What does TV actually mean? New consumer experience and generations

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Abstract:
For researchers interested in audience studies, the generational hypothesis connecting audiencehood with the opportunity to build a generational identity is as fascinating as it is challenging. Especially in the last 15 years, many popular definitions of generation have been given for a specific media-consumer target group, mainly based on the use of new technologies (such as "Web Generation", "Nintendo Generation", "e-Generation", etc.). This labeling process was driven by the enthusiasm of marketing professionals, the concerns emerging from the journalistic debate, and the attention given by scientific publications emphasizing the role of media in the construction of a generational semantics and "we sense".

This essay aims to address the relationship between generations and media audience by focusing on a highly central, symbolically and culturally charged medium characterized by a large cross-audience penetration and daily consumption practices: Television. After years of stability with respect to its consumption practices, television is now experiencing hybridization with the Internet, which is rewriting its own identity as a medium. Is the rise of new consumption practices among younger generations possibly related to the emergence of a new way of understanding TV? In order to discuss such generational approaches to audience research, the author will rely on data from the "Osservatorio Social TV 2013-2014", a qualitative and quantitative study on social and connected television in the Italian market.

Keywords: generation, audience, TV, multi-screening, consumption, engagement, Social TV

Introduction

In recent years, the issue of generations has been widely discussed and has gained increasing visibility (Vittadini et al. 2013; Aroldi et al. 2011; Buckingham 2006; Edmunds &

Turner 2002; Corsten 1999; Wark 1993), due to new and unheard-of consumption practices in the media system, enabled by technological innovations.

Such a discourse deals with the idea that audiences can be understood in terms of generations of consumers, separated by the media system they live in, as well as by their use of personal devices.

In this perspective, technological innovations, as they affect the media system, could be intended as a series of "turning points" which separate different generations, thus giving new strength to the main problem related to generational analysis – namely, how to cut the historical continuum into discrete and consistent units.

It is therefore no surprise that the recent acceleration of technological progress has led our attention to both technological innovation - making a clear discontinuity with respect to the past - and age groups, who appropriate technological devices. Technological innovation thus allows the building of generational theories easy to argue from a rhetorical standpoint, though not always empirically grounded (as for the so-called "digital natives" in Prensky 2001; Tapscott 1998, 2008. See also Buckingham 2006).

The close connection between age groups, generations and the use of media technologies is thus quite questionable.

First, a generational interpretation of media history is actually often connected to the notion of "generation gap" and related to adults' concerns (or expectations) about the change brought about by technological innovation (see Papert, 1996; Ribak 2001; Seiter 2005; Jenkins 2009; Livingstone 2009).

Second, generational interpretations of media history are often produced by media industries, whose business models rely on the discovery and exploitation of generational tastes. In this case, we could arguably run the risk of using several generational classifications, as seen in marketing ("e-generation", "Nintendo generation", and so on), constantly destined to be overcome by the next innovation (Buckingham, 2006).

Third, more importantly, this interpretation mistakes age groups (and the technologies that they use) for generations: as we know, the greater willingness of young people to innovate depends on several factors, such as education, wealth, and their "moral economies", so appropriately described by Silverstone and Hirsch (1992) (Colombo, 2012). Thus, it is not just a matter of age.

> It must be admitted that biological data constitute the most basic stratum of factors determining generational phenomena; but for this very reason, we cannot observe the effects of biological factors directly; we must, instead, see how they are reflected through the medium of social and cultural forces. (Mannheim, 1964, p.192)

In other words, peers belong to the same demographic cluster while they do not necessarily belong to the same generational identity, which by definition requires a shared solidarity. According to Buckingham "generations are naturally occurring phenomena, which emerge

simply as a result of the passing of time; but generations also produce themselves, as their members (and, presumably, non-members too) define the meanings of generational membership" (Buckingham 2006, p.3).

When we take account of the role of media in the construction and self-construction of generations, we need to consider how technologies can act as 'generationing' process (Alanen, 2001; Buckingham 2006; Siibak, Vittadini 2012): namely, what different generations do with technologies and, above all, what different meanings media consumption can convey in constructing alternative generational identities.

From a media consumption perspective, "membership of a certain generation constitutes a constraint on identity capable of functioning as a sort of subculture in the definition of media diets, the activation of common frames of interpretation of media texts and a predisposition to processes of domestication of communication technologies" (Aroldi, Colombo, 2007:35).

Generations can hardly be understood by only focusing on age and age-related consumption practices; to focus only on practices would cause us to miss what generational differences actually refer to, due to the speed of growth in technological innovation and to the ostensible reduction of the time lag between age groups; on the contrary, by focusing on the symbolic rather than practical use of media – namely, on the generational semantics, "we sense" (Corsten 1999) and "habitus" (Bourdieu 1979), in relation to the audience experience, rather than on skills and capabilities exhibited in accessing technologies – we would eventually do justice to their very cultural meaning and overall significance.

> By offering an inventory of both symbolic resources and spaces where people can share their collective experiences, media serves as a powerful element in producing and reinforcing generational identity and forming the collective memory for social generations" (Siibak, Vittadini 2012).

Starting with this premise, when it comes to television consumption is the generational hypothesis still reliable?

As we know, the symbolic capital embedded in the medium and in its usage (Fiske &Hartley, 1978; Newcomb &Hirsch, 1983; Silverstone 1994) provide a shared representation of reality, which is likely to blur the lines between different age groups.

The point I will address here is whether or not recent TV evolution can be intended in terms of generational gap. I will also discuss the extent to which a technological system transformation is destined to make a historical discontinuity or rather to simply add a new layer to the way people experience TV. Or, to put it in other words, we could wonder if some innovations are destined to separate generations, while others seem to take them together.

