The Facebook Watch Phenomenon in Italy: An Explorative Analysis

If, according to Eco, there are two phases of TV since the creation of the media, nowadays it’s necessary to define the characteristics of a television that now converges with the Internet. Carlos Scolari calls it "hypertelevision" and frames it in a system of hyper mediations and media convergence. But a television that depends on the Internet has been reality for some time and is almost normalized, also it pushes toward innovations in which the TV as a medium disappears and its formats become produced and distributed by the big online forces, which are not created specifically for it. If Twitter, fusing with Periscope, started to cast sport events in live streaming, Facebook is trying to stay a step ahead by producing original contents. The area of the platform dedicated to videos is called Facebook Watch and went live already a year ago in the USA. Facebook branded serial products are already numerous, but they’re available in Italy just recently. Because of this, it’s appropriate to observe this new mash-up between social media and television. In an hyperintegrated, interdisciplinary world, made by connections between knowledge and disciplines, There’s the need to study different sides of the same phenomenon. The focus will be partly on analysing how the Watch section works, which are the original contents produced by Facebook, what are those available in Italy and will be studied the case of "Sorry for your loss", the biggest Facebook production until now, with Elizabeth Olsen. From a sociological point of view, will be studied the relevance of the phenomenon, how the section is currently used, and mostly its social implications. The study is then also based on the reaction of Italian users and consumers through different research strategies. Methodologically, and referring to social media, is impossible not to speak about Big Data and they need a mixed method research strategy. Using quantitative techniques like Web Scraping, will be extracted contents about the phenomenon from the same Facebook platform, to analyse the relevance; consequently, via qualitative strategies, will be studied the social implications and users/consumers reactions. In detail, the research design can be defined as “integrated”, and it also refers to the Grounded Theory model (Charmaz, 2014) for the theoretical construction. The integration of Big Data depends of a necessary sequentiality, so they are used as indicators in the analysis prosecution.

Keywords: Big Data Analysis, Mixed Methods Research, Social media, Television, user reaction.

Introduction

Television, as a generalist medium, lived two main phases: according to Umberto Eco (Eco, 1985), the first was paleotelevision, then neotelevision, since the allowance for transmission to private broadcasters in the 80s. Nowadays Television is not what it was almost forty years ago and it is characterized mostly by innovations. Indeed, it’s necessary to recognize the features and name a new television era, wondering what changed, searching for differences and similarities with the previous phase. Carlos Scolari thinks of the current status of TV like a transition period, considering the neotelevision not ended, but complemented by other habits of consuming TV formats, developing the idea that a new era of Television is rising and is defined by the word "interactive". It seems an oxymoron pairing the word television with the interactive one, because the traditional screen does not offer to the audience an interface to somehow interact and communicate with.
In fact, other audiovisual devices have come to help television, adding interactivity and converging with it: screens that are connected to the Internet are responsible for the beginning of a new era called hypertelevision, from the words of Scolari. The new television is interactive, multiplatform, personalized, and deeply connected to the virtual reality of the Web 3.0.

The change leads to taking television out of the TV screen, distributing content made in a TV style on other devices. This generates a question: internet of course helps television, but what happens when actors on the internet steal television formats and creates contents of their own, without letting them air on TV?

It seems that television is depersonalized, that formats are taken from it and given to more exciting media, such as PC, smartphone tablet and console. It then TV dead? Observing audiovisual contents online, it is clear that tv is not dead, but simply reborn on other devices. Today television is more that itself, simply offers format, styles and features to create content distributed on any kind of device and consumed anytime and anywhere.

This led the giants of the web to invest on TV formats and transform themselves into broadcasters or producers, like Twitter, Youtube or Facebook, that recently launched worldwide its OTT service called Facebook Watch offering some original contents. The objective of this study is describing the platform and investigate on its reception in Europe and Italy.

The study is organized in: Introduction, Methodology, four chapter such as Toward a hyper-Television, Tv on social media, The sociological and methodological point of view, Analysis results and comments. Conclusions end the work.

Methodology

Review of literature, consulting of news on newspaper websites to observe the status of television and studying the case of Facebook Watch with its functionalities and peculiarities. Methodologically, there was the need to describe users of Watch and to analyze the potential reach of the phenomenon in Europe with a focus on Italy. Specifically, have been used three different techniques: web scraping, hashtag analysis and sentiment analysis. The Web Scraping technique was used to extract the data from the platform and reconstruct the statistics of the main descriptive traits among Facebook Watch platform users. Later, through the hashtag analysis it was possible to reconstruct the related phenomenon and its context of reference. Finally, the sentiment analysis was employed to study the reactions of users and the direction of web rumors that allow to understand if the phenomenon is appreciated or not.
Toward a Hyper-Television

As U. Eco wrote in 1985\(^1\), television as a media was created in the 1950s and, for the first time, in the 80s got its first change from paleo- to neo-television: from that moment private networks were allowed aside of the public channels, introducing a new idea of business in the mediatic system and starting a so called television market.

