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Meanings of Digital Participation into the Narrative Online Communities

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Meanings of Digital Participation into the Narrative Online Communities

Gabriella Taddeo*

Abstract: Drawing from theory and research on participatory practices, fan communities and their role in the identity and social work of teenagers, the paper contributes to the debate by analyzing how Italian teenagers take part in a writing-oriented social network such as Wattpad. These practices of authorship and readership have been explored through a mixed method approach, including participatory workshops, interviews and netnography, with a sample of 103 Italian students. Findings show several different ways to approach to digital narration and also different competences connected to such practices, that could be exploited in educational contexts. Different approaches to authorship are thus identified, spanning from an “industry” oriented to an “identity” oriented approach. Also several typologies of social readership emerge, since fans, peers and supporters are different cognitive, emotional and social shapes that teens give to their relation and participation online. The paper aims at describing such models, underlining the deep identity and social work that teens perform through them and offering some suggestions about how to connect it to formal educational contexts.

Keywords: participatory culture, digital narrative, digital literacies, informal learning, Wattpad

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Meanings of digital participation into the narrative online communities

Online participation is a central issue in the social and cultural debate related to youngsters and their daily habits. Fan communities, in particular those based on sharing narratives and user generated stories, have long been studied as sites of audience activity (Jenkins, 2006; Magnifico, 2013), areas of literacy (Black, 2006; 2008; Curwood et al., 2013; Garcia, 2016), spaces of affinity in which is possible to perform identity and social work (Gee, 2003), defining both commonality and distinction, both othering and being othered (Ksenia & Korbkova, 2014).

Fan fictions, at the base of such community, have been explored in their several cultural and social meanings. Hellkson and Busse (2006) tried to summarize the different approaches to the field highlighting six ways that fan fiction can be interpreted:

- Interpretation of source text;
- A communal gesture;
- A sociopolitical argument;
- Individual engagement and identificatory practice;
- One element of audience response;
- A pedagogical tool.

Several studies have also been dedicated to deepening the practices of interaction in these communities, attempting to know in depth about forms of authoring (Bold 2016), but also about diverse, less visible ways of participation, like commenting and reviewing (Magnifico et al., 2015).

As wider background, there is the intense debate about forms, levels, quality, social implications and limits of digital participation, which along the years has produced optimistic views about the role and the impact of such phenomena in the cultural system (Jenkins, 2006; Tapscott et al., 2007; Bruns, 2008), its impact in improving economy (Benkler, 2007), media professionalization (Shirky, 2008) political participation and citizenship (Castells, 2012; Cohen & Kahne, 2012), and also more skeptical positions which underline limits in terms of effective diffusion and inequality (van Dijk, 2009; Bird, 2011; Hay & Couldry, 2011; Van Deursen et al., 2014; Taddeo, 2018), social risks for privacy and control (Livingstone, 2008; Andrejevic, 2011), quality of participation (Carpentier, 2011), as well as concerns about the quality of the cultural production and creative processes (Livingstone et al., 2005; Keen, 2007; Gardner & Davies, 2013).

Summarizing with the words of Banet-Weiser (2012), the debate seems to be characterized by an “ambivalence” with which participants and also researchers seek to identify what gets gained or lost with Web 2.0.

This paper contributes to the debate at hand, exploring how and why Italian teenagers participate in a writing-oriented social network such as Wattpad and trying to answer to the following questions:

- How do new writing and reading practices emerge online?
- What are the links of these practices with new forms of skills that teenagers are developing?
- Which are the limits and opportunities, in an educational context, for such practices?

Methodology¹

The object of the paper is part of the larger research project *Transmedia Literacy*², which focused on understanding the participatory and transmedia experiences of young people in the digital and social spaces, and the informal learning strategies that, in these environments, teenagers were experiencing (Scolari, 2018; Guerrero-Pico et al., 2018; Pereira et al., 2018).

Considering the fieldwork, four research tools were used: 1) a questionnaire, to assess teens' socio-cultural backgrounds and media access, uses and preferences; 2) participatory workshops, to explore the teens' practices and motivations while promoting content creation and gameplay; 3) in-depth interviews to a sample of participants with the most striking practices and/or motivations and 4) their media diaries, which would cover ideally a week of media practices. The total sample completed the questionnaires and participated in the workshops (divided in two groups per class). For the interviews and media diaries five students were invited from each group.