To discuss these hypotheses, I draw on data from "Osservatorio Social TV", a research project, related to the diffusion of social and connected television[1] in the Italian market.

TV audiences and/as generations

It is not the first time that TV has dealt with innovations able to modify its history and the cultural form of television as perceived by the audiences (for example, between the baby boomers and their children there are marked differences in the time dedicated to consumption and the significance of watching television as an everyday activity; see Aroldi, Colombo 2007); nonetheless, not all renewals can be intended as a milestone nor should they be given the same importance. Furthermore, not all transformations have to do directly with the widening of a generational gap.

The first gap was obviously opened by the very introduction of TV, from 1954 onwards: in this case, the rift between users and non-users – which basically relies on the simple "to have / to have not" dichotomy – also takes on a generational shape. So, for the Italian baby-boomer generations (born between the mid-fifties and mid-sixties), television was the medium that accompanied their formative years (teaching, providing amusement, spreading a standard form of the Italian language and conveying certain shared cultural contents); and the kind of television that they use as a frame of reference remains the model of television with which they grew up (Aroldi, Colombo, 2007: 39).

While the diffusion of the medium was gradually filling this gap, new innovations took place, which rarely determined a generational rift; or, to put it in different words, generational discontinuity started to rely on symbolic representations provided by TV as an educational medium or a medium of entertainment, rather than on the material appropriation of the medium (which could be intended exactly as a form of binary divide).

The domestication of TV and its appropriation on the part of the audiences caused people to get used to it: James Lull's analysis of daily consumption (1990) comes to mind, which distinguishes between "structural" and "relational" uses, all destined to be part of the moral economy of contemporary families. In recent decades, technological innovations may have improved the quality of viewing, while not affecting the way people watch TV and the meanings they attribute to it. As a consequence, TV has been the very centre of domestic consumption for many decades: meter surveys easily provide confirmation, showing many differences in time budgeting and target market preferences, without questioning the overall stability of consumption patterns (Scaglioni 2011, Aroldi, 2007; see also Auditel research reports).

As reported by De Blasio and Sorice (2012) in their study about the role of media for different generations, the most significant differences in the television perception relate to the gap between the first generation who had a TV, and all the others. For the Post-War generation, the TV was an opportunity to learn and discover (educational frame) while for Boomers it represented "a fundamental enabler of the imagination, a kind of framework within which the knowledge of the world develops and whose contents (programs) represent an almost indelible generational memory" (Id., 101). As the medium enters the domestic routine and gradually becomes a daily ritual, the attribution of symbolic value by

the new generations starts fading: in their eyes, television and its programs become something "boring", something for the elderly.

As can be seen, it is possible to detect a clear discontinuity related more to the medium's symbolic value than to the technological change that affected the TV set.

We can radicalize this point by taking into account the different transformations that have affected the history of TV. The advent of color television obviously marked a clear discontinuity between "old" and "new" media, especially for those who grew up in the Eighties: its importance, nonetheless, cannot be compared to that of the so-called "bedroom culture" made possible by the multiplication of screens. In the latter, we are faced more with social and cultural change than technological. As Livingstone said, "the bedroom becomes meaningful through the conjunction of all three rationales above. It provides a convenient location in which personal goods can be gathered and maintained. It provides a means of escape from the interruptions, interference and gaze of others. And it facilitates the routine (re)enactment of a desired identity" (Livingstone, 2007:8).

The new location of TV sets in the home may be considered responsible for a new relationship between fathers and sons: namely, between adults, still interested in a shared and collective form of consumption, and teenagers, suddenly able to have a private space. The television sets diffusion enabled young people to freely access content and become independent from their parents. Of course, the ease of access to the television code promotes a shortening of distance between adults and younger generations, allowing the latter to free themselves both in terms of the medium use and the content reading (Meyrowitz, 1985).

The invention of remote control marked a new step in this story, making audiences more autonomous with respect to the medium, but it did not open a serious generational gap. According to Lull and Morley, the "fight for remote control" – referred to by Ang as "living room wars" (1996) – hugely affected families' symbolic investments, but was mainly rooted in gender differences (father versus mother). As for the relationship between adults and children, on the contrary, the use of remote control contributed to blurring the lines between different generations – arguably due to the fact that children became very confident with new technological devices – as has been confirmed by several surveys (Livingstone 2007; Palmer 1986; Simpson 1987; Lull 1980).

Management of the remote control can clearly be viewed as not only a strong indicator of the degree of self-determination about television choices by young people and a subversion of the family hierarchical dimension, but also as a levelling of the distance to adults (Tirocchi, Andò, Antenore, 2002).

Further confirmation comes from the analysis of television audience data, in particular prime time.[2] Looking at the composition of television audiences, kids and teens overstate the ratings of programs, especially during prime time, as they are crucial targets. Teens are strategic for TV content success, as they bring with them the entire family (id, p. 97).

A further technological innovation to be considered is the digital terrestrial system. Even though it has been presented in a very pompous way, its innovative potential is actually quite limited (Scaglioni, Sfardini 2008; Scaglioni 2011). Beyond all the well-known problems related to the technical compatibility between decoders and TV sets, digital terrestrial TV provided by definition an increase of available channels, while not affecting the qualitative experience of audiences.

On the contrary, if we consider the transformation of the medium with respect to the social and cultural meanings of the audience experience, we can find more discontinuity within consumer practices and generations.