A perpetual flow of images and sound was still the normal and contents were included in it, showing information and entertainment programs that were so seductive to attract audience to the screen all day. Once known its power, television started to talk about itself, speaking less of the outside world, news, reality and generating a microcosm in which audience can enter and enjoy a “fake” TV reality.

Television, recently, started to evolve because of the increasing usage of new technologies, distributed in the last twenty years of the XX century: the most revolutionary was the internet, that changed radically the way of thinking, otherwise than putting every communication medium into a hypertext system. Websites first, but also search engines, social network and everything that comes with it, exploit the spontaneous connections between topic, like the human brain does: there’s no linearity, no more single-topic for an audience who can jump between themes, different textual forms, focusing on more issues at the same time, namely what today is called multitasking. Also, there’s the abolition of single genres, to let appear ones like infotainment, a fusion of information and entertainment, with a fluidity able to change the audience’s feelings rapidly, using all the emotion spectrum.

These characteristics define what Carlos Scolari calls “hypertelevision”, a new phase for the media: it’s necessary to remind that, as stressed by Scolari, the growth of television cannot be framed in a lineal series of changings, and it’s not possible to segment the eras according to social and historical context, so it’s useless to clearly divide the neo- and hyper- television eras because they coexist, and also because the second has much in common with the first. Hypertelevision is deeply different too, because it’s combined with other mediatic species, such as digital technologies that transformed the entire media ecosystem: there are no more borders around TV, it now converges with other devices, ready to host the audiovisual format.

However, if every text creates its own reader, which kind of spectator belongs to hypertelevision? It’s a computer user: someone used to interactivity, to a networked community, to hypertext, so to fragmented texts and rapid and frequent changes. That’s why television evolved, basing itself on computers and on a new kind of active audience: the viewer needs to participate, actively look for pieces to build complete puzzles of fragmented stories, to be found on and offline. Spectator is no more the “couch-potato” of the 80s, but makes his wishes clear to the medium, adapting contents and times on himself: shows are no more consumed in a flow interspersed by advices, but every title is extracted from the traditional flow to be depurated of the commercials and consumed rapidly, often right after airing.

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Audience doesn’t want to wait anymore for television to dictate the rhythm, but want to choose what to watch and when: the urge of selecting what depends on the incredibly large offer of the networks, adapting the when is necessary because of the diminution of the time available to watch contents and the increase of stimulations of different entities.

Hypertelevision can be define like the opposite of a mass media strategy because of its capability to be personalized, based on individuals and therefore always trying to satisfy every niche with a large number of shows, that not necessarily have to be aired on TV and in certain time frames. The content schedule is now richer, available on every media and omnipresent, with no more bond with time and space: channels air online and through decoders, creating the TV On Demand. The broadcast system, a system from one to many, doesn’t fit anymore in a TV that requests a narrow system, from one to one or few, to please a choosy audience.

Many academics are still wondering if internet will replace TV, or if it’s just a complement: it’s not easy to tell if studies are based on audience because lineal networks are still registering high ratings, but at the same time it’s quite impossible to monitor online ratings. What it’s clear is that the common sentiment is to have the ability of choosing. That’s why crossmedia actions are so relevant: all kinds of audiences should have the chance to access a content anytime, anywhere and on every device. That’s why TV should not be afraid of new mediatic species, but must adapt on them, survive the digital revolution and become bigger that itself, adding the interaction.

Interactive platforms are not just useful for crossmedia storytelling, namely casting the same content on another device, but are fundamental to new narrative cues and marketing plans apt for enlarging the content-watching experience. Broadcasters try to unify the multiscreen experience, taking advantage of the promiscuity of the media considered: videogames, websites and apps expand the experience of a user who becomes a creator himself, in the multiple system of narrative universe. This phenomenon is called transmedia storytelling.

**Hypertelevision and hypermediation.** Associating the prefix “hyper-” to television was, for Carlos Scolari, a consequence of his studies based on a larger series of changes in communication. The theory of hypermediation was elaborated by the professor Scolari who investigates on the new paradigms of communication that are changing the everyday use of media. He refers to a new idea of community online, considering the immediacy of the Web 3.0, also called semiotic web. This definition appeared first in 2006, on an article wrote by Zelman after a Web 2.0 conference, in which were presented some innovation better related to a new phase of the web: one was the ability of web pages to communicate in real time with the servers, simulating Flash technology, through the AJAX (Asynchronous JavaScript and XML) technique.