In Italy, four sampled schools were selected considering three criteria: level of school (two lower secondary schools and two upper secondary schools); urbanization (two schools in the city of Turin, two in the suburbs – a small city as Susa and another in the outskirts of Turin, La Loggia) and ICT level (two schools with high levels of ICT adoption and infrastructures, two with lower ICT levels). A class from each school participated in the study.

In Table 1 is possible to view the sampling scheme of the Italian fieldwork, across the different methods.

Complementary to the fieldwork with students, a desktop, ethnographic online analysis was carried out, which focused on one of the online environments considered most interesting according to the analyses that emerged

¹ This research was funded by the European Union-TRANSLITERACY project 645238/Horizon 2020-Research and Innovation action.

² Transmedia Literacy. Exploiting transmedia skills to improve formal education. TRANSLITERACY - 645238 / Horizon 2020 – Research and Innovation actions. Further information about aims, methodology and results of the research at the page: www.transmedialiteracy.org

from the previous phases. The netnography (Pink & Ardevol, 2018) was carried out in Italy between the May 1st and July 1st 2017 and focused on interactions within the Wattpad platform, as it proved to be one of the most-used digital environments in which Italian teenagers undertook creative and participatory activities, together with Instagram and YouTube (Guerrero-Pico et al., 2018; Pereira et al., 2018).

Table 1: Sampling scheme

RESEARCH TOOLS	SAMPLE		
	Italy		
		Teens (n)	Age
Questionnaires	97	43	11-13
		54	14-19
Workshops	103	49	11-13
		54	14-19
Interviews	39	22	11-13
		17	14-19
Media diaries	24	12	11-13
		12	14-19

Wattpad is a social reading platform and a tool for sharing both reading and writing experiences.

According to the data given by Ashleigh Gardner, head of partnerships at Wattpad Studios, the platform had in 2017 over 60 million monthly users and more than 2.5 million monthly writers who had published more than 400 million story uploads. Wattpad stories are available in more than 50 languages. Demographics show that users are more than 70% female, and 80% are Millennials or Gen Z, spending more than 15 billion minutes per month reading content on the platform (Anderson, 2017).

We selected 3 narratives and authors for the online observation within the platform, basing on the examples, pieces and authors collected during the previous fieldwork phases: we looked at those of which sampled teenagers were merely readers, those in which they acted as interactors, and, finally, those of which they were authors.

In selecting the cases, we referred also to Bold's (2016) classification of Wattpad writers, adapting it to our aims, thus classifying authors and works according to three categories:

- Authors and narrations mentioned in the workshops and interviews by participants and identified as being really famous and popular; these may be considered "star authors" as they received millions of views, thou-

sands of comments for each book and, in some cases, have also migrated from the Web 2.0 system to the traditional publishing world, becoming paper-printed success stories. We thus considered as “star” author Cristina Chipperi with her work titled *My Dilemma is you*.

- Authors and narrations from the sample of teenagers who participated at the research that can be considered, according to the Bold’s classification, as “invisible authors”, as they received less than 10,000 views and gathered more intimate and private interactions compared to those visible on the Wattpad platform. This category includes #solaconlametta, an author who was among those interviewed, with her book *Autolesionismo-Anoressia-Bulimia-Depressione-Amore* (tr. *Self-harm - Anorexia-Bulimia - Depression - Love*), which received 9,000 views and 461 votes.
- Works selected according because they fall between the two categories mentioned above. We can define them as authors in the making, first “invisible” and now “stars”: “micro-celebrities”. We would place Auripazza, author of the book “Frase che diciamo tutti mentre leggiamo fan fiction 2” in this category (460,000 readings and 37,000 votes).

Table 2 - Analyzed Wattpad narratives in the netnographic phase

Analyzed narratives in Wattpad	Type of author
<i>My Dilemma is you</i>	A “star”: (24 million of readers at July 2017)
<i>Frase che diciamo tutti mentre leggiamo fan fiction 2</i> (tr. <i>Phrases which everybody says while reading fan-fiction. 2</i>)	A “micro-celebrity”: (460.000 readers at July 2017)
<i>Autolesionismo-Anoressia-Bulimia-Depressione-Amore</i> (tr. <i>Self-harm - Anorexia-Bulimia - Depression - Love</i>)	An “invisible author”: (9. 000 readers at July 2017)

During the ethnographic phase on Wattpad, data collection began with systematic observation (Androutsopoulos, 2008, p.6) and repeated monitoring, focusing on “relationships and processes rather than isolated works.” For this reason we observed the writings, but also the interactions that took place within the months of observation, as well as the general background of the interactions, considered as the entire body of paragraphs, comments, conversations, profile updates, transmedia cross productions accumulated asynchronously along the way, surrounding each of the three analyzed narratives and authors.

