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### **Social Networks Sites and Life-Sharing**

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## Social Networks Sites and Life-Sharing

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### Abstract:

*This paper is focused on the role of main social activities, as creating and sharing personal content. The reason is connected to the raise up, in last ten years, of User Generated Content as a system to allow people to be active on the Web<sup>3</sup>. In the first paragraph I analyze the Web-population through recent surveys, showing different ways to classify generations. I comment the Jenkins' "convergence culture" [2006], the push and pull media definition of Negroponte [1995] and the difference between digital natives and digital immigrants [Prensky 2001]. The second paragraph deals with use and consumption of digital media between young and adults from the computer use to mobile-phone and portable gaming device. In particular the mobile-phone seems to be an important medium to be online in every place and every time: it allows people to take and share photos, video, text and so on. This brings us to the third paragraph where I discuss mobility and applications: following Anderson [2010] the desktop is replaced with the webtop or web-applications that do not require a browser to be used. This is particularly evident for recent mobile devices as iPhone and iPad. Convergence and mobility allow people to share content in every time: yet ten years ago people used to share digital information (file-sharing) as video, music and text, by illegal channels such as Napster, without knowing who uploaded that on the Web. The Web 1.0 phase was characterized by an "anonymous dimension". Instead, the current Web allows people to share information about their own life, publishing on social media, freely, their own photo, video, text, with real name and surname (life-sharing). At the center of the Web is the "ego", the user. In the fifth chapter I analyze three social media that are currently catching up people's attention - Facebook, YouTube, Twitter – and I try to explain how they make possible to users to share culture and frame of their life. At the end I spent some words about piracy and privacy issue that social media bring up.*

### Keywords:

*social media, convergence, software culture, generation, file sharing*

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<sup>3</sup> I not deal about other - also important - activities as online purchasing.

**Generations.**

I would start my contribute with a photo.



Figure 1: A wall in historical center of Naples, Italy

This picture was taken in a street of the historical center of Naples. Few months ago the buildings in these streets were repainted completely. After some days, only a graffito appeared on one of these walls. And, at present, nothing changed. So, through “clean walls, dumb people” we can express the importance for a single person to express his or her own ideas, opinions, creativity and, after all, “subculture” [Hebdige 1979; Middleton 1990; Thornton 1995].

Then we can consider the Web as a street. In it, there are walls where everyone of us can write: we can create a blog, debate in a forum, share content in a social network. But, as a street, we can also stay in a square and meet other people, listen to music, watch video; or enter in a store, buy and sell things. As an old “agorà”, people make exchange, not only things but also ideas and opinions.

Clearly, this is true in the current age of the Web. Ten years ago, the Web was characterized by static pages, chat and forum. Usually only few experts could create and insert content in a web page. After Y2K, the emergence of User Generated Content (UGC) tools has allowed every PC owner (or user) to participate. Is it true? Partly.

As Jenkins [2006] wrote, the contemporary media landscape is:

- a) innovative
- b) convergent
- c) everyday
- d) appropriative

- e) networked
- f) global
- g) generational
- h) unequal

Last two points are particularly important at present. Usually we analyse people dividing them according to “age range”. For example, we could divide young people in three different stages:

- teens, from 13 to 19 years old;
- young, from 20 to 30 years old;
- young adults, more of 30 years old.

This division historically is connected to social changes: studying, working, wedding and so on. But in a so-called “Uncertainty Age” these steps are mixed. Aligning to other international classifications, we will refer to “generations” instead of “age ranges”. Over all, analysing media consumption, we can divide people in “digital immigrants” and “digital natives”. As Prensky [2001] wrote, natives were people born in the 90’s, surrounded by digital media<sup>4</sup>: computer, dvd, photo and video cameras, mobile-phone, Internet. They live with technology and have experience of a world by it. They can contact friends in few seconds, calling them everywhere and everytime, or sending an SMS or email. They can watch what happening in other countries without leaving own home (or any place where they are) and in real time, when they want; how they want.

Instead, digital immigrants were born in late 40’s, during or after the Second War World. They passed great part of their life with analogic media. Obviously, when we treat differences in the use of media, we think about two main stages of socialization: primary and secondary [Parsons, Bales 1956]. As we know, both stages look at a situation where actors are educated by their families as members of a particular culture and, then, as members of a small group (at school or work for example). If we think of the rule of media such as television or, at present, mobile-phone and Internet, we can consider how much they are significant during socialization stages.

Viewing this rule we can understand other differences between “immigrants socialization” and “digital socialization”. In the first case people were born in a social context where family, school and institution were the main cores for cultural and social education. Relations with people were direct and face-to-face. Their mass-mediatic landscape was characterized by radio, cinema and television. People play a typically passive rule, as spectators of sounds and

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<sup>4</sup> I prefer to use the adjective “digital” instead of generic “new” to refer to media based on a computer system. After all, every Age had “old” and “new” media. Also we have to keep in mind that the term “digital” itself could be useless soon to analyse the media of this millennium.

images. As Negroponte [1995] wrote, that was the Era of “push-media”. We can consider those as years in which people can do experience of a place staying physically in it. “Space” and “Time” were “hard dimensions” where, for example, everyone had to spend minutes, hours, days in order to visit a place (space) and to move their body from a starting point to a destination. We had to go to a Library to search/read a book, spending additional time to search some phrase in it; we had to go in another country to talk face-to-face with our older emigrant uncle; and so on. The greater is a space, the greater is the time required to cover it (according to physics law).