In this perspective, the shift from programming as sequence to flow is much more significant. Compared to the earlier phases of the broadcasting service, which was organized – as all media industries – in distinct sequences accessible in the same unit of time, "the flow offered can also, and perhaps more fundamentally, be related to the television experience itself" (Williams, 1974: 94). As Williams argued, a proof of this is that "most of us say, in describing the experience, that we have been 'watching television' rather than that we have watched 'the news' or 'a play' or 'the football' on television. […] Then again it is a widely if often ruefully admitted experience that many of us find television very difficult to switch off" (ibid.).

The rise of commercial networks in Italy between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s also introduced a significant discontinuity, referred to by Eco as "neo-television" (1983). In this case, the innovation did not only determine a quantitative increase of TV channels, but also produced a variety of products, languages, social and cultural values, which in turn has recently contributed to the huge diversification between target groups already accounted for in surveys dedicated to lifestyles.

How TV consumption changes: new practices, new audiences

In recent years, the evolution of TV has been marked by very radical changes with respect to the well-balanced relationship between offer and demand, and between broadcasters and audiences, which historically characterized the medium.

These transformations, in one way, deal with the technological evolution of the medium and its hybridization with other devices, and, in another, with the rise of new consumption habits and practices on the part of the audience, who increasingly wants to be entertained and engaged.

In order to understand the very meaning of these transformations, we arguably have to put into question the traditional definition of TV, rooted in the complementarity between the technological frame, the contents delivered by the medium and the context – namely, the family unit – in which all domestication processes take place (Andò, Marinelli, 2014; Lotz 2009; Moran 2009; Curtin &Shattuc 2009; Spigel, Olsson 2004).

However, our present consumption practices could hardly be understood according to this definition. In fact, from a technological perspective, TV has definitely moved towards a multi-platform approach with respect to both distribution (digital and IP-based

broadcasting) and user access (tablet, smartphone, and the overall multi-device ecosystem). As a consequence, the TV set is no longer the only screen: rather, it is the main one, although destined to broadcast and deliver content, which is often produced by different operators. As for TV content, it can now be accessed via several portable devices, to the point that consumption is no longer determined by physical place nor by social context.

It is worth remembering that "connected television" (Andò, Marinelli, 2014 forthcoming) is neither a specific device nor a given technological standard, though it seems to constitute a broader pattern, a sort of evolutionary trend carried out by a plurality of players including broadcasters, micro-electronics companies and digital enterprises such as Google, Apple and Microsoft. The idea by which all these players are inspired is that the TV experience is still central in contemporary everyday life, but nonetheless has been radically changing with respect to traditional viewing of TV broadcast programs.

Internet-enabled TV screens are now expanding the potentialities of the medium by allowing a more personal consumption experience, while also giving new content providers the chance to conquer traditional audiences (with regard to television's temporal regime as provided by catch-up television, see Gillan 2011; Doyle 2010; Uricchio, 2010). Therefore, in terms of content, the rise of trans-media storytelling (Jenkins, 2003) is progressively releasing content from a single medium, widening the viewing experience.

As a consequence, contents will no longer be determined by any technical divide, but increasingly affected by hybridization rather than depending on the specific languages and expressive codes embedded in a medium.

Audience experience is destined to take advantage of this new situation: far from being focused on a single medium and on its specific content, it is now enriched by the chance to access an *expanded text* (Askwith, 2007) via different devices. From the audience standpoint, therefore, we can observe the most radical changes of the TV system. Consumption practices, enabled by both the diffusion of new technologies and improvement in audience competencies, are now giving shape to new social uses able to domesticate new devices and invent unheard of and unpredictable hybrid styles, as we will discuss later.

We could refer to this new condition as a form of "anytime" and "anywhere" television: an experience, in other words, that has little or nothing to do with the show schedule, as it was programmed by broadcasting companies and super-imposed by the flow, which can be seen as the very socio-technical pattern of traditional TV. The system has recently moved from being ruled by a producer-generated flow to becoming a cross-platform environment, rather based on what has been defined a "user-generated flow" (Ulricchio, 2010). This transformation seems to affect different levels of the system: the material distribution of devices in the domestic space (main screen, second screen, etc.), the temporal organization of consumption (time-shifting[3]) and the social practices related to TV viewing (the so-called social TV).

Social TV clearly illustrates this new definition of TV experience. Here, audiences take advantage of technological convergence and multi-screen practices, transforming TV

consumption into a shared production, which allows people to actively exchange opinions and comments while at the same time experiencing new forms of live event co-viewing, and eventually becoming able to perceive themselves as a broader community (Andò, Comunello 2012; Johns, 2012; Doughty, Rowland, Lawson, 2011; Wohn, Na 2011).

In the social TV experience, both inter-user and user-to-content relationships are at stake. On the one side, social TV has to do with the way people stay in touch with each other: the reference here is to all kinds of interaction generated by audiences with respect to used devices (tablet, smartphone, laptop), inhabited online environments (social media and apps), live/non-live interaction flows, before-during-after program conversations, TV genres and motivations to interact (such as sharing, support for the program, looking for rewards).

On the other side, social TV means a digital relationship with the content, namely all the interaction – managed across a second screen – oriented to information gathering and sharing about television content, with reference to different programs, celebrities (TV show hosts, actors), contents, brands and commercials, gamification (Andò, Marinelli, 2014).

The above process deals with a huge transformation of TV audience experiences. Far from being linear, it seems to be driven by a trial-and-error logic rather than a systematic program, to the point that even companies and players able to rule the transition are barely aware of its deep meaning and implications. In any case, we are certainly talking about a process by which TV has definitely become something else, while actually maintaining its very centrality.

Methodology

In order to focus on whether or not TV evolution can be intended in terms of generational gap, I will rely on data from the "Osservatorio Social TV"[4], all related to the diffusion of social and connected television in the Italian market. The "Osservatorio" has realized different surveys dedicated to the new consumption practices taken on by the audience, with particular attention to:

1) Scenario analysis[5]
2) Buzz monitoring[6]
3) Qualitative survey on families and TV audiences;
4) Quantitative analysis (Cawi) on a sample of Web users.