Wattpad in fact is a “medium-term time community”: interactions are rarely synchronous, instead spanning months, and they can be viewed and

accumulated during the time of publishing, being considered an integral and pivotal part of the cultural experience each “book” triggers.

The netnographic work was carried out saving and reading the 3 narratives, observing daily new writings, comments and interactions, as well as the different transmedia initiatives (e.g. Instagram or Snapchat contents) that were produced in the meanwhile. Finally, specific chapters, comments or contents underlined by the interviewed were analyzed, in order to merge the netnographic notes coming from the online observation with data and information coming from the other contexts (face to face as well as through other online tools) of interaction around Wattpad, as described by Italian users’.

Wattpad as a “middle intensity” creative activity among youngsters

Prior research shows that some young writers have used the internet to build up large-scale networks around writing, teaching English (Black, 2008), exploiting their talent in writing (Olthouse & Miller, 2012) or developing public services projects (Jenkins, 2013). These networks motivate youngsters to develop relationships with their readers, reviewers and fans (Curwood et al., 2013; Padget & Curwood, 2015).

While creative participatory practices - though exceptional - are well-studied practices, not many scholars have coped with the “ancillary” practices linked to authorship, such as reviewing, reading, managing fan spaces and sharing of stories (Gee, 2004; Lenhart et al., 2007; Black & Wiliam, 2009).

However, these “ancillary” forms of participation were the most popular amongst our sample group.

According to our interviews, in fact, 10 of the 39 students interviewed used Wattpad among their social and media platforms: they declared themselves to mostly be “middle intensity” interactors, by commenting, sharing, and reviewing works with their friends or with unknown peers. The users were all female, the majority of whom (8 teenagers) between 12 and 14 years of age, while only 2 teenagers came from upper secondary school classes.

While all the girls declared they were readers on the Wattpad platform, 9 declared that they also comment and share stories or part of them, and 3 claimed to have produced content, experimenting also as authors within the platform.

Though this data seems to suggest that this digital environment plays a weak role in teenagers’ participatory and creative activities, we can better understand the weight and importance of this kind of social platform as a creative tool for the Italian sample group if we consider that it was the third most popular active and creative application used by the Italian sample

group, after more mainstream practices such as creating and editing videos (23 interviewed teens said they did this) and images (18 teenagers). During the workshops, 2 groups, all of females from lower secondary schools (11-13 years old) decided to produce a Wattpad story: they worked re-elaborating stories from their preferred fan fictions (*Colpa delle Stelle*, *After*, *Stanza 258*, *My Dilemma is you*), explaining us during the workshops their idea of creation, based on a variation of such narratives on the basis of a more ironic, feminist and less romantic mood.

Having discovered that “middle intensity” interactive and communicative practices in Wattpad were among the most widespread creative practices among our sample group, we decided to explore these activities in depth by observing how these interactions were usually performed, within this space, which were their motivation and which their uses and gratifications about such activities.

Stars: voices for dreaming

Many of the youngsters interviewed told us about their passions for popular stories such as *My Dilemma is you*, or *After* by Anne Todd.

My Dilemma is you by Cristina Chiperi, a 17 year old Italian teenager, was already a bestseller at the time of observation, counting in the Italian version of the platform about 24 million readers and thousands of comments per chapter. In spring 2016 all three works in her saga had also been published in Italy as traditional prints, ranking top position for several weeks (Il Post 2016). Following the platform’s most widely-used narrative format, the author takes famous teen idols (in this case, YouTube star Cameron Dallas) and rewrites them as the protagonists of a love story.