But, in my opinion, digital media have changed this situation, making “soft” the relation between these dimensions. Since 1990s a new typology of socialization has emerged, that we could define “digital”. In fact, in “digital socialization” children and young people meet other people living in different spaces but interacting at the same time. For example, we can visit Tokyo staying in London, connecting to Streetview Google service and “walking” around the city<sup>5</sup>. Differently from television, people can manipulate visual information choosing what to see and when to do it: it is a so-Negroponte-called “pull-media” [Negroponte 1995]. Also, we can think to about “VoIP” technology as Skype: we can talk face-to-face with older emigrant uncle, staying in our house (or walking in the street, why not?), watching a little camera of our computer or mobile-phone and speaking at a microphone. On our device screen we can see in “real-time” people we are talking to. In a way, we can consider the existence of a dimension of “real-time in shared-space” as the birth of a “third” space where people, who stay in different places, are converging in it. Digital media are unifying space and time dimension in one, and only one, new digital dimension<sup>6</sup> characterized by a “software culture” [Manovich 2009]. But differences between “natives” and “immigrants” are not enough to analyze and understand usages of the Web in depth. Scholars tried to propose other classifications as X/Y Generation, Net Gen., Millennials, iPod Gen., Google Gen. et cetera. Lost in all these classifications, we can try to divide them in two great categories:

a) *Age Gen*: It comprises all classifications referred to “decade of birth” of people. WWII generation for people born after the Second World War; Millennials, born after 2000; X Gen., 60-81’s.

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<sup>5</sup> I know that StreetView is not a “real-time” service but, at present, is much more “in time” and “in real” than other system.

<sup>6</sup> I could use “virtual dimension” term but “virtual” seems to suggest the idea of “unphysic”, “aleatory”. In my opinion “digital media” are not creating another dimension but are more merged with “real dimension”.

b) *Use Gen.*: in this category, I put classifications referred to what technologies people use and how. iPod Generation, Google Gen. are some examples.

Following Jenkins's [2006] classification, I have tried to explain why media landscape is "generational". Children, young, adult and elderly people use media technologies in different ways. The rule of digital media, in their life, causes different modes to experience culture and the world. Also, Jenkins wrote that media landscape is "inequal" too. This is because people do not have same technologies or do not have the same access to these. This is the digital divide,

«the gap between individuals, households, businesses and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities (OECD 2001:5)». The digital divide reflects differences among and within countries in terms of access to physical infrastructure, such as computers and Internet or even conventional communication infrastructure, such as fixed telephone lines. Digital divides can exist between developed and developing countries (also known as the global divide), or within a country (known as the national divide)» [ITU 2010:40].

Negroponte tried to raise the "digital divide" question to the international community proposing the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) project:

«To create educational opportunities for the world's poorest children by providing each child with a rugged, low-cost, low-power, connected laptop with content and software designed for collaborative, joyful, self-empowered learning. When children have access to this type of tool they get engaged in their own education. They learn, share, create, and collaborate. They become connected to each other, to the world and to a brighter future»<sup>7</sup>.

We can analyze the "digital divide" as a "tecnology-" or "culture-" divide. In the first case, the world could be divided between the "internet's haves" and "internet's have-nots" [Tapscott 1998]. With "internet" we have to consider any "connected-technology": not only in-house computer, but also devices installed in some institution (as school) or outdoors (as mobile-phone). Is the access to Internet democratic? Yes, because all people can access the Web and express their own opinion. No, because not all people have a device to access the Web or do not have a digital knowledge to express their own opinion. By IDI values<sup>8</sup> we can group countries in four levels:

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<sup>7</sup> <http://laptop.org/en/vision/index.shtml>

<sup>8</sup> ICT Development Index

Table 1: Country groups with different ICT levels [Source: ITU 2010:41]

Group	Number of countries	Population* %	IDI 2008	
			minimum	maximum
High	33	14.8	5.67	7.85
Upper	33	11.7	3.64	5.64
Medium	47	37.3	2.16	3.64
Low	46	38.1	0.79	2.04
<b>Total</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>7.85</b>

Note: \* This is the share of the population covered by the IDI, i.e. the population of the 159 economies included in the IDI (accounting for 97.8% of the world's population).  
Source: ITU.

- *High*, in which are 22 European countries, seven economies from Asia and the Pacific region, two Arab States (UAE<sup>9</sup> and Bahrain), as well as Canada and the United States.
- *Upper*, such as the Seychelles from Africa, Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia from the Asia and the Pacific region, three CIS<sup>10</sup> countries, three Arab States, nine countries from the Americas region, and 15 European countries.
- *Medium*, like China and Indonesia, but also small countries like Jamaica and the Maldives. In total, this group includes one European country (Albania), five African countries, nine Arab States, nine CIS countries, 10 countries from the Asia and the Pacific region, and 13 countries from the Americas region.
- *Low*, it also accounts for one-third of the population covered by the IDI (36.1 per cent) and comprises 46 countries, 31 of which are African. It also includes Haiti from the Americas region, five Arab States, and nine countries from the Asia and the Pacific region (including India).