Qualitative analysis aims to situate consumption in its actual context, according to the overall contribution of media ethnography. In particular, we built a sample of people living in Rome, ranging from 15 to 64 years old[7]. The sample was based on the broader composition of an Italian audience, as it emerged from the scenario analysis.

Interviews have been realized in domestic environments, so as to allow the observation of daily practices, with particular attention paid to:

- use of TV-set, new devices and multi-platform contents;
- use of "second screen" during TV consumption;
- use of social media during TV consumption;
- level of cognitive, emotional and relational engagement, to be analysed both with respect to types of devices used and contents shared.

In this case, contrary to business and marketing research approaches, qualitative research aims at revealing the meaning-making work that accompanies the adoption of technology in everyday life (Bakardjieva 2005).

Quantitative survey is rather meant to measure practices related to social TV – new consumption styles, online access, time-shifting, multi-screening[8] – as emerged from the qualitative phase. We investigated with particular attention:

- fruition of TV-based contents via different platforms and devices. Consumer clusters have been built, which rely on several variables: time budget; in and outdoor consumption; shared and individual use of different devices; choice of contents.
- the different social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, Miso, and so on) used for different purposes and activities.

By definition, such a survey relies on a non-representative sample of Italian population. On the contrary, we limited our analysis to a sample of *connected* people, who are characterized by a high confidence with new technologies as well as by a likely engagement for emerging practices. According to the convergent culture idea (Jenkins, 2006), we aimed to investigate a specific target: namely, people equipped with both media literacy skills and a clear awareness of how technology-mediated processes work.

Both the ethnographic and Cawi[9] samples are thus biased in favour of most-connected users, as our interest was in emerging practices, which by definition are diffused amongst the so-called "early adopters" (Rogers 2002) and those accessing pay-TV, multi-screening, TV on-demand and time-shifting services.

Such a choice also allows us to put the generational hypothesis to the test of empirical data. To focus on a broader or representative sample would lead us to limit any generational gap to the basic "to have/to have not" distinction. While a non-connected 65-year-old adult and a connected 15-year-old teenager are obviously separated by a generational divide, it is more interesting to detect dissimilarities taking place at a different and more sophisticated level. Moreover, the diffusion cycle of media eventually tends to fill the gap between "have" and "have not" (Rogers, 1962). Although it is known that once you overcome the problem of access, new and more inequalities are produced with respect to the uses of technologies (Di Maggio, Hargittai 2001), it's also true that:

> The revolution announced by the new interfaces, which fragment the work entrusted to the browser and allow direct access to the content, rewards the immediacy and fun, it's less expensive in terms of cognitive load and more suited to relaxed lifestyle, to contexts of use away from the office life and related to normal daily activities" (Marinelli, 2012).

Furthermore, the easy access to new platforms could lower the importance of manual ability – which is said to characterize the so-called digital natives – and thus eventually reduce generational differences. However, we have to keep in mind that digital divide also relies on social and economic stratifications, which have little to do with the cycle of generations. Access to pay-TV services seems to be determined by the economic intra-generational divide rather than by the inter-generational divide. A new form of digital divide is then widening, which relies on skills, competences and the overall social habitus – rather than on the binary "to have / to have not" variable – and which in turn can hardly be intended as merely a generational gap (Bentivegna, 2009).

Many other distinctions should also be considered, which have to do with the individual relationship with both technological devices and media contents. Our purposive sample of Web users can hopefully make all these individual attitudes and choices more visible. It is worth remembering that all the interviewed people own multiple screens and therefore share a similar consumption condition.

As for the research design, the mixed use of qualitative and quantitative methods – according to the complementary approach (Jensen 2002) – aims to provide both a description and measurement of daily practices and an in-depth investigation of the way users build *meaning* from their experience and from their technological set. In this respect, technology as such can be considered as an enabling, rather than a decisive, variable.

From "television" to "televisions"

As for the data collected, we found a sharp difference between the practices of adults (45-64) and of teens and children, especially when it comes to the "hybrid" use of TV-based and Internet devices. In other words, traditional TV consumption, which is still organized according to broadcasting schedule, does not engender large differences in the way people behave and relate to the medium. People older than 45 tend to watch more TV than younger people, but, from a qualitative standpoint, the different age groups reveal a quite similar relationship with the broadcasting experience.

As for the emerging practices, many more distinctions appear, which deal with the dynamism of young targets. People between 16 and 24, and more significantly between 25 and 34 years, are vastly more active in managing their everyday experience. Nonetheless, adults are engaged in an exploration of new practices, as in the case of PVR (Personal Video Recorder) use. According to our qualitative research, PVR time-shifting practices are becoming very popular amongst older audiences, too: the reason is that new technologies

Table 1: How often do you watch TV content live on a TV set?

Live on the TV set						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Total
Always	50	70	53	38	55	266
	18.80%	26.30%	19.90%	14.30%	20.70%	100.00%
Often	49	63	46	32	19	209
	23.40%	30.10%	22.00%	15.30%	9.10%	100.00%
Sometimes	13	24	35	20	17	109
	11.90%	22.00%	32.10%	18.30%	15.60%	100.00%
Never	17	23	28	25	31	124
	13.70%	18.50%	22.60%	20.20%	25.00%	100.00%
Total	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

are making recording *easier* with respect to what video-recorders had done in the past. In other words, such a practice as time-shifting reveals a different pattern upon which generations are joined rather than separated.