If we look at the comments about the fifth chapter of the book, (which counted at the time a total of 1,517 comments), we can see that the vast majority of them are spoilers, words of surprise and admiration, the exclamations and greetings of fans and, but more rarely, comments comparing the story with the daily emotions of the readers. The author did not interact with her readers by responding to such comments, nor did those readers who took the time to leave a comment seem to expect direct interaction with the author; they seem more interested in merely sharing an emotion, a feeling and a sense of presence and to get involved in commenting, in an enthusiastic and also, sometimes, in a sarcastic way, the story and its narrative style. They are, according to Magnifico et al. (2013), above all, comments left by readers to communicate their social presence.

In the “Conversation” area, which collects all author-reader interactions, we can find only those behaviors typical to an established member of the media industry: announcements for the publishing of new chapters, commu-

nications regarding the release of printed versions, as well as notifications on deletion of spoiler comments or confirmations on the originality of some works compared to others released on the platform.

We can observe that within this context the author-readers relationship is shaped according to quite a traditional top-down form of mass media and the level and quality of participation is strongly asymmetric and impersonal.

This data is confirmed also by our field research: teenagers of the Italian sample referred us, during interviews and workshops, that they interacted with such type of works as “fans”, talking together about the story, suggesting it to friends, sharing famous phrases, but without performing any type of one-to-one, direct interaction with the author.

Invisible authors: voices for empathy

The second case we examined is the *Autolesionismo-Anoressia-Bulimia-Depressione-Amore*” work (tr. *Self harm-Anorexia-Bulimia-Depression-Love*), by an Italian girl who was part of the sampled teenagers, participating to the Wattpad community both as reader both as writer of own stories.

As Wattpad author P. (female 17 years old) can be defined, according to the Bold’s classifications, an “invisible author” since her writings have relatively low levels of popularity in the platform.

This work, first of five other narratives produced by P., received at the period of observation 9.000 readings, 461 votes and 65 comments.

During the interview and the workshops P. immediately presented herself as a “creative” and a teenager who was involved in several participatory practices every day.

She stated she was an avid video gamer, a huge fan of several singers and that she actively participated in several online fan communities; she also mentioned and described several works she had produced on Wattpad, speaking profusely about the motivation behind her writing, but also of the type of interactions and social exchanges she aspired to and reached through such activities.

All of this spurred us to study her further by reading her work and analyzing the interactions surrounding it, both the visible ones posted on the platform as well as the invisible ones that she described to us during the fieldwork phases.

In order to fully understand this case, it is important to take in consideration the social and emotional context in which she was living: during the interview and the workshops she disclosed a number of serious problems such as eating disorders, bullying at school and some rather complicated situations with her parents at home.

These problems were incorporated into her narrations which represented, for the most part, a merge of trend topics coming from popular Wattpad narrations and existential and social claims.

As she told us during the interview, in fact, she preferred writing about real situations rather than just fan fiction stories:

“I wanted to talk about real stories, it’s important to fight, to continue to fight... I say this in reply to every comment I receive: «we have to be stronger; we have to fight; if you want to send messages to me also in Wattpad, do it!» I receive many comments like this.” (P. female 17 years old).

Nobody of people who lived near her (from schoolmates to friends or parents) was invited to read and participate to her Wattpad activity, while P. told us of several groups she followed online focusing on topics such as bulimia and anorexia and which had become, for her, a real reference point while she felt a huge lack of support in school or at home on these issues.

Thus, for people living difficult situations such as her, these new forms of writing-based interactions become tools through which to express their pain and ask for help.

In the examined story, each of the 24 chapters describes a situation of pain, frustration, unrequited love. At the end of each chapter she has added an “author space” in which she explains where her inspiration for each story came from and a connection to her own thoughts and emotions.

The comments she received in the platform (65) all speak of the emotions she shares: some commenters offer support, expressing emotion and empathy.

As we can see, for example, in this comment by #lacasasenzafinestre (tr. # homewithoutwindows):

“This chapter is much better than the first one. «how do you weigh happiness?»; fantastic. You expressed the concepts well; I really felt the emotions and so... this time you really deserve a star.”

Some commenters offer themselves up to help the girl further, through their availability to connect via other channels and opportunities for dialogue, also outside of the literary context of the platform.

Nobody focuses on a rigorous review of the product, or the quality or originality of the writing; instead both the author and readers use the narration as a launch pad for to find emotional and social resources in new and unusual contexts respect to the traditional support systems.

Readers interact with author mostly as personal supporters, paying attention to the emotional value of the contents, more than on the writing qualities of her work or on the storyline.