On the same year, Tim Berners-Lee said the future of the web should be a semiotic web, able to give the chance to access to an incredible resource of data through the calculation of a big quantity of data, just what AJAX wanted
to do. So, Web 3.0 becomes a synonym of semantic web as should be immediate and easily accessible and panmediatic, destroying borders through media and unifying channels, structures, forms and languages.

Scolari analyses the possibility of such a system, defining the current trend as a combination of symbolic interchange, production and consume processes that grow in an environment characterized by a great number of subjects, media and languages technologically interconnected by a reticular system. Hypermediation doesn’t include just a greater number of media and subjects, but also a variety of manipulations, hybridisations and contaminations that digital technologies allow, transforming every textuality in millions of bits. It is considered a post-massive form of communication, in which including digital media as part of the process of construction of meanings, and in which are defined commands to the interface to let users interact with the associated software to reach a goal.

Basically, the idea of Scolari is that interactive communication redefines the concepts of interpersonal and massive communication, including in the equation interfaces and software such as comment boxes, blogs, search engines and mobile devices: people find new ways to communicate no more directly with other subjects, but indirectly, in a hypermediated way. They result to create two kinds of communication:

1) Communication subject – device – subject, in which the device is the medium to get to the receiver

2) Communication subject – device, in which the device is the same receiver, called IPO (interaction person – computer)

All those features create hyper-media, and in the specific case of screens, they create the hypertelevision.

**TV without television: OTT services.** From 2007, the hypertelevision market of the world has suffered the rise of Over the Top platform (OTT) with a pay-per-view asset. Specifically, they are metaservices able to offer an infrastructure for the distribution of audiovisual contents, of propriety of the distributor or not, on demand on several devices. The necessary feature is that they can connect to the internet, so PC, smartphones, tablets and consoles and TV sticks (like Chromecast or Amazon Fire) are considered.

The advantage is that there’s no need of cables to receive channels, but simply share content on the connected network. For this reason, acquiring and distributing contents of external producers and broadcasters becomes easy and let OTT services substitute not only television, but also physical video libraries.

The Over the Top platforms increased their popularity all over the world thank to the spreading of the mobile 4g network and the fast fibre connection at home.

The digitization of content and signal transmission and diffusion systems has multiplied, diversified and fragmented the audiovisual offer and facilitated the access, adding the possibility of independently choosing the contents: in fact, products now should be quality worthy, accessible from multiple screens and included in a varied and constantly evolving catalogue, at a popular price.
Platforms with these features were initially marketed in the United States, like with the famous Netflix case, which from having physical video libraries, has evolved to become a giant of streaming and on demand services, with an updated catalogue accessible entirely through a cheap monthly subscription. Other successful services are pay-per-view, indeed platforms that offer a large number of contents that can be accessed by purchasing titles individually. For example, it’s possible to pay a little amount of money to access a movie for a limited time, or an episode of a show, or an entire series, destined to be watched on any screen able to access the Internet. The digital environment allows providers to enrich the offer of titles with value-added services, such as their version in SD, HD or 4K quality, a wide range of audio and subtitles languages to be showed, extended versions, exclusive contents, the constant distribution of new titles and frequent technological updates.

The predominant models are those based on monthly subscription, with valuable services and prices which tend to be cheap to attract a wide, non-elitarian audience. The ability to purchase packages at different costs makes the service even more accessible, especially considering that OTT services allow the user to share monthly expenses with friends and acquaintances. The service remains personalized even if shared because of the chance to create different profiles on the same account, customizing the offer for every consumer by monitoring the most watched contents. The real revolution, as underlined by the HBO service, is the detachment from lineal television broadcasters, which make OTT services independent and, in those cases where it’s possible, let them decide autonomously on the rhythms of distribution. Netflix, for example, like others, has experimented a new distribution of their serials, making all episodes immediately available, eliminating the waiting between chapters, and letting the viewer decide the personal fruition time. These services have changed the way of "watching television", and in a more radical way they have changed the way of "paying to watch television" by forcing the lineal pay-tv broadcasters to lower costs and increase services, not betraying their own nature and constantly approaching a more diverse audience.

One of the most famous OTT services is the already named Netflix, created in 1997 by Reed Hasting and Marc Randolph. They created a digital video library: the user had to access the website, make a rental request for a title and wait for it to be physically delivered by the American postal service. The cost was standard and the service appreciable, for this reason the netflix.com website began to dedicate itself also, in 1998, to the sale of DVDs. The following year they offered to users an annual subscription to access the unlimited rental of DVDs at a reduced price. In the year 2000 was introduced an evaluation system on the website: users could evaluate and recommend films to the Netflix online community, just like in the latest version of the platform, in order to monitor the activity and the tastes of the public. In 2005 the website users were already 4.2 million, and they witnessed the fundamental innovation that happened shortly after: in 2007 Netflix turned into a PC streaming platform.