Not accidentally, all pay-TV subscribers interviewed admit to having substantially reorganized their daily consumption activities according to this new opportunity. Time-shifting technologies can actually free audiences from structured schedules, while giving them the power to manage their time (according to familial or professional needs, the rhythm of domestic work, etc.) as well as the chance to choose between the whole variety of programs.

> I videorecord very often [...] things that are produced at the same time or things that I like and I can't watch. I videorecord and then I watch." (Man, 45 years old)

> Well, the MYSKY I have on television is great, and then, if you see something is on when you're not at home, you can videorecord directly from the phone and when you get home you watch it directly on TV." (Woman, 35 years old)

TV-on-demand services are highly appreciated by the audiences as well, for they arguably provide them with a very similar opportunity, while equipping them with an even larger library of content. Our interviewees seem to be aware of the fact that such a technology will eventually strengthen their freedom. However, when talking about "multi-screen" practices, the distance between adults (55-64) and young people suddenly becomes more significant. In this case, I will still take into account daily usages, which are supposed to be the best indicator of established practices. In an everyday life perspective, the so-called *catch-up* TV

– which by definition is consumed through official broadcasters' websites – appears to be very popular amongst younger people, particularly those from 25 to 34 years old.

Table 2: How often do you watch TV content on demand on official TV websites?

On demand on official TV websites						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Total
Always	8	15	7	3	0	33
	24.20%	45.50%	21.20%	9.10%	0.00%	100.00%
Often	25	39	29	16	9	118
	21.20%	33.10%	24.60%	13.60%	7.60%	100.00%
Sometimes	45	51	43	30	23	192
	23.40%	26.60%	22.40%	15.60%	12.00%	100.00%
Never	51	75	83	66	90	365
	14.00%	20.50%	22.70%	18.10%	24.70%	100.00%
Total	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

Table 3: How often do you watch TV content streaming on official TV websites?

Streaming on official TV websites						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Total
Always	8	18	12	4	4	46
	17.40%	39.10%	26.10%	8.70%	8.70%	100.00%
Often	48	57	31	23	16	175
	27.40%	32.60%	17.70%	13.10%	9.10%	100.00%
Sometimes	44	66	60	46	35	251
	17.50%	26.30%	23.90%	18.30%	13.90%	100.00%
Never	29	39	59	42	67	236
	12.30%	16.50%	25.00%	17.80%	28.40%	100.00%
Total	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

Not surprisingly, TV content viewing on mobile devices – such as laptops, tablets or smartphones – is typical of heavy Internet users, and specifically of young people, more used to deal with technological convergence.

> [I watch the TV] quite often using the online RAI channel, therefore on my computer. (man, 30 years old)

Especially a video of the day or night before, so yes, on the TV program websites or otherwise on YouTube if the videos are there and if it's allowed. (Woman, 18 years old)

I use the iPad or my computer to connect, perhaps, to TV channels that are streaming or... Then, having the connection with Skype... I mean, with Sky... There's also the option to watch through buffering the TV from your computer... (Woman, 25 years old)

I did not have television for six months, so I was forced to watch TV or movies through the tablet or via the screen of the laptop. (Man, 28 years old)

If a generalization may be made, conventional practices – such as on-air viewing or basic time-shifting functions such as Pay-TV services – tend to bridge the distance between the generations, due to traditionally shared habits, values and skills.

The TV program choices confirm this. Different age groups show a very similar attitude towards TV, grounded in a well-established media literacy. Both casual and structural uses of TV are diffused amongst adult and young audiences, and seem to rely on the same practices, such as zapping, mouth-to-mouth communication, and so on. All these skills have been established during TV history and thus are owned by almost all members of audience groups. Conversely, innovative experiences are put into play in online social network sites, which are affected by a participative and collaborative culture and more intensively used by young people.

Therefore, the choice of a traditional TV program – of what to watch on the TV screen – still relies on conventional methods, including advertising. On the contrary, the choice of a program in a networked environment is more often based on different recommendations, and more often on "buzz communication", as it takes place in social network sites.

I turn on the TV and watch what's on air. (Woman, 54 years old)

Yes, I turn on the TV and decide. I don't look at newspapers to inform me about when they program some episode. (Woman, 48 years old)

But if there's a TV series that I consider particularly interesting, first of all I try to stay at home to watch it. Yes, I choose directly in this way, or if I read about it, or I see on social networking sites that someone recommended something… (Woman, 18 years old)

I mean, if there is a lot of talking about a program, I get curious. But if I hear negative comments on TV programs, I'm not necessarily influenced. (Man, 28

years old)

Table 4: How often do you read comments or recommendations on SNS for the TV show to watch?

Reading TV comments and recommendations on SNS						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Total
Always	12	9	6	6	2	35
	34.30%	25.70%	17.10%	17.10%	5.70%	100.00%
Often	17	28	19	10	8	82
	20.70%	34.10%	23.20%	12.20%	9.80%	100.00%
Sometimes	22	43	42	27	22	156
	14.10%	27.60%	26.90%	17.30%	14.10%	100.00%
Never	78	100	95	72	90	435
	17.90%	23.00%	21.80%	16.60%	20.70%	100.00%
Totale	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

From multitasking to multiscreening

Multi-tasking and multi-screening are able to discriminate between young and adult behaviour. According to many surveys, young people – especially kids - are used to doing many more activities while watching TV – such as reading, studying and playing – as opposed to adults; nonetheless, this gap has been widening since the diffusion of mobile devices, digital applications and social media. Particularly, the simultaneous multi-screening practices make a clear discontinuity with respect to the way people used to watch television, above all because they can lead users to a new dimension of *engagement*.