Micro-celebrities: voices for emerging

The third example that we have taken into consideration belongs to those authors that are defined by Bold as “micro-celebrities”, as they are emerging and establishing their fame.

Auripazza may be considered an emerging “micro-celebrity”; she is author of the work *Frase che diciamo tutti mentre leggiamo Fanfiction 2, The sequel* (tr. *Phrases which everybody says while reading fan-fiction. The sequel*) which in June 2017 counted 461.000 readings and 37.000 votes. The last update was on June 24th 2017 in 109 parts, so her book could be considered as a live, ongoing work, during the research.

At the time of the ethnographic observation, Auripazza had 266,000 followers and 5 digital works in her portfolio, including a cross media product entitled *Cose da YouTube* (tr. *YouTube stuff*).

It was at this time that Auripazza started her “identity work” (Korbkova & Black 2014), her path towards becoming a “Wattpad star”, and she decided to reinforce her presence in the transmedia ecosystem by publishing an Instagram Profile, a Twitter profile and other social media pages.

She can be considered an interesting case study for two main reasons:

1. Since she was growing as a public writer in the Wattpad system, we could observe her transformation dynamically and analyze her identity and media strategy -undertaken over several platforms - to transform herself from invisible author to a star.
2. Her work, classified under the *Humor* genre, highlights interesting self-reflexivity issues, since she writes about literary stereotypes of Wattpad fan fictions and, by doing so, provides a launch pad to the fan fiction aesthetic and culture from within. It could be considered a kind of auto-ethnography.

Some examples of this mix of author-reader writings are chapters that compare fiction and real life, as, for example, in this piece:

In FF (alias Fan Fiction):

“Harry Styles gifts her an iPhone7 and she: «Ah... Thanks. »

In real life: my classmate gives me a piece of snack and I: «oh My God thanks so much!!! I love you foreveeeeeer! » Hysterical shout... that isahahahaha”.

“In FF: «I’ll read my favorite book under a tree in the park».

In reality: “I’m just looking at another stefy1986 video ...”

Following her narrative strategy, which is more a collective diary of teenagers’ daily lives than those of fan fiction characters, she often asks for comments, ideas and contributions from readers who respond by adding to the story sketches of their own lives and mixing everyday, ordinary life episodes

into the narration, as in the example below, coming from one of her commenters:

“In the FF: «I want to relax listening to classical music».

In reality: I want to relax by listening to “Let’s go” by Fabio Rovazzi.

Comment: ahah trash is the new black”# giuliala712”

Her transition from being an ordinary teenager to becoming a “star” is based on several strategies:

1. Distance from everyday life. Her method of presenting herself and interacting was initially (in May 2017) based on pointing out that she was an ordinary girl, sometimes disgruntled as all can be, but, over time, she has made a shift toward smoother self-presentation, eliminating the traits and details of her private life and hints at her daily life, and eventually showing a more normative self, building up an identity as a reference model.
2. One-to-many interactions. Over time, interactions have become less an exchange between peers and more a collection of tributes to her from her fans. Observing the comments made at the end of her chapters we are able to observe this shift. Her responses to readers’ comments mix fragments of daily life with feedbacks that reflect her more public role.

One example of the former is when she shares the following message with her peers regarding upcoming school examinations:

“Good luck to everybody who will be taking school exams this year(both third and fifth year students), and also all of those who will have to retake theirs in September”.

We can take as an example of the second kind the apology she makes for not having the time to manage all conversation requests:

“Sorry but at the moment I am unable to follow what’s going on in Wattpad too much; there are so many of you. Thanks for writing to me and I will try and reply to each message as soon as possible”.

As her audience grows so too do readers’ requests; and her punctual, person to person replies decrease at the same rate.

3. Transmedia identity brand. According to the unwritten self-marketing rules of the Wattpad environment, many authors undertake a huge task to transform themselves from “invisible” to “celebrity”, and this transformation starts by affirming a strong and continuous transmedia presence online, overcoming their initial role of mere writers and the very boundaries of their books, in order to create broad self-branding strategy across multiple platforms. Over time, in fact, also Auripazza enriches her social media identity by adding Twitter, Instagram, We Heart it, and, later on, Snapchat profiles. With regards to the last one, she admits she doesn’t

use it very well since she is new to the app, demonstrating that the use of these platforms is not always driven by daily changes in media consumption but rather is specifically motivated by a particular media work she is interested in, in order to grow as a Wattpad personality.