Since 2011 Netflix leaves the US territorial boundaries, conquering South America and part of Europe, winning prizes for its dynamics, such as the first
Prime Time Emmy in Engineering and the Emmy dedicated to independently produced contents: it was the first television broadcaster to be nominated in this competition. The big exploit of the company led to the production of original contents: the history of production is not very long, but it is unexpectedly rich. The first content created and distributed by Netflix was “House of Cards” of 2013, the first series distributed just on the web that could access a television budget, or almost a cinematographic one, that counts 50 million dollars for the first season, and actors taken from cinema like the award-winning Kevin Spacey and Robin Wright. It was inspired by the British series with the same name and it was produced by Beau Willimon: for the first time, all episodes were distributed on the same day, suggesting a continuous view of the approximately 13 hours of show, introducing the so-called binge watching.

This strategy marked the role changing of the broadcaster, that becomes a producer: some of the next original contents were Orange is The New Black, drama of 2013, BoJack Horseman, 2014 animated series, Narcos, docuseries of 2015 and many other serialized narratives. 2015 is instead a turning point for the company: it produces the first feature film called Beast of No Nation, written and directed by Cary Joy Fukunaga. It is based on the story of Uzodinma Iweala and tells of an African child who is forced to join a military group after the death of his family. The film costed 6 million dollars and was supported by Participant Media and Red Crown Production, while it was distributed simultaneously online by Netflix and in cinemas by Focus Feature. The co-presence on the web and on the big screen of the movie, generated discontent among the exhibitors, who accused the service of violating the rule of the 90 days of exclusivity destined for the box office. The strategy of the American company was basically to impress the Film Festivals to which wasn’t allowed to participate until then. The movie came out with good criticism and prizes nominations all over the world.

2015 is also the year in which Netflix landed in Italy, Portugal and Spain, while in 2016 the company reached a worldwide coverage, a great number of serials and movies produced independently and an increasingly growing public. Verónica Heredia Ruiz, professor of the University of Medellin in Colombia, defines the company as a model of content that converges between the internet, cinema and television. Furthermore, she states that Netflix is responsible for the creation of a new business and financial model, for building an innovative television discourse and for having a substantial impact on technological adaptation processes. This analysis confirms the prediction of Ellingsen concerning the success of OTT services in the third wave of technology, that goes from 2006 to the present.

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TV on Social Media

The analysis of authors like Scolari leaves no doubt: a new television era has begun and it’s larger than the same media.

The theories of the death of TV are correct if just the physical television and the flow system are considered, but television products are more alive than ever, expanded, fluid and dislocated in time and space. But a TV product that doesn’t air on TV, but on OTT platforms, is still television? Yes, if audiovisual canons are respected and if digital TV is legitimated. The traditional media is having a Darwinian evolution, adapting itself on new technologies, so surviving for this time.

Even social media are trying to emulate TV: YouTube, Twitter and Facebook transformed themselves into broadcaster and producers of shows inspired by TV formats.

Twitter included livestreaming already in 2015, when it acquired Periscope, an existent video platform. Every user can stream or simply watch live videos from other users and interact with reactions or comments: videos can be found on the preferred feed, composed by profiles followed on Twitter or searched through keywords. Every user channel, so, becomes a video channel, maybe with episodes of a coherent series or random contents. So, Twitter found in the live streaming its path and tried to evolve airing sport events: the company signed deals with large sports associations such as NFL, NBA and MLB to broadcast games or eSports matches through their own platform. Twitter ensures that it has broadcast more than 800 hours of live content and 450 live events. The live show area is where the 140-character colossus wants to be the best.

YouTube has instead tried to get closer to the OTT dimension by creating its own subscription service: YouTube Premium, also called Red or TV. It was announced in 2017 by the YouTube Space in Los Angeles with a price of 35 dollars a month, with an offer of live programs and contents from ABC, CBS, FOX, NBC and ESPN. The channels aired just live are the existing Disney Channel, SyFy, National Geographic, FX and other, for a total 40 channels. Showtime and Fox Soccer Plus are available to be added at an extra cost.

An important function the ability to schedule the recording of live content to be watched later, thanks to the automatic uploading to a cloud. The system is available for all devices and has an intuitive interface. However, the project has changed over the years, reaching the final product YouTube Red.