Obviously, not all multi-screening practices can be considered relevant in this respect. In any case, a simultaneous use of different devices, focused on the very same goal, is more likely to engender engagement and to allow people to more actively manage their relationships.

In fact, mobile devices are mainly used for activities related to the relationship management in its broadest sense: from social networking to photo / video sharing, instant messaging and using e-mail. Specifically, people can manage a constant interaction through these devices, thanks to the portability and power of connection, which are independent from the physical places where they access the web.

In relation to television consumption, the mobile allows the maintenance of continuous contact with other audiences about content, both simultaneously with the time of fruition (multi-screening actually allows the use of a connected device to comment, through another device, on what you are enjoying) and in sequential mode, as the audience can at any time interact with others about TV content if they wish to.

Table 5: How often do you visit SNS while watching TV?

Visiting social network sites (Facebook, Twitter, others)						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Total
Always	20	25	17	6	3	71
	28.20%	35.20%	23.90%	8.50%	4.20%	100.00%
Often	43	65	38	25	17	188
	22.90%	34.60%	20.20%	13.30%	9.00%	100.00%
Sometimes	42	54	55	40	28	219
	19.20%	24.70%	25.10%	18.30%	12.80%	100.00%
Never	24	36	52	44	74	230
	10.40%	15.70%	22.60%	19.10%	32.20%	100.00%
Total	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

Additionally, multi-screening offers media producers the opportunity to push the audience to expand their consumer experience on different screens, increasing the touch points with the content and obtaining more goals in terms of customer loyalty. Essentially, mobile device's affinity for interaction can positively reverberate on media products with which the audience can be pushed to build a more intense and bidirectional relationship.

Table 6: How often do you use apps on mobile devices while watching TV?

Using apps on tablet and smartphone						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Total
Always	19	24	8	5	0	56
	33.90%	42.90%	14.30%	8.90%	0.00%	100.00%
Often	38	61	38	18	6	161
	23.60%	37.90%	23.60%	11.20%	3.70%	100.00%
Sometimes	40	48	65	35	23	211
	19.00%	22.70%	30.80%	16.60%	10.90%	100.00%
Never	32	47	51	57	93	280
	11.40%	16.80%	18.20%	20.40%	33.20%	100.00%
Total	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

Therefore, multi-screening seems to emerge as an element capable of discriminating between adult behaviors and consumption styles of target under 40 years old. Once again, we are not facing a purely technological issue: inside our sample, mobile device ownership is quite high for all age groups, and mobile devices have now become privileged access points to the Internet.

Table 7: Tablet holders

Tablet holders						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Total
Holders	54	85	74	48	32	293
	18.40%	29.00%	25.30%	16.40%	10.90%	100.00%
Non-holders	75	95	88	67	90	415
	18.10%	22.90%	21.20%	16.10%	21.70%	100.00%
Total	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

Table 8: Smartphone holders

Smartphone holders						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Total
Holders	108	154	145	104	111	622
	17.40%	24.80%	23.30%	16.70%	17.80%	100.00%
Non-holders	21	26	17	11	11	86
	24.40%	30.20%	19.80%	12.80%	12.80%	100.00%
Total	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

However, having a connected mobile device doesn't mean that multi-screening is spread for all targets in the same way. It is rather a powerful indicator of change in the perception of television, both in its orientation toward the same goals and its consideration as a distraction device.

In one way, it can be an expression of strengthening consumer experience, demand of participation, aspiration for television content appropriation. In another, it can be an expression of a progressive detachment from the TV, more and more a background screen, almost silent, which accompanies other activities clearly perceived as more relevant.

My daughter keeps the sound off, because she doesn't even want to listen… (Man, 55 years old)

I use the television also during the day many times just as a background…; when I'm at home, I use it for listening to music a lot. (Man, 28 years old)

I mainly use [...] my laptop and then my cell phone, the smartphone. The television… I watch it, but not too much, just maybe when I'm bored in my free time… (Woman, 20 years old)

> I use television primarily as a background, the computer to watch TV series and movies in streaming, and the smartphone to keep in touch. (Woman, 16 years old)

> It's been a few years since I realized I watch TV when I'm bored and I often look at the computer during TV viewing. So I definitely do more than just watching television itself. (Man, 30 years old)

The most common multi-screening activities observed in our sample are certainly e-mail control, online searching, interaction with others and use of apps. Only 7% of respondents state that they always perform these activities while watching TV, while 20-25% do it often, with a clear predominance of younger target over adults (45+). As these practices are still limited (about 30% of the sample), they are very interesting with respect to the ability to anticipate trends, which appear already established at the international level (see Nielsen reports).

However, if we look at the multi-screening activities aimed to enhance the TV experience, the constant interaction with others watching the same program is certainly the leading dimension of the youth. From the use of instant messaging systems and online chat to the use of Facebook (although less effective than the penetration of this social networking site might suggest) and Twitter, the need for sharing is the goal for the sampled young people.

It is as if the progressive empowerment experienced with the advent of the bedroom culture and the personalization of consumption practices were counterbalanced by the search for someone to actually share the meanings and emotions of TV consumption, a co-viewer virtually placed in the same environment and committed to the same viewing activities.

From the qualitative interviews a form of "hidden" social TV also emerged when the audience commented online, live, during a show, but directly with their circle of friends and in private settings such as WhatsApp, Facebook chat or Skype.

> I mean, if there's a particular movie, I say: 'There is the movie we wanted to watch... Go, watch!' on WhatsApp. (Woman, 16 years old)

> For example, I'm away from my family and I knew that my sister was watching the same program and maybe I interacted with her in chat rooms or via Whatsapp about the show. But sometimes we're on the phone or on Skype and we note that there is the same background noise, and we're watching together. Since we live very far away, sometimes we decide to watch the same show to feel closer. (Woman, 25 years old)

Table 9: How often do you talk about TV shows on chat?