4. Marketing strategies. Over time she tries to expand her audience through specific, Web 2.0, participatory involvement and calls to action: contests, upcoming chapter spoilers, inviting her readers to put themselves forward as characters in her stories, and so on.

Fandom and everyday life are mixed, as can be seen in the comments in Figure 2, where author and reader talk together about moving on to high school and Auripazza, as a micro-celebrity and already a minor reference point, is now legitimated in giving guidance tips.

Figure 1 - A comment by Auripazza, a “micro-celebrity” author in Wattpad. (Conversation exchange between the author and a commenter, in which her blurred approach between an invisible and a micro-celebrity role is showed)



Within this author we can notice a certain willingness to promote her work and her “brand identity”, in order to approach audiences in a marketing-oriented way.

However, also the attitude towards writing as a simple, genuine social need can still be clearly seen, as is the inclination to fit in with peers before moving on standing out and becoming a unique personality, a literary “star”.

From the fieldwork, one girl said they she had participated to the Auripazza’s works, both sending comments and new phrases to add to her work. She considered her a “girl like us”, with a good talent, and her approach to her work was of reviewing and suggesting, respect to emotional support or adoration.

As authors, two girls from the fieldwork tried to adopt a similar approach, by writing stories which strongly connect to the trendy topics and imitate the moods actually popular in the Wattpad community, but also maintaining, through their writing activity, relationships with friends (in many cases invited as reviewers or co-writers), emotional connection with their life and biographical references.

An interviewed girl (C. 13 years old) told us about her path in the platform in such manner:

“A friend of mine, who is English mother tongue, invited me to write a Wattpad story, we started very shiny but, going on, we have received more than 200 readers (also because of the English language). So now we are trying to refine our work and distinguish it from the other popular stories, using irony and promoting it also through Instagram”.

Discussion

We have analyzed three different works and authors within the Italian Wattpad community: a “star”, a “micro-celebrity” and an “invisible author”.

Amongst the “stars”, we have observed how many interactions are undertaken by commenters though, on the most part, these are not really very participatory; amongst micro-celebrities, on the other hand, the voices of commenters are numerous, their online visibility is high and they become truly involved in the creative process, not just as fans but as co-creators of the message and the narrative world. However, as their fame grows, micro-celebrities tend to adapt their communicative style to that of a “star”, reducing horizontal communications with their readers and striving to build a public voice. Irony, marketing, reduction of one-to-one communications, and a diminishing of personal details are all strategies aimed at reaching this effect.

The case of the “invisible authors” is different still: they write not to become stars, nor to express their literary attitude or to position themselves as

talented producers within the cultural industry, but rather to express emotional needs and obtain social support.

The aim in this case is not to talk to everybody but to talk to people who are like them. They don't want to become protagonists of a marketing strategy which isolates them as "special" among others, rather aspiring to remain with others, and their narrative works reflect this desire.

Differentiation and identification are two main forces at the base of such communication dynamics, and they are differently modulated by the youngsters according to their needs and goals.

We can therefore distinguish a number of different voices in Wattpad:

- voices by "stars", usually mono-directional and shaped according to a mass media and top-down interactional approach;
- voices by "micro-celebrities", who try to stand out, emerge and differentiate themselves;
- voices by "invisibles", who aim to fit in, belong; they don't want to stand out as, unlike micro-celebrities and stars, they wish to be included and connected.

Beyond different uses and typologies of interaction, different modes of reflexivity and self-reflexivity are undertaken. A first form is related to the general aim below the authors' interaction in such system. If by some teens Wattpad is used as a stage to stand out, show the own uniqueness and talent, by other ones it is rather interpreted as a space to search for similarity, belonging and social inclusion.

The writing process and its interactions also imply different forms of reflexivity.

In the case of the works by the "stars", such reflexivity is developed mainly through the ability to create a brand narration and to manage it through the social media mechanics and marketing rules of the Web 2.0 industry. By the "invisible authors", instead, it is mostly relational in type, it focuses on communicative interactions and uses writing and narrating as ways to explore and exploit personal relational needs.