YouTube Red reduced its price up to 9.99 dollar per month and mainly offers advantages for normal video streaming, such as the elimination of advertisements, reproductions in background and a streaming music section with no interruptions, perfect to listen YouTube music contents without the related videos. Most importantly, the YouTube Originals section was created, and it includes audiovisual products created by artists in collaboration with the platform. In Italy the service has the same features but is called YouTube Premium.

Facebook tried some ways to enter the audiovisual market, for example it has begun to air some matches of the Champions League in the USA
accordingly with Fox Sport, and some matches of the American and Mexican leagues.

The leap forward, however, came from the section dedicated to videos called “Facebook Watch”, and the production of original contents.

**Facebook watch.** The Facebook company has included, for a long time now, the possibility of publishing videos and enjoy them with an optimized displaying, adding the automatic reproduction of videos considered similar to the previously like contents or simply suggestions.

Facebook has recently organized its audiovisual contents in a section of the website called *Facebook Watch*, that allows faster navigation and endless possibilities. Rumours had that Facebook plans to host webseries and shows that could really challenge the YouTube platform: it has the intention to host videos of minimum 10 minutes, better if they’re part of a series, also live videos and contents uploaded by users. The interesting part is the investment on original Facebook products, decision that places the company as a competitor of Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV, YouTube Premium and Netflix: Facebook Watch is not only entertainment and serials, but also sports, talk shows, comedy and more.

The Wall Street Journal predict that this move could bring an earning of up to 70,000 million dollars to the already billionaire giant of the web.

The Facebook Newsroom, area of the site for press communications, begins to talk about the Watch section in October 2016, announcing new ways to watch videos hosted on the platform, such as casting them on TV through devices such as Chromecast, Amazon Fire Stick and AppleTV, announcing, so, the optimization of video transmission on screens not naturally connected to the network.

Facebook in that moment almost became a TV channel, or at least it pierced the PC screen to land on the common generalist medium, even if, in the end, the consumption of the content is just streaming titles that can be watched on PC. The innovation lies in the features of casting-system sticks, like the ones quoted, which once received the input of casting and showing a video, they continue the transmission autonomously and allow the use of the PC or mobile devices in freedom, without having to abandon them to allow the reproduction. This system encourages participation, interaction thanks to the already known *second-screen* habit, with the difference, in this case, that both the first and second screen signals come from the same platform.

On February 2017, were distributed apps for Smart TVs of the Samsung brand, while, later in August of the same year, Facebook Watch was made available in the USA: it’s described as a section of website where all the videos hosted on the platform are grouped and organized, with a particular optimization for the shows of any genre with a series of episode.

The goal is to make “social” watching a content and the strategy to implement this is to create a user-friendly database, with an easy searching system and the possibility to follow other users, or a series of videos, or thematic, or hashtags.

Facebook Watch is also composed of subsections like "most popular" or "funny videos" and tips about what friends are watching, so that the sparkle of
conversation can be turned on and the content discussion can take place
directly on platform. The goals of socializing video watching comes from an
intuition of Facebook: to recognize in videos not only an experience between
speaker and listener, but also among the community of listeners themselves,
which is why for each show it is now possible to participate in the related
discussion group. Under this mantra, the Watch Party function has been
created, which allows anyone to broadcast videos (live or not) and invite their
contacts to watch together the single content, or series of videos. In this way
can be fomented the engagement and stimulated participation: it is a format
that enhances the thematic flows of contents, as if they were dedicated TV
channels, and it is appropriate to consider it as a close relative of traditional
TV.

The contents that Facebook wants to host are episodes that engage the
community, live videos for fans, TV series that tell a story through episodes
and great live events, mostly sport ones.

One of the examples quoted in a news on the Facebook Newsroom is: "For
example, Returning the Favor is a series hosted by Mike Rowe where he finds
people doing something extraordinary for their community, tells the world
about it, and in turn does something extraordinary for them. Candidates are
nominated by Mike’s fans on Facebook."4

In 2018 the Watch experiment was extended to the whole world,
expanding the service to devices such as Xbox One and Oculus TV, but also
making the section available for all pages, which can contribute with their own
videos. The contents are diversified between countries for reasons of
international copyrights and agreements, but the contents are nevertheless
countless, and the activity of the section counts 400 million people a month
and 75 million a day on average, who spend more than 20 minutes in the
section.5

The focus, however, is not on the activity of users who interact via or
because of videos, but on Facebook’s ability to become a producer and
broadcaster of original, often serial, contents, like a true OTT platform.

