend. I did not speak with her a lot, but I remembered her name. I started to look for her information… I visited her friend's Facebook profile. We had some common friends, I wrote her name, just the name, I looked for the different profiles and I found her. Then I started to send her messages.

Federica (18 y.o.), instead, spoke about the «mugshot» technique:

> Sometimes it happens that you can see someone that is cool, but no one knows him… So, the only solution is to take a picture of him and ask your friends if someone knows him. If someone knows him, you have the name and then you can find him using Instagram or Facebook.

Taking a picture of someone or finding someone simply by knowing her/his name, can transform a fleeting encounter into the first step of a relationship. It is not necessary to expose yourself and ask for a way to contact the potential partner, but it is sufficient to have (or to find) a small hook to find the interesting person and create a digital connection in order to move onto the second step (study) and eventually into the flirting stage.

The step that we define as the study is located between the first encounter and the start of the proper flirting stage. This is a step that the interviewees frequently defined as «stalking»; a practice that consists of collecting all the information

about the person in order to better understand if she/he could be interesting and to know more about him/her everyday life. In this phase, the smartphone plays an important role, especially though the use of social network apps. This phase acts as a sort of primary evaluation of the potential partner, allowing the interested party to explore the features the young man/woman and to decide whether or not to commence with the flirting activity. This seems to be a practice that has become quite widespread among young people, and it is based especially on looking with the smartphone at the photos through Instagram and (for the youngest) on searching information on platforms such as Ask.fm. This was descried by Veronica (18 y.o.):

> When you know someone and he is not your classmate or your friend, you do not know a lot about him. Maybe you know him from a party; he is cool. But you do not know anything. So, you start to stalk him [laughter]. You look for his photo on Instagram to understand if he is really hot. You can understand the people he mixes with, what he likes, etc. Sometimes it happened that I knew someone, and then I decided not to continue with him because I did not like something [about him].

After the study phase, the flirting practice can begin. The digital flirt is frequently a part of a wider flirt that is composed of both mediated and face-to-face moments. Digital flirtation can be described as a sort of dance following specific moves and implying distinctive roles on the basis of an active and conscious use of the smartphone and the apps it enables. The first step consists of the «I like strategy» (Scarcelli, 2015, p. 39), which consists of giving a certain number of «likes» or «reactions» to the other person's posts on social media, in order to be noticed by the potential partner. The contents that are selected to be liked are not casual; they usually represent the partner alone and are chosen among the partner's older posts. The interviewees said that two or more likes are required in order to make the other person aware that the attention is focused on him\her. If the person reciprocates with similar behaviour, this signals that it is time to pass on a message. As Filippo (25 y.o.) said:

> You put the like and see if she does something. Maybe you can comment on some posts. After this, if she responds with likes, it is time! You write to her, «hey», with an emoticon; you throw the hook [laughter]. If she does not respond it is better to go away. She is not interested in you.

The first part of this dance is performed using major social media platforms (Facebook, Facebook Messenger or Instagram), while the second part moves to another more personal tool, like WhatsApp, which is interpreted as more private, even if WhatsApp profiles contain less personal information. In this case, the phone number connected to the smartphone is considered a sort of filter; anyone could find you through a social network (as in the first contact phase), but the phone number equates to accessing a person in a more private way. As Chiara (19 y.o.) told us during the interview:

You can see my profile, you can find me. You just have to write my name in Instagram. I have more intimate conversations via WhatsApp. I can decide to give you my number. I am saying «I trust you» and that you are special, a friend, boyfriend, someone that I like, etc. These examples illustrate the adoption of the smartphone in sentimental relationships and how young people are able to reconfigure and reshape the traditional practices connected to courtship on the basis of a collectively-shared understanding of media technology use.

4 Spending time with friends: «Between me and the people»

Our second setting, in which young people actively reconfigure social practices through the smartphone, regards spending time with friends. Frequently, the smartphone has been described by the interviewees as a «risky technology», because it can affect face-to-face interactions and relationships. Indeed, on the one hand, the smartphone allows users to connect with each other anytime and anywhere, but on the other hand, it is commonly blamed of being a distraction, moving attention away from situated and face-to-face interactions.