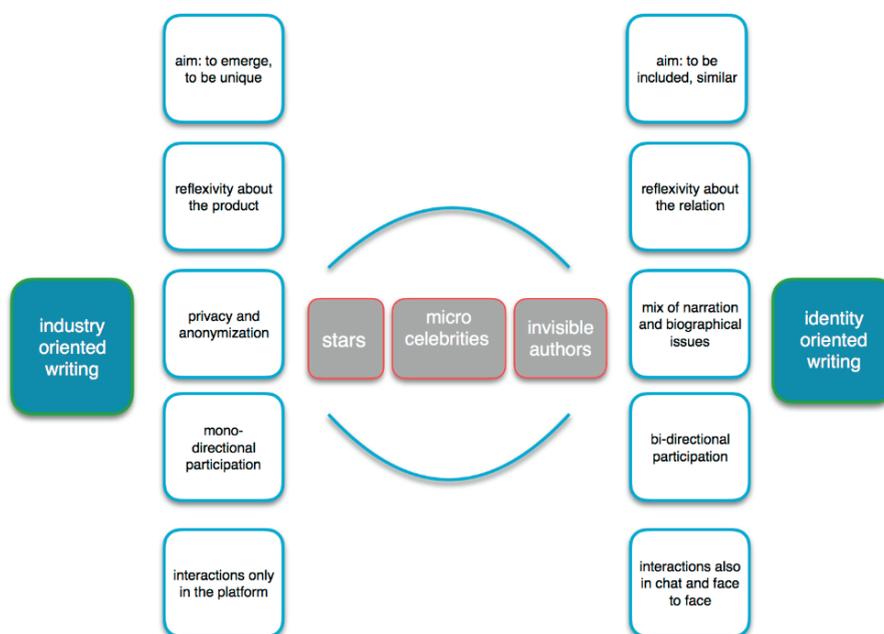
The connection between storytelling and real life also is configured according to different, divergent models: in the "invisible" authors, as the example of P. showed, there is a strict intertwining of real life and fictional one: they are often blurred both in the stories both in the online interactions (e.g. in the comments). Instead, "micro-celebrities" and, moreover, "stars" tend to widen the distance with their readers, avoiding to put direct details about their real life in their stories, or using irony for self-distancing far from daily, ordinary lives.

This distancing is progressively observable also in the forms of interaction around the stories: while the "invisible authors" respond to each comment, denoting a direct relationship, one to one, with their readers, and tend

to create connections also exploiting other communication channels (e.g. Whatsapp), “micro-celebrities”, and “stars” tend to progressively reduce direct responses to readers, making them more and more generic and standardized. They also avoid to get in touch directly with their readers through communication tools outside of the Wattpad platform.

Figure 2 summarizes all the distinction factors mentioned above, trying to show how new cultural practices that emerge from such social media platform address multifaceted production and participation models, with vastly varied, and sometimes divergent, aims, practices and interactional dynamics.

Figure 2 - Dynamics and motivations behind Wattpad practices

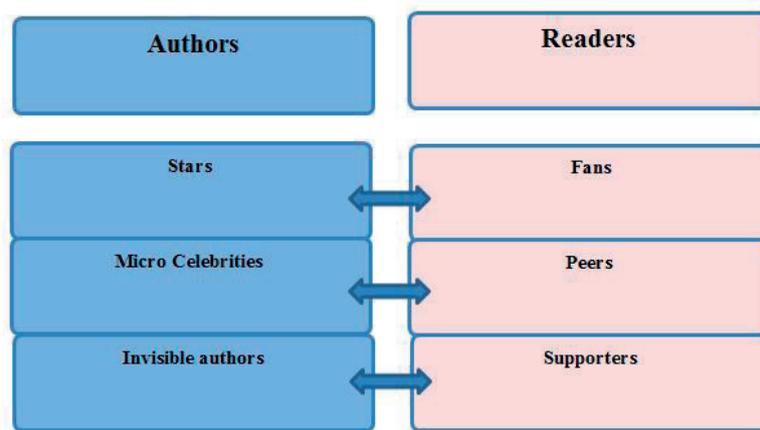


Finally, also the way of being readers changes: readers of the “stars” find in their stories far and mainstream models of identification, so they can be defined as genuine “fan”, their comments aimed not at expressing a personal and even divergent point of view but rather at reinforcing their sense of belonging, passion and identification.