Facebook Originals. The company wanted to invest on products of its own
property, becoming an audiovisual producer, and focusing on shows that, as a
post in the Newsroom says6, were able to make Watch not only an OTT service
but also a place to participate and interact. Some of the reported shows are
“Red Table Talk”, that summons users each week and make them vote the
topic of the next episode, or “Ball in The Family”, a reality show, which
generates countless comments and reactions on the dedicated group.

In fact, the platform hosts various types of contents, mostly reality shows
of sports genre, comedy, naturalistic, talk shows like the product already
mentioned, or docuseries.

Among the dramas there are 5 titles, including Five Points, Sacred Lies
and Sorry for your loss: the season format is mostly short, ten episodes at most,

6Idem
and the time of each episode varies depending on the content, taking
inspiration from the online video format and not TV one. Only Sacred lies and
Sorry for your loss maintain an average duration of 30 minutes per episode,
approaching the classic serial formats.

Among the comedies there are only two titles, as for animated products,
while for the docuseries there are Humans of New York, from a famous blog,
and numerous sports documentaries. The reality shows are based on formats
known as The Tattoo Shop, on tattoos, or Bear Grylls: Face the wild,
naturalistic, or Huda Boss, on the influencer Huda Kattan, creator of the Huda
Beauty brand, and her family: there are already plenty of original shows, that
always count with short seasons and a duration under half an hour.

There are some talk shows of different themes, such as After After Party,
Profile, and an interactive game show, Confetti, in which users participate by
answering questions directly from the smartphone and challenge opponents in
real time. News and sports programs complete the offer, also including live
events.

The most prominent products, as described by Facebook Newsroom⁷, are
Red Table Talk, Confetti, Returning the Favor and Sorry for Your Loss.

Red Table Talk turns out to be the most followed show, and the one with
the most active discussion group: it’s a project by Jada Pinkett Smith that
involves her mother, Adrienne Banfield-Norris, and her daughter Willow
Smith. In each episode a topic is discussed from the three generational points
of view, calling on special occasions also external guests such as Ellen
Pompeo, Will Smith or Kid Cudi. It received a Daytime Emmy Award
nomination in 2019 in the Informative Talk Show category.

Confetti is an interactive game show: people must download the face book
app on their phones and play one of the available games, challenging friends
and trying to win real money prizes. The prize is given to one of the first
subscribed who answered all the questions correctly. People should participate
to the live show during its airing and they have short time to answer: the thrill
that this format gives, makes it the most commented show. Unfortunately, the
show isn’t available in all countries, in fact it’s not playable in Italy.

Returning the favor is a Docuseries that includes an episode, Operation
Combat Bikesaver, described as the most viewed episode of Watch. This show
it’s about local “heroes” in the USA, monitoring people who are making
something good for the community and giving them prizes for the work.

Sorry for your loss is a drama starring Elizabeth Olsen: it’s described as
the show with the most loyal fan and it’s composed by one season of ten
episodes that last about half an hour. It’s pure fiction and tells the story of a
young widow dealing with her pain and regaining her life back. It’s been
critically acclaimed as one of the best shows of 2018 from newspaper like The
New York Times, Vulture, Time and, recently, the protagonist Elizabeth Olsen
got nominated as Best Actress at the Critics’ Choice Awards for her
interpretation as Leigh. It’s an engaging story because of the theme of the grief
it represents, in which many people can recognize themselves, in fact Kit
Steinkellner, the show’s creator and executive producer, said in a statement:

“Seeing our audience embrace and champion ‘Sorry For Your Loss’ and reading the comments and posts from people who feel seen and understood watching our show, has been one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.”

The Watch section is now available worldwide but not with all the shows. Especially, after a year of testing in the USA, Facebook Watch became available in Italy on September 2018.

The section was already enriched with Original products and videos from popular pages already available in Italy with no changes in the interface. Shows in foreign language doesn’t access to dubbing, but just subtitles in Italian, letting contents stay global but easily consumed by local users.

The Sociological and Methodological Point of View

In an hyperintegrated, interdisciplinary world, made by connections between knowledge and disciplines, there’s the need to study different sides of the same phenomenon.

From a sociological point of view, will be studied the relevance of the phenomenon, how the Facebook Watch section is currently used, and mostly its social implications. The study is then also based on the reaction of Italian users and consumers through different research strategies.

Methodologically, and referring to social media, is impossible not to speak about Big Data and their need of a mixed method research strategy. Using quantitative techniques like Web Scraping, will be extracted contents about the phenomenon from the same Facebook platform, to analyse the relevance; consequently, via qualitative strategies, will be studied the social implications and users/consumers reactions. In detail, the research design can be defined as “integrated”, and it also refers to the Grounded Theory model (Charmaz, 2014) for the theorical construction. The integration of Big Data depends on a necessary sequentiality, so they are used as indicators in the analysis prosecution.