**Table 1** shows how *low* and *medium* groups cover 73.4% of IDI's population (97.8% world's population) while *upper* and *high* is only 26.5%. By these values, can we still consider access to Internet democratic? Clearly not.

So, at present, media landscape is generational but, at the same time, unequal too. Of course it is “global” and “networked”: through the Web people are linked together, send email, watch video, listen music and read text from different countries. By mobile devices, these practices have become daily: we are connected to information in every minute of our life. And, because information

<sup>9</sup> United Arab Emirates

<sup>10</sup> Commonwealth of Independent States



is in the Web and the Web is a space where people meet other people, by mobile devices (and computer) we are connected to these ones.

For that we have to remind that the spread of mobile device, such as mobile-phones, could be useful to reduce digital divide, providing Internet access to less-privileged teens.

## 2. Use and Consumption

Once I have defined generations types, I would analyze different uses and consumptions of the Web. During last five years, mobile-phones have become one of the main communication devices among people, particularly between teens and their friends, by the use of short message systems. In USA 75% of 12-17 year-old own a mobile-phones (4% report having two or more phones), compared with 90% of parents. Teens use them to take (83%) and share pictures (64%), play music (60%) and games (46%). Other features are exchanging video and instant messages, surfing the Web, participating to social network, sending email and buying items [Lenhart et al. 2010b].

Compared with other digital devices, mobile-phones ownership is third after game console (80%) and mp3 players (79%; follow computers and portable gaming devices). The main reason for not having a mobile-phone (25% of 12-to-17 years-old) is that is “too expensive” (30%), “parents took it away” (27%), “broke it” (22%). Only 8% declares “don’t need it”. As I said, texts messaging is the most common practice used on mobile-phones; teens uses SMS to contact friends several times a day (75%), boy/girl-friend (40%), parents (24%) and other family members (17%). Also they use mobile-phone (calling or texting) to chat, report location, micro-coordinate, personal matters and manage school works. In other words mobile-phone is used to manage social life; but, if mobile-phone is more dedicated to personal interactions, teens use social network sites (as Facebook or MySpace) for interpersonal interactions and to organize larger events. Of course, social network sites are useful to contact more friends in less time (and in less costs); at the same time devices as mobile-phones are not suitable to allow a long and complex web-navigation session, because of their small screens. New devices, such as iPad, could offer this feature. Also mobile-phone provides an opportunity to access the Internet for users who could not go online otherwise.

Besides mobile-phone, 79% of teens (12-17) owns a mp3 player, compared with 67% of 18-29 years-old and 55% of 30-49 [Lenhart et al., 2010a]. Then, teens are also consumers of gaming devices: wired and portable. 80% of teens between 12-17 ages have a game console. Instead, half of teens (51%) has a portable gaming device. These devices allow users to access the Internet without a computer or a laptop: the ratio is 93% of teens versus 70%. In fact,



they go online via mobile-phones, game console (portable too) and video-music portable players. Following Lenhart's [et al. 2010a] classification, we can divide content creation activities in three groups: *blog*, *share content* and *remix*. The first refers to web-writing and discussion process that characterized Internet in last ten years. During "1.0 Web Age" (1990-2000) people went on Internet to read pages and search information. Anyway, their rule was "passive" because they only can "push" information from the Net. Newsgroups and forums tried to create web-communities, as starting point to participate and discuss with other people about different subjects. After Y2K users acquired a most active rule on the Web, creating their own web-page/site, through free blogs tools (as Wordpress.org or Blogger.com). Four years ago [Lenhart, Fox 2006] 19% of 12-17 aged internet users kept a blog and 38% of online teens read blogs. More than half (54%) of blogger users was under the age of 30 and 30% was between 30 and 50 years old. Bloggers in the 50-64 age group were 14% and only 2% was 65 or older. Blog is a medium to express oneself creatively and to share personal experiences with others (friend or not). It allows a blogger to create a relationship more direct with friends and a channel to meet new people. Then, the majority of bloggers cited an interest in sharing stories and expressing creativity. These two practices return in the use of social network sites (SNSs). Analyzing in depth the using of SNSs in 2009, 71% of 18-29 years-old american declared to have a profile on Facebook, 66% on MySpace and 7% on LinkedIn (this one focus on professional networking). The numbers of people participating in these social networks, sharing media, and creating "user generated content" are growing: MySpace, 67 millions of users<sup>11</sup>; Facebook, 550M<sup>12</sup>; YouTube, 440M<sup>13</sup>; LinkedIn, 37M<sup>14</sup>.