Readers of the “invisible authors”, instead, love to recognize in the stories fragments of real life, and they feel called to support the author, through their participation, to find strategies to “rewrite” his/her life. Their comments mostly focus on support the author in existential matters, giving suggestion and emotional support for the real life. They can be defined as “supporters”.

Finally, readers of micro-celebrities consider themselves as “peers”, thus performing their participation through suggestions, comments and also collaborative writing about the narrative aspects of the work as well as the professional and artistic development of the author.

Figure 3 - Different authors-readers relationships in Wattpad



Conclusions and final remarks

Findings reveal that teenagers who participate in Wattpad do not all aspire to a “star-system” model, since the motivations, values and gratifications behind their writing practices vary greatly and do not necessarily adhere to the ideals of success as they function in the classical, mass media driven, cultural industry. In fact according to our findings, teenagers are able to differentiate their interaction, contribution and communicative style in relation to different objectives, using reading and writing as a professional tool as well as communicative and relational acts.

Going deeper into understanding the motivations of the online participation of young people in writing and reading in communities like Wattpad, we have highlighted several objectives underlying participation, which give form to different styles of interaction both as writers and readers. Youngsters are increasingly aware of, and attracted by, the logic of the creative industry behind the web 2.0 phenomena, but not for this reason they are willing to give up the personal aspects of social communication and individual expression that these tools can offer.

Teens then move among different roles and are able to modulate their contribution and their interaction based on the role they want to express at that time. To embody a role implies different aspects and profound differenc-

es both in relation to the type of content that is shared, and also in relation to the type of communication interactions that are chosen. While the “stars” fully adopt a mass media communication style, the “invisible authors” use the interaction in the platform as a way to build and strengthen one-to-one communications and interpersonal bonds (often trying to overcome the limits of their physical networks) and the “micro-celebrities” act in the middle and in transition between the two models.

Several aspects of the issue should be further analyzed. An interesting one is, for example, the gender factor. In Italy we have noticed the total female predominance in relation to the dynamics in Wattpad, both as a reader and as a writer, while males are mostly involved as Youtube video producers. We should go in depth in this aspect, to understand why particular aspects of the above described interactions are closely linked to gender issues.

Despite trying to observe such interactions as a whole, there was one important bias we could not avoid: we were in fact unable to observe the numerous and invisible interactions that the subjects undertook across other platforms - for example, WhatsApp - and which constitute part of the daily interactions among Wattpad users, as well as physical exchanges and face-to-face interactions.

We tried to reduce such biases during the analysis by taking into account the entire body of materials that emerged from the workshops, interviews, media diaries and the Wattpad space, and trying to triangulate them.

However, since “online practices as playing out at an intersection between a multitude of overlapping fields, some entirely web (or Internet) based, and others spanning mediated

and co-present environments” (Herzig, 2016, p.16), further research could be dedicated not only to match netnography with data and descriptive narratives on daily life coming from the fieldwork, but also to intercept and connect meaningfully the multiple digital environments that teenagers live concurrently.

Not only research about transmedia practices, but also research through transmedia methods could be further developed.

Finally, different aspects of this analysis can provide elements of reflection in the educational field. The study underlines how different forms of literacies develop and take shape starting from the interests, passions and specific subjectivities of the teenagers, even very different ones. To think about a unique model of engagement and development of literacies in the classroom, therefore, appears to be a dated and ineffective approach. This analysis intends to indicate a comprehensive approach in the educational field, aimed at stimulating teachers to take part in the digital cultural practices of teenagers, and to connect them to formal knowledge.

Going in depth into the motivations, the obstacles, the cultural relationships that push teens to write, even outside school contexts, for example, can be an effective approach to create a bridge between formal and informal learning.

Teachers, therefore, should take part, in an ethnographic manner, in the digital practices of their students, in order to understand their limits but also their potential (Masanet et al., 2019). The article, therefore, showing the complexity of the motivational worlds behind some digital youth practices, intends to highlight the importance of using a bottom-up approach to digital literacy, able to enhance, and not only to measure and standardize, the variegated world of youth contemporary digital skills.

The Transmedia Literacy project, finally, developed a Teacher's kit and an action plan (Amici & Taddeo, 2018) aimed to facilitate teachers to carry out such work, bridging digital practices and informal learning strategies, emerged from the research, to educational activities that can be implemented in classroom.

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