Chatting (Whatsapp, Messenger, Skype, Gmail)						
	Age groups					
	16 to 24	25 to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	Totals
Always	15	18	10	4	0	47
	31.90%	38.30%	21.30%	8.50%	0.00%	100.00%
Often	37	43	18	11	4	113
	32.70%	38.10%	15.90%	9.70%	3.50%	100.00%
Sometimes	45	52	59	33	19	208
	21.60%	25.00%	28.40%	15.90%	9.10%	100.00%
Never	32	67	75	67	99	340
	9.40%	19.70%	22.10%	19.70%	29.10%	100.00%
Total	129	180	162	115	122	708
	18.20%	25.40%	22.90%	16.20%	17.20%	100.00%

With regard to the use of Facebook and Twitter as a form of enhanced social TV, it becomes clear that the interaction takes on other meanings such as to express an opinion on what you are watching, increase the fun, or compare to others' ideas. As already mentioned, in many cases it's to read what others say, acting as an incentive for new content consumption.

> I do it because I can, basically. If I have the opportunity to share my opinion with others, even if not required, I do it anyway. (Woman, 27 years old)

> Yes, for example on Twitter. If on a talk show there's a character that says something interesting for me then maybe I can quote on Twitter or, less frequently, on Facebook. Because I always have my smartphone beside me, if instead there is a TV show that I'm not particularly passionate about, I go on Facebook to look at who is updating his profile or what anyone is writing, or I go on Whatsapp to check if there are any new messages. Otherwise, I change the TV channel. (Man, 38 years old)

> To look at the other part of the TV show… as if there was not only the audience in the talk show studio, but also a virtual audience at home, united through social media. (Woman, 35 years old)

> Let's say that for sure this increases the fun in watching certain programs. Maybe see what people think on social networks – because, for example, Twitter is also widely used to make fun of certain programs, certain characters... (Man, 28 years old)

No, not to participate in the discussion. Maybe I happen to leave a comment but then I don't rage about it... or I will continue the discussion on that topic. Maybe I see a friend who wrote 'I did not like this' and I say 'you don't understand anything', things like that. (Woman 16 years old)

But if I quote a specific speech I liked, this was personal interest in itself. It's already implicit in the post editing. Maybe, some quotes, especially about politics or a political leader, and then we just share impressions among us, thoughts… (Man, 30 years old)

[I interact] both with people I know and people I don't know personally, but in a way you know them because, maybe, they are famous or at least fairly well known on Twitter, and I exchange opinions with them. (Man, 22 years old)

Conclusions

The data presented above suggest that there is a discontinuity in audience behaviors in relation to the different meanings of television as a medium. As I suggested before, this could be read as a generational turning point between the adults (45+) and the younger target of our samples (particularly 16-24).

As mentioned above, it is clear that these gaps are linked to innovative consumption practices, enabled by technological changes. But not all technological innovations act as a gap in the same way. Therefore, we cannot restrict our analysis to a mapping of those practices.

As discussed, while technology gradually becomes available to everyone (such as PVR), some innovations, such as time-shifting, seem to be able to progressively flatten the differences between youth and adults. We must not forget that time-shifting comes from the attempt to circumvent TV flow, successfully tested by viewers to shorten the distance between the release windows of their favorite TV shows (Gillan, 2011; Andò 2012). On the contrary, the PVR experience, anticipated by VCRs (Video Cassette Recorders) but without the same success, ends up being expressed in the everyday use of TV and allows a release from the schedule in a less competitive and antagonistic way than that expressed by TV show fans.

In this case, the need for viewing time emancipation, expressed by TV show fans, is immediately made technologically available by broadcasters and definitively turned into "trivial" and daily practices by the audience, such as breaking the video stream to allow small displacements from the screen when watching (first delegated to the commercial break time).

However, time-shift is nothing more than a broadcaster's strategy to keep the audience under network control, while responding to the need for customized consumption practices emerging from the grassroots. Time-shifting technology expands the TV-based

viewing experience, while also expanding the potential market and allowing a wider audience to access content that program scheduling could not make available.

The same argument could be applied to on-demand TV: this service also maintains control over the audience behind an apparent guarantee of freedom in making choices within a contents library, which however remains governed by the network.

In this sense, one could say that these practices discriminate, or are intended to discriminate, less than others in terms of generational distances.

In place-shifting and multi-screen practices, we find that the gap is more of a symbolic nature.

Place-shifting can be read as a way of consumption personalization with respect to the device through accessing television contents, but its symbolic value is beyond this: it represents the progressive TV screen pauperization as a means for domestic entertainment. This pauperization of meaning and loss of loyalty – already existing with respect to the cultural distance expressed by young people against traditional TV (free to air) – results in a less intense value attribution to the medium, with the TV screen relegated to the background of other activities, even without sound and even if the "other" activities include paradoxically watching TV content through another device.

In this case we observe a significant loss of sense by the medium and the questioning of the complementarity between the technological frame, the content delivered by the medium and the context – namely, the family unit – in which all domestication processes take place.

The television screen therefore reasserts its centrality as a terminal for home entertainment, not only TV-based.

The multi-screening, instead, acts in an ambivalent manner in relation to the medium definition, yet still providing new meanings to the consumption experience. When the second screen is used at the same time as the TV to act as a distraction device, we are faced with a situation similar to that described for the TV as a background to other activities clearly perceived as more important.

Here the audience presence in front of the television screen, which would be evaluated as a form of consumption by the monitoring system of ratings, probably validates TV as a transitional object, as documented by Silverstone (1994). The TV on is therefore seen as an element of reassurance and continuity over time, guaranteed by the repetitive scheduling of TV content.

