

Media experiences, discourses and generational identity: an empirical research

FOCUS: MEDIA PRODUCTS AND
IDENTITY DISCOURSES

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| The project

Generational identity: which role for Media?

>> *“Media and generations in Italian society”* project

Multidisciplinary and multi-situated research:

- Secondary analysis
 - ✓ Re-framing of “generation” in social theory
- Media content analysis
 - ✓ Representations of generations in popular literature
- Multi-situated media focus: literature
 - ✓ Idea of generation in production, representation and consumption of GenX writers
- **Empirical (qualitative) study of media experiences**
 - ✓ **4 cohorts’ analysis of life histories/accounts on media and collective identity**

Goals

Inquiring relationship between generational belonging and media:

- Reconstruction of cohort's specific media experiences
 - *To what extent media are present and involved in the memories and generational experiences*
- Identifying specific features and connotations actives in the process of shaping a semantic of different generations
 - *which retorics and meaning attributions are developed in explicitly self-reflexives discourses about cohort's identity*

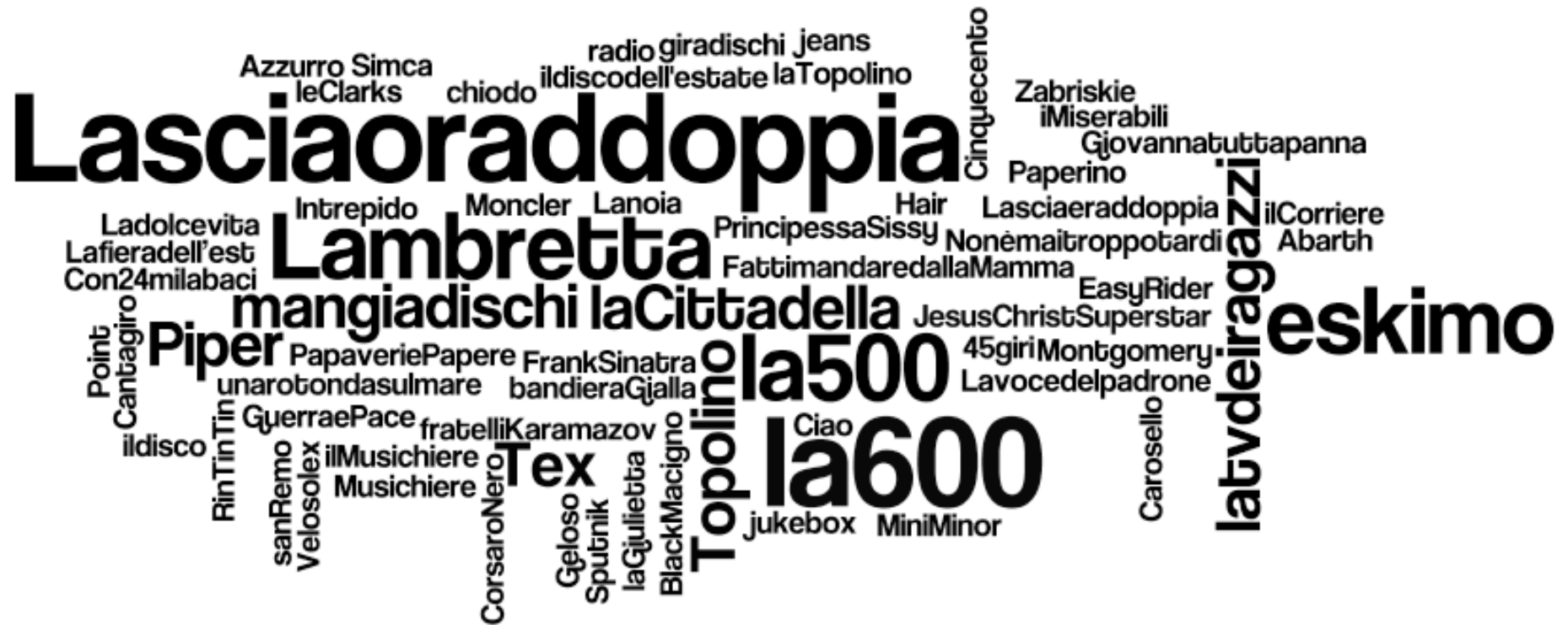
Methodology

- Total corpus : 208 people
 - gender: around 50% men / 50% women
 - education: around 50% university degree + 50% graduate or less
- Two tools, with different social ties:
 - Focus groups : groups of people without strong social ties
 - Interviews : couples of people with strong social ties, as long time friends
- Geographical distribution:
 - Milan, Rome, Urbino (24 focus group, 8 friends' couples)
- Four cohorts:
 - **“Postwar”** > 1940/1952
 - **“Boomers”** > 1953/1965
 - **“Neo”** > 1966/1978
 - **“Post”** > 1979/1991