We can consider that as a place where personal content can be created and shared. For that reason Web 2.0 is also characterized from UGC systems. Create and share stories (blog), music and video contents (YouTube). Share pieces of own life, on the Web, with family, friends or strangers (Facebook, Twitter). It is also important to understand why SNSs are most used by people aged 50 and over [**Table 2**]:

«First [...] social networking users are much more likely to reconnect with people from their past, and these renewed connections can provide a powerful support network when people near retirement or embark on a new career. [...] Second, older adults are more likely to be living with a chronic

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<sup>11</sup> [https://www.google.com/adplanner/planning/site\\_profile#siteDetails?identifier=myspace.com](https://www.google.com/adplanner/planning/site_profile#siteDetails?identifier=myspace.com)

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.google.com/adplanner/planning/site\\_profile#siteDetails?identifier=facebook.com](https://www.google.com/adplanner/planning/site_profile#siteDetails?identifier=facebook.com)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.google.com/adplanner/planning/site\\_profile#siteDetails?identifier=youtube.com](https://www.google.com/adplanner/planning/site_profile#siteDetails?identifier=youtube.com)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.google.com/adplanner/planning/site\\_profile#siteDetails?identifier=linkedin.com](https://www.google.com/adplanner/planning/site_profile#siteDetails?identifier=linkedin.com)

disease, and those living with these diseases are more likely to reach out for support online. [...] And finally, social media bridges generational gaps. While the results can sometimes be messy, these social spaces pool together users from very different parts of people’s lives and provide the opportunity to share skills across generational divides» [Madden 2010:6-7].

Table 2: Social Media Trends by Age 2009-2010 [Source: Madden 2010:8]. % of online adults who use SNS, 2009-2010

	2009	2010	Percentage point change, 2009-2010	Percent change, 2009-2010
<b>Social Networking Use</b>				
<b>All adults</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Age</b>				
<b>18-29</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>30-49</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>50-64</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>88%</b>
<b>65+</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>

An other important activity on the Web is “remixing content” [Lenhart et al. 2010]. It refers to taking material found online (songs, text, images and videos) and merges it in a new, original, creation. For example, YouTube is a place where we can find what Lawrence Lessig [2004] called “Remix Culture”.

Following Forrester classification [Li, Bernoff 2008], web-users can be:

- *creators*: create and publish textual, video and audio content on blog and personal web page;
- *critics*: participate actively in the discussion about online contents;
- *collectors*: prefer use “Feed RSS” to organize and retrieve interesting content in every moment;
- *joiners*: read often social network sites and view others profiles;
- *spectators*: a low-profile, view other users generated content;
- *inactive*: not classified in previous voices and do not participate in social network sites.

Similarly, the 2010 Regions Europe's Digital Competitiveness Report [EUC 2009:48; Figure 2] proposed the following typology of Internet uses:

- *recreation*: playing, downloading media or so;
- *resource enhancing*: eLearning, reading the news, social networking and work;
- *instrumental*: buying and selling, e-banking and dealing with the public administration.

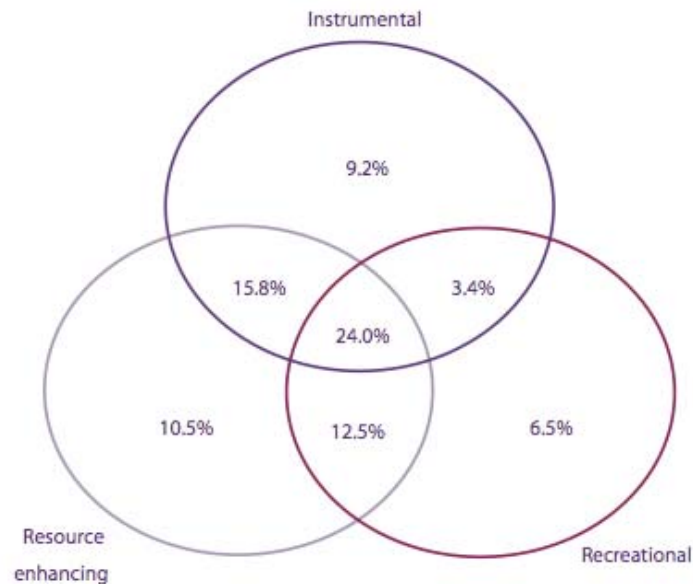


Figure 2: Typology of Internet Use [Source: EUC, 2009:49] The categories are not mutually exclusive. Out of figure: 18.2% *Tentative*, use e-mails and search engines but have not yet engaged in more advanced applications.

### 3. Mobility and apps

“The Web is dead?”. With this question Wired Magazine published an article by Chris Anderson [2010], on August 2010, in which he explains how in last decade the navigation on Internet has changed. Less Browser and more Apps; less disorder and more functionalities. Diffusion of mobile devices involved the creation of less complex softwares, downloadable on demand from Internet and easy installable. Yet Google, from 2006, created small web-based applications such as Gmail, Calendars, Contacts, Docs, Groups, Sites and so on. These represent a “work suite”, as Microsoft made with “Office” and Apple with “iWorks”, but do not require to be installed on a PC and could be

accessible from different computer system that have a web-browser. It could be called “cloud-computing” because it uses the user-computer as a “screen device” and not as a “computing device”. As Anderson wrote, the *desktop* is replaced with the *webtop*: “open, free, and out of control”. So convergence and mobility join on mobile device as mobile-phone but also as portable game consoles or multimedia players. From one place, such as iTunes or Xbox Live, music, video and applications, created by users too, can be downloaded. Through Internet users share files, information; in the near future they will share applications. The shift from browser to apps goes on with a shift from *syndication* (a push/mass-transmission model of information) to *subscription* (where user chooses what to be informed about); people are available to pay less to obtain particular, useful and suitable applications: it a so-Anderson-called “freemium” model (“free + premium”). It is clear that emergence of Native Apps will not cause the death of Internet, rather a different use of the Web. In any case people will be able to access information and to create content any time and any where they want, by a cellphone or other mobile devices. Already now, by them, users are sharing their “mind” by a Facebook or Twitter account; are showing their “sight” by YouTube or Flickr. It is a “sensorial relation” as de Kerckhove wrote [de Kerckhove 2001]: the relation with digital media involves ours senses in a complex, new, enhanced *brainframe* [de Kerckhove 1991].