Why a Big Data Analysis? A Web Scraping Tecnique has led to:

- The extrapolation of the characteristics of online users who use Facebook Watch in the week taken as an example for analysis; 10
- the contents produced;
- top languages;
- the people engagement;
- the map of the Italian and European areas involved.

The Mixed Methods Strategies with a Sentiment Analysis has led to:

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9Program used: www.talkwalker.com
- the topics of discussion;
- the related topics;
- the reaction of online users.

**Analysis Results and Comments**

**Who uses Facebook watch?** The study based on users clearly shows biological and social details of the considered section of population, regarding traits like gender, age, interests and jobs.

**Users gender.** From the analysis, it results that the number of male users is twice the number of women. Specifically, 66.6% of users are men and 33.3% are women. (Figure n.1)

![Gender Distribution](image-url)  
*Source: personal elaboration 2019.*

**Users age.** From chart n.1 we read that the young age group uses Facebook Watch more. Specifically, the 25-34 age range (47.9%), followed by the 18-24 range (32.3%) and the 35-44 range (10.2%), finally, the 45-54 range (6.4%) and 13-17 range (3.4%).
**User interests.** From Graphic n.2 we read that users have different interests. The main interests of those who use the section are: family and parenting, movies and animals; later, books and literature, food and drink and music. The minor interest of those who use the application is art.

**User jobs.** From Graphic n.3 we read that also the users’ jobs are different. The main jobs are: consultant, health worker, blogger, then lawyer and Kitchen staff.
**Analysis of the "facebook watch" phenomenon.**

**Potential reach of the phenomenon.** From the figure n.2 it can be read that the phenomenon in Italy has a great potential of development and that it can reach about 10 million users.

**Figure 2. Potential reach.**


**Top languages.** The languages used (Graphic n.4) in online conversation are: English (82.6%), Spanish (15.3%), and Portuguese (2.1%). Thanks to this analysis it’s possible to see that the Italians use the English idiom when they talk about the phenomenon. In fact, the platform does not have a lexical translation in Italian. For this reason, the Italian language does not emerge.

Graphic 4. Top Languages.


Related topic with “Facebook Watch” phenomenon. With the qualitative study of related topics (hashtag analysis) it can be reconstructed the reference context of the phenomenon development. From the bubble chart (Graphic n.5) we read that the principal related topics to the phenomenon are:

- IammoreoBj
  Odell Beckham Jr. is a football superstar who produced a series on Facebook Watch where he shows how to prepare for every game of the season, balancing family, friends and more. It has 171,205 followers and is one of the most popular series.11

- Noticias Amedias
  “Noticias a medias”12 is an informative magazine with news on what happens in the world and in sports. In this program the latest trends are told in a funny way: the success of this format explains the strong link between sports, especially football, and the Facebook Watch phenomenon.

- Assange
  Julian Paul Assange is the founder of the non-profit organization called WikiLeaks13, a programmer and, now, a convicted. Facebook Watch has helped audience follow, through the videos, the story of Assange's arrest on 4/11/201914.

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11https://www.facebook.com/IAMMOREOBJ/
13WikiLeaks is an international non-profit organization that receives anonymously, thanks to a container protected by a powerful encryption system, documents covered by secrecy and then uploads them to its website.
14https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2019/04/11/news/wikileaks_assange_arrestato_a_londra-223773680/?refresh_ce (Assange was taken over by the British police after Ecuador withdrew asylum. He was arrested on the basis of a 2012 mandate, when instead of surrendering to Scotland Yard to be extradited to Sweden and being questioned about the rape allegations, he took refuge in the Ecuadorian embassy in London and asked for asylum: it was on June 19, 2012, Ecuador then led by President Rafael Correa granted him protection because he believed the WikiLeaks founder's concerns that the extradition to Sweden exposed him to the very serious risk of extradition to the United States, where a 2010 investigation of the Grand Jury of
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- **AgujeroNegro**
  
  This hashtag refers to the first photo of a black hole, taken on 10/04/2019\(^5\). In accordance with Einstein’s relativity theory, a black hole is a ring of fire that, in space, defines a point of no return. A network of radio telescopes has collected the first image of the halo surroundings the black hole.

- **Webbys**
  
  The Webby Awards\(^6\) are leading international awards that prize the excellence on the Internet. The Webbys now honors excellence in 7 major media types: Websites, Video, Advertising, Media & PR, Social, Apps, Mobile, & Voice, Games, and Podcasts.

- **Facebookadvertisements**
  
  Last important consideration concerns the reference to advertising that thanks to Facebook Watch it is possible to insert during the reproduction of videos.