Analysis: repertoires and arguments

- From a large analytical grid...
 - ✓ Historical and biographical phases
 - ✓ Different media and their repertoires
 - ✓ Connotations about historical and media experiences
 - ✓ The role of places
 - ✓ Social institutions and agencies
 - ✓ Values
 - ✓ Self-reflexive arguments

- ...to this presentation :
 - ✓ **Repertoires: presence of specific media products in generational memories, as activators for reflexivity**
 - ✓ **Arguments: narrative and rhetorical processes actives in the negotiation and shaping of generational discourses**



repertoires | **Products / education years**

❖ **Postwar :**

Tv programs, movies, theater (on tv), actors

❖ **Boomers:**

Singers and music authors, song titles, radio programs, comics

❖ **Neo:**

Tv animation, tv series, fashion brands

❖ **Post:**

Tv animation, consoles, videogames titles

➤ Some of the main changes highlighted:

- Some increase in references, and extension of media languages
- Local/global (americanization, orientalization)
- Television centrality (less central for both extremes cohorts)

Media+
Generations

repertoires | **Products / in the '80s**

➤ Same period BUT different focalisations:

❖ **Postwar :**

tv programs, actors/showmen, brand material culture

❖ **Boomers:**

tv channels, singers/band, brand auto/moto

❖ **Neo:**

music band, (pop/electronic), tv animation, fashion brands, tv series

❖ **Post:**

popstars, videomusic, tv series, tv animation, blockbuster movies

Differences in repertoires' selection reveals:

➤ Action of different media frames/media consumption patterns

➤ BUT : *distorsion of biographical issues*

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discourses |

Generational reflexivity insists in two directions:

- **as a discourse about difference**
- **as a discourse on self-definition**

Every cohort > specific configuration of the difference/self-definition model:

- *Postwar*: radical difference from the past, self-definition is coherent and shared
- *Boomers*: strong orientation towards self-definition
- *Neo*: contradictory perception of difference
- *Post*: oriented towards self-definition

discourses | **Difference/self-definition**

	continuum	connotations
Postwar	run-out »	end of rigidity/strictness in cultural transmission »
Boomers	gap »	responsibility, self-realization, individual achievements »
Neo	transition »	consumption overload, individual autonomy »
Post	ex-post »	dis-value, risk, digital technologies, childhood shrinkage »

You don't have such a strong generational run-out to me, but I had a very strong one to my parents [...] so we reacted in a very drastic, collective... Socially, politically we have been the first generation of reactives to what was the previous scheme
[MI, PW2]

the famous 1968 year: there was an epochal change [MI, PW1]

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There were precise rules that today are not. If one was used to work like me - I was, I don't know, 18-19 years old - while I had a job, while I was viable, I had to undergo to some rules [UPW1]

But at home with parents you had home rules... you were a son and so you had to do some certain things to live your life, even to have that freedom [UPW1]

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There is quite a gap between Sixties and Seventies. In the '60s is almost a continuous post-war, where you can still find some 'we may love each other' ["volemose bene"], or "let's re-do Italy", *La dolce vita* by Fellini... that lasted until the Sixties. In '68 that ended up [MIB2]

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At that age we were already adults, ready to face what our lives was offering us, while today's youth... I see teenage is prolonged... [MIB2]

Those years protests in my opinion... Things you couldn't had, and so the discourses were about abortion, feminism... [UBO1]

We are those who, you know, we worked a lot, we didn't had shackles on our minds [UBO1]

We started our careers early [UBO1]

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A transitioning generation [...] not from post-war – they've got nothing – but even not as those today's hyper-technologicals guys...

I got surely more than my parents, but compared to today, less [MIN1]

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[MIN1]

We survived the Eighties [...] we started the brand immediately, giving
birth to the true conformism [UNE2]

Maybe now there is more ... permissiveness. I mean: you can do
much more...

But less independent than 20 or 30 years ago, because they throw
them in the middle of the road... You see: they are clumsy... I mean:
it's our fault, of course, but there is that thing ...[UNE1]

I remember once upon a time maybe parents were trying a bit more of
taking care of their kids. So as teenagers we were more...how can I
say: we were less close to the life as today's youth [MIN1]

That was a dark time, nothing much came out
[MIPO1]

An era of uncertainty and adjustment, because the
Wall was felt down, and an entire political class was
dead classe politica [MIPO1]

We are a kind of “dividing” after the Berlin wall.
Before there were ideals, a society much more
idealist, that today maybe we may miss [MIPO2]

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I've got a brother older than me, he's 43 and after school he went for Interrail ... my mother was ok, she felt he was safe. But when it came to me and I asked to do the same she told me "times were different". Times changed toward a major uncertainty. [UPO2]

Compared to older generations we've got less political involvement.. We just care about ourselves.. we just follow the flow. [MIPO2]

We are Internet pioneers [UPO1]

We were children.. Today they are already adult-minded [UPO2]

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