#### 4. From File to Life Sharing

The shift from *Web*-paradigm to *Apps*-paradigm is part of a Internet’s revolution process, started twenty years ago. As I wrote, in “Web 1.0 phase” users visit and participate in forum community, searching static information by search engine, contact other people in public chat and download (illegally) music by software as Napster. This software created the “file-sharing phenomenon”. Unknown people make available, freely, their own personal collection of music, video, text and image files. Mainly, their content comprises a wide range of interesting information, such as the last single of David Bowie, recent cinema movies, books or celebrity photos. Above all, music files used to be the most downloaded typology of files. After the closure of Napster, new software were developed to allow users to continue to exchange files, in fear (and economic tears) of Discographic Houses.

This free and open exchange system is similar to another “open development community” better known as Open Source Community (OSC) or Linux Project. Linux is a operating system (OS) open-source-based, where common users/programmers share mainly freely pieces of code or entire programs to enhance the efficiency and stability of that operating system. The OSC debate, asking and sharing help about the “core code”: at the end, the OS

is a “social product”. This sense of community and reciprocal exchange could belong at Marcel Mauss’ “Gift” concept [1924] and the balance in OSC could follow the “mutual control” as expressed by Randall Collins [1975]. In this sense, physical presence is strictly missing but, however, members feel to be part of a “virtual society”, accept the “open source culture” and feel the mutual control. Who does not follow community rules is not part of it.

Another example of this “Community Spirit” could be found in Wikipedia project. Founded in 2001, it is a

«multilingual, web-based, free-content encyclopedia project based on an openly-editable model. [...] Wikipedia is written collaboratively by largely anonymous Internet volunteers who write without pay. Anyone with Internet access can write and make changes to Wikipedia articles (except in certain cases where editing is restricted to prevent disruption and/or vandalism). Users can contribute anonymously, under a pseudonym, or with their real identity, if they choose»<sup>15</sup>.

With Wikipedia (and within it) the *collective* and *connective* intelligence, conceptualized by Pierre Lévy [1994] and Derrick de Kerckhove [1997] is spreading up. In any time anyone can open a Wikipedia page and check it: add text, images, video, sound; debate with other authors about what is expressed in a particular entry. Users are the authors; they create the “open encyclopedia”. But users are also the readers; they control the content and, as Yochai Benkler wrote, «linking and “see for yourself” represent a radically different and more participatory model of accreditation than typified the mass media» [2006:219].

So, people can produce and share information simply: blogs, through comment-based conversations, proceed to create content with divergent and polarized viewpoints; wikis, through texts edited together, aims at facilitating views convergence [Dagnino, Gulmanelli 2003:65]. Another difference between blogs and wikis is in the attention focus: in the first one this is the author; in the second one is the edited text.

The collective participation had influence on economic systems as well: as Don Tapscott wrote, the actual business environment has to be based upon a close relationship between Companies and Customers. This collaboration is characterized by four principles: *being open*, or a transparent way by allow collaboration in public space; *peering*, as linux-based community: «Peering succeeds because it leverages self-organization—a style of production that works more effectively than hierarchical management for certain tasks» [Tapscott, Williams 2006:25]; *sharing*, as a “communalism” ideal of Mertonian norms of science: the intellectual property is treated like a mutual fund; *active*

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<sup>15</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About>

*globally*, because today a company have to trade with an international audience and also their products could be made in different countries: «Global alliances, human capital marketplaces, and peer production communities will provide access to new markets, ideas, and technologies» [ib.:29]. Those principles create a “wikinomics”.

Another question we have to ask is “how user rules change on the Web”. Actually web-tools most used are email and search systems, then research and information gathering, e-commerce; climbing “web activity pyramid” [Smith 2009a; **Figure 3**], we find basic online entertainment, more advanced communication and passive social media use, more advanced online entertainment, active engagement with social media. Of course high use of email and system search than low use of social media is caused by recent birth of the latter.



Figure 3: Web activity pyramid [Source: Smith 2009a]

Usually “Web 1.0 user” was known by his nickname and not by his original name and surname. In this sense we can consider their help completely free-of-charge. Nicknames of many users became famous in different communities thanks to their assistance.

In “Web 2.0 phase” something changes. Of course people continue downloading (illegally) music, video, image and text files (entire softwares like commercial operating system or videogame too). But the use of blog and social network sites implies a most active participation and responsibility in writing and sharing information. In a blog I write about myself, express my opinions; I am not an “anonymous user” but a “particular person”; I have not an avatar but a face; I have not an *additional name*<sup>16</sup> but my Name and Surname. I put the signature at the end of what I wrote, attach my face-photo and I am recognized in a web-community for that data.