**Graphic 5. Related topics to the Facebook Watch phenomenon.**

**Mapping of the Italian phenomenon.**

**The Italian regions.** From the map (Figure n.3) it’s clear that the regions that use and that contribute to spreading the phenomenon are the northern Italians followed by central regions of Italy and the islands. Specifically, the two regions that use the section more are Lombardy and Lazio.


Alexandria, Virginia, for the publication of the secret documents of the American government. To date this investigation is still ongoing and last November the American authorities inadvertently revealed that there is a secret warrant for his arrest against Julian Assange.)

\(^5\) [https://www.media.inaf.it/2019/04/10/prima-foto-buco-nero/](https://www.media.inaf.it/2019/04/10/prima-foto-buco-nero/)

\(^6\) [https://www.webbyawards.com/](https://www.webbyawards.com/)
The users countries. The graphic n.6 reveals that the United Kindom is the first country that uses the application (24%), followed by Spain (23%), France (10%) and Italy (8%), where the phenomenon is still emerging but has great potential.
1 Graphic 6. Network of user Countries

The reaction of users. Graphic n.7 and n.8 explain users' reaction to the phenomenon. Specifically, Graph n.7 monitored the online user conversations. The graphic n.8 is the Sentiment Analysis. The sentiment is positive for all our analysis period. In both graphics we note that on 04/15/19 there is a change; it is explained by the malfunctioning of Facebook on that day. So, everything considered, the direction of users' feelings about the Facebook Watch phenomenon is positive.

Sentiment Analysis is the most common text classification tool that analyses an incoming message and tells whether the underlying sentiment is positive, negative our neutral. You can input a sentence of your choice and gauge the underlying sentiment by playing with the demo here.
Sentiment Analysis or opinion mining is a particular technique because it is based on three fundamental processes (Cernoni; Carini; Iacus; 2014):

1. Processing of natural language:
2. Textual analysis;
3. Computational linguistics.

This analysis, with the development of social media, is having great success in Marketing, because it returns a continuous monitoring "of Web rumors".

There are different approaches to Sentiment Analysis, which can be grouped into four categories:

- Keyword Spotting that classifies text based on categories;
- Lexical affinity that detects influential words and emotions related to them;
- Statistical methods based on machine learning systems, on the analysis of lexical correspondences and on methodologies of supporting vectors;\(^\text{18}\);

\(^{18}\)The analysis of lexical correspondences is a multivariate technique that allows to synthesize the information contained in a large matrix of textual data, displaying on the factorial level the association between the forms (words) within the text in analysis, looking for the better simultaneous representation of the row and column elements, so as to study the interdependence between characters. The axes can be interpreted as semantic dimensions through which to read the corpus: the proximity between words on the factorial level refers to their combination or association in the text, and the exploration of the associations between words contributes to the reading / description of the corpus.

\(^{19}\)Machines with support vectors or kernel machines are supervised learning methodologies for regression and pattern classification, developed in the 1990s by Vladimir Vapnik and his team at AT&T Bell laboratories. They belong to the family of generalized linear classifiers and are also known as maximum-margin classifiers, since at the same time they minimize the empirical classification error and maximize the geometric margin. They can be considered a special case of Tichonov regularization.
- conceptual level techniques that instead are based on elements of knowledge representation such as ontologies and semantic networks and are therefore much more detailed.

*Graphic 8. Sentiment Analysis.*


**Conclusions**

Television already moved from the TV screen to the online network, but nowadays it’s also colonizing multiple utility platforms, changing the original purpose of the great web giants. From aggregators of users, and democratic spaces in which users were in charge of uploading and distributing contents, the social media platforms like Facebook now create and share themselves high budget contents, that can satisfy audience.

Facebook Watch users worldwide are countless and they’re already familiar with video streaming platform: maybe because of this they gladly welcomed the Facebook action of becoming itself a producer of contents and a broadcaster. Some of the Facebook Originals shows have been renewed, some others are still a work in progress, meaning that this phenomenon is yet to be observed, monitored, meanwhile that the numbers of usage are increasing, and the expectations are high.

It’s also interesting to evaluate how, through new Facebook section, different topics find their own space, even if they have different goals from the platform ones.

Looking at the phenomenon in Italy, there’s the need to describe it as young, unripe, but, paragone to the development of Watch in other countries, like shown in graphic n. 6, has hopeful possibilities. Overall, the use of this section with different finalities transforms it in a new way to share audiovisual contents and to relatively create engagement and community.

In conclusion, there’s the need to underline that this study had the aim to observe the genesis and the diffusion of a new service offered by Facebook,
but it’s necessary to wait at least a year to understand the direction of the phenomenon and to comprehend how it developed over time.

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