In the interviewees' words, mediated interactions and face-to-face interactions have different levels of importance. The latter is considered to be the «real» form of interaction and should not be affected by mediated forms of interaction. For our interviewees, most important things criticality connected to the use of the smartphone are related to those situations when they are in co-presence with friends. Frequently, the interviewees spoke about how the presence of a smartphone could affect the quality of their face-to-face interactions. For instance, Marika (22 y.o.) said:

> When you are with your friend, it is better not to use the smartphone, I mean, you can use it to enjoy their company, for example, playing with Snapchat… But I hate when I am with friends and their face is glued to their smartphone… What I think is, when you have a mediated conversation, ok it could be important, so it is ok… but if it is not something necessary, why do you have to use the phone if you have a person in front of you?

Another example is the one offered by Rino (29 y.o.), who described what he perceives to be a sort of etiquette, explaining that he prefers to disconnect the smartphone temporarily from the «always on» status in order to focus more on face-to-face interactions:

> If I am with other people, I do not use it, for example, like now [during the interview], probably I have some notifications on my phone, but for sure I am not going to check them. Frequently, when I am with my friends, I set my phone on plane mode. Even if someone wants to contact me, I do not care. It is different if I am working because I need to answer immediately.

This experience is similar to that recalled by Elisa (25 y.o.), who considers a dedicated attention to face-to-face interaction, without the distraction of the smartphone, to be a sign of respect:

> It is a sign of respect. I do not like [to use the smartphone when I am with other people] because I want to respect other people. I admit that sometimes I use the smartphone when I am with other people but just if I am waiting for an important call or message. I prefer that the phone is forbidden in such contexts. I mean, you can use it when, for example, you are on the train and you do not know anyone, but not when you are with other people and you should socialise.

Moreover, the smartphone can be involved in these interactions as a support device. For instance, some interviewees use the smartphone to show photos to friends or when using smartphone apps becomes a means of involving the entire group of friends. As Marika (22 y.o.) told us in relation to the use of Snapchat: «You could also use the smartphone to enjoy the time with your friends or family. For example, when me and my family have used Snapchat, we enjoyed it a lot. It was possible to «exchange the face», like me with my grandpa's face and he with mine».

However, Rino (29 y.o.) thinks that there are risks in using the smartphone as support during face-to-face interactions. He and other interviewees spoke about the smartphone as concurrent to face-to-face interactions and explained that he was sometimes afraid that technology would act as a substitute for conversations and ultimately isolate people:

> I saw lots of situations where the smartphone was not good when someone was sharing time with other people. It is important that it does not become an instrument to disconnect from face-to-face conversation or, worse, the only switch that could turn on the conversation. I mean, when you do not have things to speak about with your friends, you start to use the smartphone and you look for an excuse to find something in common to speak about…
> It's like when you go to the restaurant and you see an entire family sitting at the table with everyone, all with mobile technology in their hands.

Anita's view was similar to Rino's; she told us that smartphones can enter the face-to-face interaction practices in novel ways, for example, seeing photos that would not been shared online in other ways: «It makes no sense if you take your phone to show a photo to the people that are with you and say something like, «Hey look at this. I did not share it in the WhatsApp group! Look at it now» (Anita, 23 y.o.).

As the examples show, shared forms of regulation about and judgments of the integration of the smartphone in face-to-face interactions seem to emerge based on the critical views about mediated sociability. In any case, these emerging practices represent active attempts to reconnect the value of face-to-face interaction with technologically mediated relationships.

5   Household conviviality: «In family lunches, the smartphone should not exist»

A third situational setting representing an important context in which social practices are reshaped under the influence of the smartphone is household conviviality. In the last few years, the established routines of families have had to deal with the integration of the smartphone as a personal device owned by all family members. According to our interviewees, the smartphone is at the centre of a negotiation process about when it can be used and how it should be kept out of some home situations, in particular during lunches and dinners.

A first important shared value emerges as those interviewed attribute meals shared with their parents and relatives a value of togetherness and consider smartphone use an obstacle. Most of them said that meal time corresponds to high peaks of social media activity, the use of the smartphone during lunches and dinners is generally condemned, and the device is essentially seen as a disturbance of these convivial moments. For this very reason, interviewees reported adopting specific practices aimed at defending established routines. One of the most common is, for instance, that the device is switched off or left elsewhere, as seen in the following exchange with Linda (20 y.o.):

> I leave it in the bag; I'm not with the phone in hand… when I study and during meals. Because I also noticed that my sister, if you do not take it from her hands, goes on writing.
>
> [Interviewer: That is, when you are for example at dinner all together?]
>
> Exactly, yes, that is, we must take it away from her!