### 5. Share-culture

We can consider the phenomenon of life-sharing as an important social feature (De Notaris, 2010). On the Internet people are connected but life-sharing enables users to show themselves each other and know other people of the world: their musical habits, what books they read, what movies they watch, what they produce and how they consume. People are *always on*<sup>17</sup> and steadily and reciprocally connected. Computer and binary code created a transcoding [Manovich 2001] where all pieces of culture are digitalized and transmit via file. But, as I explained, this is not only a cultural item conversion. It is a deeper circulation of ideas, opinions, dreams, images of the individual dimension. People share their life. If in the file-sharing era users share experience to help each other, in the life-sharing era the “gift” is free of any reward. We can consider these shared pieces of our life as an attempt at making ourself known to other people (friends or not); update them about our movements, interests and needs.

As we know, everyone of us gets a “social capital” [Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988; Putnam 1995] and it can be useful to increase productivity of individuals and groups. The Web and, above all, social media allow people to increase their own social network, bypassing face-to-face interactions, space and culture boundaries. For that reason we can analyze some of these social media to understand how and how much they could enhance social capital. In

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<sup>16</sup> This is the etymology of “nickname” term.

<sup>17</sup> A short terms to refer to be “always connected, always online”.



particular, I focus on the three of most popular social media: Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

### 5.1 Facebook

It is the most used social network by worldwide montly active users<sup>18</sup> with 500 million active users in July of 2010<sup>19</sup>. As is well known, it was created by Mark Zuckerberg in 2003 as a site addressed to Harvard students. Its name stems from the colloquial name of books given to university students to help them to get to know each other better<sup>20</sup>. Soon it opens its platform to other Universities and, then, to everyone older than 13<sup>21</sup>: it became the most known social network in the world<sup>22</sup>. It is crearily an “ego-based” site, where users get the main rule. Thanks to an internal search system, users can find people who attended same school or worked. Also, find people with same interest as music, movies, recipes, stores, clubs, etc. Once the users have added friends to their network, they can “shout” their own status to it. A dedicated field, *What's on your mind*<sup>23</sup>, allows user to write text, share a link, upload a photo or video. The “friends status update” is showed in a long vertical list, with friend name, their photo and the item shouted.

But users can express themself also by notes, fan pages, groups and, recently, community pages. Through notes it is possible to write a long text, as social opinion, political comment, announcements etc.; it can be used as a “blog item”. Fan pages and groups allow people to discuss about a common interest, as a music singer, a soccer team, and a politician, or to support a cause. Users subscribe the page/group and are updated on any news about it. Then

«Community Pages are a new type of Facebook Page dedicated to a topic or experience that is owned collectively by the community connected to it. Just like official Pages for businesses, organizations and public figures, Community Pages let you connect with others who share similar interests and experiences. On each Community Page, you'll be able to learn more about a topic or an experience—whether it's cooking or learning a new language—and

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<sup>18</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_social\\_networking\\_websites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites)"

<sup>19</sup> <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=409753352130>

<sup>20</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook>

<sup>21</sup> <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=2210227130>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.vincos.it/world-map-of-social-networks/>. In Russia is overtaked by *V Kontakte*, in China by *QQ* and in Brasil by *Orkut*.

<sup>23</sup> In earlier version it is *What's your doing*.

see what your friends and others in the Facebook community are saying about this topic»<sup>24</sup>.

With Facebook people can update their friends on everything they are doing, also by mobile device (mobile-phone) and game device (XBOX). So, in every time I can connect with my network and give “shout” to my “mind”. As a result of the progressive process of digital convergence, Web and mobile devices merge up, allowing users to communicate also about one’s space position, automatically. By GPS system mounted on our mobile-phone, Facebook shares to our friend-network the place where we are in that moment. Introduced by a dedicated location-based social networking website (FourSquare and Gowalla) it has been integrated in Facebook Places:

«With Places, you can discover moments when you and your friends are at the same place at the same time. You have the option to share your location by "checking in" to that place and letting friends know where you are. You can easily see if any of your friends have also chosen to check in nearby»<sup>25</sup>.

As a social media, Facebook rises up on traditional media (newspapers and TVs) during great natural disasters or mass movements. That is the recent case of Haiti earthquake on January 12, 2010. Because professional journalists and photographers could not go on the island, people of the world could be updated about what was happening via Facebook:

«Just as the initial images from Haiti did not come from professional photographers, the first impressions from eyewitnesses did not come from professional journalists. Instead, each came from citizen-reporters or, more accurately, people who watched the world around them literally crumble. They posted what they saw on social networking sites. It is yet another example of crisis coverage and outreach in the 21st century.

“Thank God for Facebook” said the Port-au-Prince Salvation Army director»<sup>26</sup>.

This world participation led people to create also a Facebook group dedicated to support the victims of the earthquake<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=382978412130>

<sup>25</sup> <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=418175202130>

<sup>26</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/HaitiEarthquake/haiti-earthquake-online-support-haitians-facebook-twitter-social-networking/story?id=9554022>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=260272509040&ref=mf>

A similar situation occurred in Italy, during another earthquake in Abruzzo on April 6, 2009. Also in this case the first communications about the disaster were passed by Facebook groups and status. In twentyfour hours different groups dedicated to give information, coordinate aid and offer solidarity were created. For that reason, according to John C. Bricout of the University of Central Florida (Orlando) and Paul M. A. Baker of the Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta) social network site as Facebook could be useful in specific emergency situations because «the emergency communications become one channel for a broader, relational network that extends from the virtual/online realm into real-world resources and relationships»<sup>28</sup>. This trend is also reported from an American Red Cross survey that shows how after tv news and radio station, the Web and Facebook are used to get information about an emergency. Again, people would use social media channels in an emergency to let friends/family know they are safe (49% would do; 86% of them would use Facebook)<sup>29</sup>.

