The Convergence Culture of the Formal and Informal Interfaces in Education

Maria Annarumma, Università degli Studi di Salerno, Salerno, Italy
Riccardo Fragnito, Università telematica Pegaso, Naples, Italy
Ines Tedesco, Università degli Studi di Salerno, Salerno, Italy
Luigi Vitale, Università degli Studi di Salerno, Salerno, Italy

ABSTRACT

Media convergence refers to a flow of content across multiple media platforms. Contents can be both top-down corporate-driven and bottom-up prosumers-driven (Jenkins, 2007). When analysing the changes that are taking place in mainstream and in grassroots media, what results is not an apocalyptic challenge among different media; rather, one takes note of how user participation is irreversibly modifying the concept of communication and creating new scenarios of knowledge. In light of this situation, by focusing on education as well as on teaching and learning processes and considering the learners as protagonists of the educational process itself, one can begin to trace their habits and customs in regards to media consumptions and all their favourite activities in order to predict a future orientation. The authors’ goal was to research how the generation of students of Bachelor of Education – future trainers and teachers – is able to use IT in formal and informal environments; more specifically, they carried out an exploratory research to understand how the leading characters of recent years, such as the New Web or social networks, are used by digital natives, in order to outline possible orientations in the employment of technology and its tools for didactic aims.

KEYWORDS

Digital Literacy and Competence, Formal and Informal Learning Environment, Technology-based Participatory Learning

1. INTRODUCTION: NEW WEB, SOCIAL NETWORKS, FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING INTERFACES

Web 2.0 introduces an era characterized by a continuous innovation in digital communication paradigms, where crossmedia and transmedia processes (Jenkins, 2007) are activated by “participatory and social technologies” (Siemens, 2005). Social applications have been reshaping space and time of public and private life, creating new modalities of participation to experience and knowledge sharing. Not only do these represent one of the main socio-cultural phenomena of recent years, but they also unveil the undiscovered potential of social media involvement in formal educational processes. Facebook is an emblematic example of often-wasted new media potential.

Recent surveys conducted by Eurispes 2015 reveal that nearly all samples (95.7%) are active on Facebook. This is the most popular social network in Italy, together with Twitter (43.2%), Google+ (40.1%), Instagram (34.2%), and LinkedIn (20.9%).

The technological devices Italian families use most are smartphones (67%). The diffusion of internet-connected mobile phones slightly exceeds that of laptops (64.4%) and desktop computers
(62.7%). Nearly one third of the samples declare that they own a tablet/iPad (36.8%), a subscription to pay-television (36%), a smart TV (33.3%), an mp3 player/iPod (30.7%), a video game console (Playstation/PSP/Xbox/Wii) (29.1%). Only 11.3% have an e-book, whereas 67% have already got a smartphone. Mobile phones are mainly used to make and receive calls (99.5%) as well as to send and receive text messages (88%). Common habits also include photo and video-making (65.3%) – to be sent or received (64.1%), surfing the Internet (61.2%), communicating via Whatsapp or other instant messaging applications (60.6%). Almost everybody has a social profile on Facebook (95.7%), where 43.1% have felt their privacy violated.

Many of the samples (41%) access social networks content (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) on their smartphones. 40.2% use their mobile also for work purposes, 34.2% listen to music, almost one third (31.1%) play.

Internet, instead, is more likely to be used for searches regarding topics of personal interest (98.4%) as well as for sending and receiving e-mails (88.2%), watching videos on YouTube (64.6%) and using social networks (60%).

Having a closer look to social processes and behaviour of younger generations means having an adequate vision of needs, customs and practices of the future society. In order to face its complexity and to get the most from all modern resources, it is necessary to develop some critical and creative thinking to select, create and interpret media messages.

This would happen within the connectivist paradigm, where, as Siemens says, “connections create meaning”. Social media may offer the learners brand-new opportunities to create and share content and interact with others. According to this perspective, traditional Learning Management System (LMS) seems as if it could provide poor performances and flexibility compared with the freedom the web can offer, in both management and customization of interfaces or content and in the availability of a certain amount of tools, media and functions.

It is not unusual for E-Learning and/or Blended Learning patterns to be transformed into worthless actions, thus entailing an enormous waste of resources and energies. Some patterns should be therefore regarded as outdated, in favour of the dynamics of crossmedia and transmedia dimensions, which may determine a farewell to the usual distinction between distance and presence as well as to a strict concept of interactive and communicative models, by focusing especially on the information flow and on the educational process.

Transmedia products involve many media at the same time, thus building a narrative process whose elements are constantly changing and evolving; there are no more barriers nor limits to the production of knowledge through media narration, which contributes with its specific and semantic languages to the creation of new and more dynamic scenarios of interpretation, and consequently of knowledge (Giovagnoli, 2013).

The idea of exploiting the potential of the Web as a working space for learning arises with the coming of social media, after a long period during which the debate was focused on the standardization of content and on the functional features of online platforms. In this new perspective, knowledge is generated following a bottom-up process: it is posted and shared on social networks to be commented, criticized and spread out.

According to Jenkins’ convergence culture (2007), a clash between grassroots media and institutional flows (of corporations, consumers and producers) is generating unpredictable effects. Grassroots convergence takes place the moment it becomes easy for the consumers to edit, export and spread media content thanks to media convergence (empowerment of flow of content through more media platforms), participatory culture (creation and circulation of new content), collective and connective intelligence (Lèvy 1996, De Kerckhove 1997). According to Stephen Downes, the world of education is also affected by the pervasive nature of the Web’s potential and tools. Therefore, everyone should become aware that both the Web and its users – the young known as net-generation – have deeply changed. In his article Seven habits of highly connected people (2011) the Canadian
Formalized Informal Learning: ICT and Learning for the 21st Century
www.igi-global.com/chapter/formalized-informal-learning/189031?camid=4v1a

A Study Regarding the Perception of Digital Citizenship among Adults and the Assessment of This Perception: A Digital Literacy Model
www.igi-global.com/article/a-study-regarding-the-perception-of-digital-citizenship-among-adults-and-the-assessment-of-this-perception/167859?camid=4v1a