In the excerpt above, a critical attitude is revealed by the young woman towards her younger sister, reflecting a situation in which regulation is performed not only by parents, but by a peer. We can extend to this evidence to what Bakardjieva (2005) noticed about the need to balance everyday use of the Internet almost fifteen years ago, as the pressure to be connected produces situations where users are called to find a new balance «between personal autonomy and inevitable submission to rules and recipes» (p. 112).

Generally, our interviewees revealed a shared understanding of the smartphone as a technology contrasting family interactions and, consequently, several strategies are adopted to contrast how this technology interfere to the meals consumed in family. A set of characteristics make this technology problematic in relation to those practices related to co-presence during family launches. This was made explicit by Giovanna (21 y.o.):

> In family lunches, [the smartphone] should not exist... There are moments when everyone can do their own business, as it should be, and moments when we are all together and interacting; there is no such thing as a table, okay, and one has a cell phone, another has a cell phone, because

then, at this point, I could eat an hour before, you could eat two hours later and you could not even go home, and we were fine… There are times, like those in family, when, in my opinion, unless there are emergencies, the phone should not be touched.

It is somewhat curious that the smartphone could be considered as a technology contrasted to another one that in the '80s was considered as a technological treat to family life: television. Indeed, as Giovanna (21 y.o.) explains, contrary to the smartphone, television is a medium that favours family interactions and debate:

I remember that we turned on the TV to watch the news, because... it was something you listened to and watched together and there was an exchange of opinion... if it comes out that in China a law has been passed… about the marriage of homosexuals… okay, there can be an exchange. My dad can be against it, I can be in favour of it, my mother can be against it, my sister can be neutral, but there is an exchange, there is something, there is a dialogue... that is, something is created.

Other interviewees also expressed a similar view about the role of television in the household. They did not simply assert that television does not interfere with the interaction between family members. In line with a classical conception of the television and its relational uses (Lull, 1980), they attributed to it a supporting role of the relational structure of the family, in particular, fostering conversation. The TV to which they referred is not simply a type of content transmitted by broadcasting technologies, but with the television as a material device, usually located in family's living room and equipped with a screen that it can be watched by several co-present people, which is different from the smartphone. Moreover, although someone uses a smart TV connected to the internet, this device has nothing to do with the solicitations from the smartphone, such as instant messaging and related notifications.

In sum, we see from the interviews that the home is still a setting in which family interaction and a sense of belonging is present. Eating at home with parents and relatives, although it represents a historically already mediatised symbolic space (consider the role of television), is one of the settings in which regulation of smartphone use is adopted and where existing relational practices (like discussing the news) are protected.

6 Studying with the smartphone: «You who took notes, come on, send them!»

A forth type of situational setting in which we can observe efforts to normalise the use of the smartphone concerns studying practices related to both homework and classroom lessons. The stories of our interviewees focused on those circumstances in which the use of the smartphone is considered beneficial,

while references to situations where it is an obstacle were rare. Someone actually pointed out that the invitation of not using the smartphone during lessons is hardly followed. More generally, even if students are aware that the smartphone can interfere with concentration, they often focused their accounts on its usefulness, sometimes referring to it as an indispensable tool, as Simone (20 y.o.) said:

> One of my classmates did not have [a smartphone][…] he had just an old-generation phone. It was a Motorola, I don't remember. And he did not have WhatsApp, he did not know when there were scheduled queries, he did not know anything. And we had to communicate things to him the next day, while we already knew everything from the afternoon before. I mean, it's a bad thing! Because, if you don't have access to certain services, you are not active part, I would say, of the system.

Simone told us about the consequence of not keeping up with routine changes due to the collective adoption of the smartphone and some apps. App use plays an influential role in learning activities, especially in those cases involving the use of the camera and instant messaging services, but also in relation to very specific apps, such as the digital school register. Several respondents talked about how they used the smartphone camera to acquire and store what the teachers presented, for example, through Power Point.

The possibilities connected to camera use are also widely adopted for quick exchanges of information between fellow students, for instance, the use of a messaging app to share useful information about classroom activities. Elia (18 y.o.) gave some examples: In relation to homework: «Did you do the exercise? Did you succeed?» «Yes» «Send me the picture!». Or… «For tomorrow there is to study this chapter... You who did take notes, do you have notes [to share]?» «Come on, send them!».