In addition to “collective crisis”, Facebook has been used for “personal crisis”. It is the case of adopted people that find their own biological parents<sup>30</sup> or the case of a kidnapped kid who found his family after 22 years<sup>31</sup>. On the other side Facebook could be useful to dump one’s spouse or have an alibi to be exonerated as a suspect in a robbery<sup>32</sup>. Eventually, Facebook allows to create “memorial page” for people dead<sup>33</sup>.

It is clear how Facebook, by showing and sharing our personal data, became a main digital medium through we could become recognizable to our friends, colleagues, neighbors but, also, to people that we do not know directly. It is the main example of the “life-sharing” process by which we express and share ourselves. After all the social network sites are based upon the “six

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<sup>28</sup> Inderscience Publishers (2010, March 15). *Emergency online communities: Building social networks to help the disadvantaged during disaster recovery*. ScienceDaily. Retrieved August 23, 2010, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/03/100304093637.htm>. They also propose «... three main objectives: first coordinated online social networks must be developed that serve the “community” online. Secondly, adequate wireless, web-based and computer-mediated infrastructure that can be sustained during an emergency must be in place. Thirdly, emergency training and simulation must be carried out that tests how well the online social networks might cope in an emergency».

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.redcross.org/portal/site/en/menuitem.94aae335470e233f6cf911df43181aa0/?vgnnextoid=6bb5a96d0a94a210VgnVCM10000089f0870aRCRD>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2008885,00.html>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.adnkronos.com/AKI/English/CultureAndMedia/?id=3.0.4083351836>

<sup>32</sup> [http://www.oddee.com/item\\_96910.aspx](http://www.oddee.com/item_96910.aspx)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1932803,00.html>

degrees of separation” theory that refers to the idea that everyone is connected to any other one in the world by most six other “friends”<sup>34</sup>.

## 5.2 YouTube

The second social media that has caught up web-user attention is YouTube. Founded in 2005 by Char Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, it was created as a “digital video archive”, where people could upload video frames of own life [Burgees, Green 2009]. In the last five years, video technologies became less intrusive and available on common mobile devices, as notebook or mobile-phone. That tech-spread allowed any people to catch easily and quickly every instant of their own daily life. The “video-blog” phenomenon grew thanks to YouTube, where users records themselves talking about different topics and then publish this video on the Web. Through video-blog a new face of “citizen journalism” emerged, where people became witness of what happens around them and share it to everyone. Unlike traditional journalism, which is typically built from the top down, YouTube is based upon a grass-roots network [Jenkins 2006]<sup>35</sup>. After the Iranian Presidential election in 2009, people recorded clashes with the police and upload them on YouTube to show to the world what was happening (like Neda Agha-Soltan’s death, shotted by the Basij, a paramilitary group<sup>36</sup>), while traditional media offices were closed or raided, with camera and equipment confiscated. Only YouTube videos (and Twitter messages, as I show in next paragraph) showed to the world what happened in Iran.

However, once a video is uploaded, if it is felt interesting, people discuss it, replying by text or video comment. YouTube became soon another example of a “participatory culture”, as it was the case for Wikipedia. Citizen journalism is not the only use of this social media. People upload on it other kind of videos: funny cats and dogs, cooking lessons, sport scenes. YouTube became a place to *broadcast yourself*. Most uploaded contents are not produced by users but taken from television channels: movies, fictions, serials and, above all, music videoclip. Music, as it was for Napster, is the most suitable “culture-item” to share. Its short length implies a low weight (in megabyte terms) and, for this, is easier to download across Internet. In this sense we could consider YouTube as a

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<sup>34</sup> We can also remind the “small world” Milgram’s experiment in Seventies. “Six degrees” was a name of an early social-networking website too, existed from 1997 to 2001 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SixDegrees.com].

<sup>35</sup> «The term implies that the creation of the movement and the group supporting it are natural and spontaneous, highlighting the differences between this and a movement that is orchestrated by traditional power structures» [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grassroots]

<sup>36</sup> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d90bwM4No\_M

remediation [Bolter, Grusin 1999] of Napster because it enhances user's experience, showing content in streaming (people do not have to download in order to watch it). It is not a coincidence that on YouTube we can find "television contents". In fact *tube* is a technical part of "analogic television"; then, also YouTube *broadcasts*, as television. Giving freedom of expressing oneself, YouTube catches both users' and other mass media's attention; most of all, it draws economic and political interest. During the last American Presidential election, the main candidates used YouTube to share their promotional videos. I have to remind that YouTube allows web-users to embed their videos on other blogs and social network sites. So a video can circulate more than within YouTube's community. The "Internet and Campaign 2008" reported [Smith 2009b] that 39% of voters watched that video online during the election cycle. Unlike Facebook the core of YouTube is not the "ego network" but the video itself. It is surrounded by video-replies, comments and related videos through user's profiles and channels. So thanks to YouTube it is easier to coordinate and realize live "smart mobs" [Rheingold 2002], as it was the case for Michael Jackson Tribute after his death<sup>37</sup>.

As a "wikinomics" media, YouTube is an aggregator of content rather than a producer of content; for that reason David Weinberger [2007] defined it as "meta business": it produces nothing, but gathers, frames and enhances what already exists<sup>38</sup>.

### 5.3 Twitter

We can consider Twitter as a descendant of a postcard and SMS. Both have a short-based communication. Usually they both carry a "private communication" (though postcard content could be read by the postman). Twitter is a so-called "social status update service" or, most commonly, a "microblogging service". Just like its progenitor (the blog), it allows users to publish their own text by Internet; like SMS and postcard, its content must be short (140 characters): micro. But, unlike a postcard, by default it has no built-in tools to attach images (of course, users can turn to third-party solutions)<sup>39</sup>. Another, important, difference is that twitter-messages are publicly visible by default. Created in 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Twitter allows users to share text information with other users or, as they are called, *followers*. As we have seen for Facebook and YouTube, Twitter is integrated with mobile device too. By a mobile-phone we can send a "twitter message" like an SMS. It is the third most

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<sup>37</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=michael+jackson+tribute+mobs&aq=f](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=michael+jackson+tribute+mobs&aq=f)

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=409416>

<sup>39</sup> <http://mashable.com/2009/05/19/twitter-share-images/>

used social network with 6 million unique monthly visitors and 55 million monthly visits<sup>40</sup>. Unlike other social media, the core of Twitter is the pure text, replying to the question *What's your doing*, with no display of photos, videos, or notes, as Facebook does. Twitter, wrote Steven Berlin Johnson, got three elements: social networks, live searching and link-sharing and, by it, we «have a cocktail that poses what may amount to the most interesting alternative to Google's near monopoly in searching»<sup>41</sup>. It is easy to use and the hardware convergence allows everyone to communicate quickly with other people. Unlike SMS, its communication is wide and open to everyone. Its telegraphic mode is most useful in situations where it is important to communicate in a short time: not only in public conferences but also in every situation created to reduce the distance between politician candidate (as Obama) and electors; send alert during disaster as Haiti Heartquake; make a detailed story of has happened in urban clashes with Iranian police [Figure 4].



Figure 4 [Source: <http://politicalhumor.about.com/od/iran/ig/Iran-Cartoons/Stop-Or-I-ll-Tweet.htm>]

Also from a “wikinomics” perspective, celebrities use Twitter to update their fans about what they are doing. Or they use it to tell about their own daily-life-history as Queen Rania of Jordan did<sup>42</sup>; also, it allows Companies to keep an open channel with their own clients, where customers are only allowed to read or discuss about a product. This shared-text implied a shift from a “Broadcast Era”, where media were used to broadcast information to “passive people”, to a “Conversational Era”, where people share and discuss about information [Scoble, Israel 2006]. This wide communication could be considered always

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<sup>40</sup> <http://blog.compete.com/2009/02/09/facebook-myspace-twitter-social-network/>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1902604-2,00.html>

<sup>42</sup> <http://twitter.com/queenrania>



under community-control. In fact, greater is the number of followers and greater is the control upon the twitter-message, because many are the eyes that read it.

## 6. From Piracy to Privacy

To conclude, shift from file-sharing, that reaches its acme with Napster, to life-sharing, whose social media are current expression, match with another important transformation. The file-sharing Era - as I wrote - was characterized by a deep anonymity component: users share files without sharing their own identity, they downloaded music without knowing from WHO they downloaded. Instead, the life-sharing Era, is characterized by showing one's own identity, with photos, videos, name and surname. Sharing files puts some problems about "copyright question": it is illegal to share music, video or other "cultural items" without buying it<sup>43</sup>. Napster was shut down by a court order, as a tool by which media were distributed without authorization, also referred to as "piracy". This copyright question brought up new and different licenses as *Creative Commons* where creators reserve some rights and waive other for the benefit of consumers: «Creative Commons defines the spectrum of possibilities between full copyright and the public domain. From all rights reserved to no rights reserved. Our licenses help you keep your copyright while allowing certain uses of your work — a "some rights reserved" copyright»<sup>44</sup>.

Share life merges *piracy* with *privacy*. It keeps the questions about "who have the rights to share personal information" as my photo or a photo where I am depicted. In this sense, user are the owners of their own life and of expression of it. Social media as Facebook (but also other web-tools as Google) are at the center of this debate because their policy rules are not completely clear. When we upload a photo on a social media, it is kept in a database that users cannot control. How can I be sure that, if I remove a particular photo from my profile, this will be removed from the database too? How can I be sure that no one, through the Web, will use my life-files without my permission<sup>45</sup>? As Viktor Mayer-Schonberger wrote [2009], we have a biological mechanism by which we forget and, by media as paper or computer, we had try to externalize our memory. Remembering requires some efforts but, by digital media, it only requires a click. For that, a photo that I take today could be used in the future

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<sup>43</sup> Of course it's outlaw share it after bought its too.

<sup>44</sup> <http://creativecommons.org/about/what-is-cc>

<sup>45</sup> A funny example of this is gave from Danielle Smith's photo story [<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31214408/>].



for or against me (this is the case of Stacy Snyder that lost her jobs because she posted a picture of herself drinking, in a pirate hat). The debate is open. It is time to recover control on own personal files so we can share life safely.

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## Postmodern Openings

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