Thus, our respondents said they benefit from the options offered by the smartphone, especially with regard to collaborative situations. Another example related to the productive use of the smartphone for studying is the translation of short texts. In these cases, we can recognise the smartphone's inclusion in pre-existing practices, where apps like Wordreference replaced consulting a traditional dictionary.

An account related to the use of the electronic school register is very interesting to understand how the smartphone is actively integrated in existing, although recent, practices, Easy access to the school registry by students and parents via a browser on a personal computer is an example of how the smartphone established a more direct and familiar use of a complex form of communication. The account from Enrica (19 y.o.) helps explain the many faces that the consultation of the registry through the smartphone can present, arguing about different apps available for this task.

> This other app is much more useful and better organised than mine. Because my app offers the visualisation trough a web page, that is, therefore, troublesome, because the text comes out tiny, you have to zoom in,

it is very inconvenient. Instead, this other [showing the app opened on her smartphone] presents a visualisation that is much more… that makes more sense. I need [to see] the marks, the circulars, the tests, even the agenda is shown, everything you need to know. And it gives even results about marks, the global average for each subject. [...] For every subject I can insert my goal, for example.

Although the adoption of the smartphone in teaching and studying contexts is commonly addressed as highly problematic, the excerpts above shed light on the way this device is actually integrated in useful and productive ways among students.

7 Conclusions

This article focused on the ways in which four situational settings common in the everyday lives of young people (sentimental relationships, when spending time with friends, at home with family and when studying) are undergoing a process of reconfiguration as a consequence of the introduction of the smartphone as basic tool of social interaction (Hepp & Couldry, 2017). Starting from the assumption that the smartphone has introduced in the last few years with significant changes in several contexts and activities, the aim was to reveal how shared social practices are not completely disrupted or radically reconfigured. Rather, what we argue is that active integration and normalisation of the smartphone in youth interactions and activities is actually taking shape in a positive way.

We departed theoretically by a dense notion of social practice, as elaborated within the research stream of practice theory (Shove et al., 2007; 2012). From this perspective, practices like flirting, eating together or studying represent situational ecologies that are sustained by a relatively coherent set of meanings, values and routines that are already populated by other technological artefacts (like the traditional phone or the television). The smartphone has become part of these situational ecologies only recently, representing a new and quite intrusive technological tool, which has challenged relationships, the possibility of conversation and the rules of group interactions. What we have seen through the analysis of qualitative interviews with young people about their experiences is that the smartphone does not disrupt existing practices, but it is rather a new entity that requires integration into existing activities and relationships. This integration is not happening without tensions. Sometimes, efforts aimed at strategically adopting the smartphone as new interactional opportunity are more evident; other times, tensions and problems in reaffirming collectively-shared routines and relationships are predominant.

For instance, what we saw in relation to the practices related to courtship and flirting was an already advanced integration of the smartphone in the interactions between young people, which has attributed new meaning and values to technological practices; in the case of eating together with parents and relatives, we

saw how an already solid set of ideas and values constitutes a solid framework of reference that actively contributes to channel smartphone's uses. More generally, a major outcome of this research has been to outline how smartphone integration in the everyday lives of young people is hardly conceivable as a process disconnected from existing shared social practices and existing cultural frameworks. Rather, what emerged from the interviews is how young people are taking an active part in the reconfiguration of these shared routines and practices, in which new possibilities offered by the smartphone are constantly negotiated with persisting sets of values, meanings and even prejudices that frame relationships and social interactions.

These outcomes do not neglect the fact that many social situational settings in which the smartphone has become important, are actually characterised by problems and tensions in establishing new routines and shared practices (for example in school activities, where teachers usually report how complicated it is to integrate the smartphone into existing classroom rhythms). Rather, what we suggest to scholars, educational practitioners and parents is to move the focus from fear and worry about the smartphone's role in the lives of the new generation, going toward the identification of new, more productive, perspectives. This shift will be helpful in outlining the strong connection between technologies, practices and everyday contexts, thus helping to recognise the smartphone as an integral part of youth culture — a culture that needs to be understood, rather than condemned, if we want to foster the growth of a critical approach to the use of digital media.

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