The simultaneous multi-screening with television consumption describes an experience that is quite different from others previously promoted by television networks. Not only with respect to those practices of social TV that enhance and expand the enunciative productivity of the audience – natural to viewing experience – but rather with respect to seeking an expanded entertainment experience more and more connected with the consumption object. This happens through trans-media storytelling (Jenkins, 2003), cross-platform content and enhanced social experience: it is to say that the engaged audiences experiment a consumer experience not limited within television text, but

expanded in its trans-media applications; in audiences' online interactions; in live gaming experiences related to content; in seeking and collecting information; in the interaction with TV celebrities through social network sites, and in the need to appropriate objects and materials related to the content. This allows the extension of the entertainment experience even with the TV screen off.

The consumer experiences described above indicate a sharper approach trajectory between content and audience, as in the idea of para-social interaction described by Meyrowitz (1995) and in the idea of non-mutual intimacy proposed by Thompson (1995).

Therefore, the increased experiential dimension leads us, no doubt, to a more marked enhancement of the expanded content sphere, compared to the device sphere as a generational key; but, at the same time, it goes beyond that. As Mannheim states, the affinity between individuals belonging to the same generation unit therefore appears in their sharing of the same contents that constitute the consciousness of the individual members and act as factors of socialization within the group (Mannheim, 1927).

However, referring to the contents as a generational standpoint was certainly more suitable within the logics of broadcasting television. In other words, the past TV content release according to the production and distribution time has probably produced more immediate generational meanings associated with the airing of specific television programs. We know it has fostered the emergence of the X and Y generations.

The current unlimited free or paid access to the contents library, which is unrestricted from time and device constraints, and the intergenerational access to cultural products loved by different age groups, allows us to think in terms of generational pattern only for TV shows with high impact in terms of fandom.

On the contrary, the focus on the experiential dimension should mean thinking on not only content but also simultaneous availability of a number of technologies within audience everyday practices (Edmunds, Turner, 2002): we have to consider not only how people use the same global cultural products but also how they are able, in daily practices, to make use of a series of technologies that intensify the capacity to reflect collectively on their common condition, to emphasize their shared "we-sense" of being an audience.

The new idea of TV consumption (if you can still call it so), as experienced by young targets, is quite different from the traditional one, "recommended" by TV networks. It's a new experience with new symbolic value, the result of the gradual clearing out of the original one.

The TV, as it has been built up over fifty years, remains central to the adults experience: for them it continues to be the main source of home entertainment, the heart of the house, despite the proliferation of mobile devices also inside the home.

This is confirmed by the economic and values investment on the main screen, technologically advanced and often not even used, as in the case of Smart TV purchased but not connected to the Internet. ("I am a maniac for technologies. I bought this TV because it is an obsession I have always had, so I searched and bought this one", man 45 years old).

It is also confirmed by the almost radical underlining of the medium specificity in terms of functions ("The TV set just to watch the television, the telephone just to call" woman, 44 years old).

For adults, the television continues to be a ritual, which is consumed at certain times of the day, those established by the schedule, although the time-shifting viewing could easily upset the way it functions. It's an opportunity for collective vision, with their children and with their peers, to talk and exchange comments, to sit together in front of the TV.

For young people (16-35), however, the TV set is increasingly just one of the screens provided, probably the one with less symbolic investment and attention.

> [while I'm watching TV] I listen to music and then I never stop so I get up constantly, changing room, and... I don't... I have never watched TV in a progressive way. If I know that, for example, the program I'm watching is boring or I don't care that much, then I'm easily distracted. I get distracted easily. If not, if it's a movie and I like it... I interrupt all activities. (Woman, 16 years old)

The younger targets are intolerant of the schedule constriction and they consider the television content boring; they escape, creating a DIY schedule built with their favorite products, delivered through different devices. The ritual of collective consumption moves online, at major live events or generational hits, for which they feel a strong need to share meanings. The relationship management with contents plays in the infinite touch points that the trans-media content provides through different devices.

We are facing a meaningful change in the perception of media, which could be measured on the different use – or, best, different domestication – of media technologies between members of different generations. We can observe different media repertoires and media competences, emerging practices and longstanding behaviors, but more relevantly we can see the members of each generation feeling more or less close to the television experience.

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Notes:

[1] People usually refer to 'connected television' as smart TV, namely a connected TV set providing viewers with an immersive experience by delivering online interactive content in addition to traditional features. As I will explain later, I use the concept of connected television to refer not only to the technological device (Internet-enabled TV screen), but to a new consumption pattern able to merge the TV-viewing experience with online activities such as web browsing, video streaming, social networking, no matter which device you use (Andò R., Marinelli A., forthcoming, *View Journal of European Television History and Culture* Vol. 3, Issue 6, "Convergent Television(s): Political Ideas, Industrial Strategies, Textual Features and Audience Practices").

[2] I refer to the research "Antenne in movimento" (1999), commissioned by RAI, Analisi, Studi e Ricerche and Sipra.

[3] Time-shifting is the process of recording and storing data for later viewing.

[4] The "Osservatorio Social TV" is the result of a partnership between Sapienza University, Corecom Lazio and the main italian broadcasters (RAI, SKY, MEDIASET, FOX, DISCOVERY, MTV, La7) The project, coordinated by Alberto Marinelli and Romana Andò (Digilab Sapienza) aims to investigate the phenomenon of social TV in Italy and understand its impact on the audiovisual market.

[5] I don't discuss this analysis here.

[6] I don't discuss this analysis here.

[7] The sample – in this case – is the set of individuals to be involved through qualitative methods and not a statistically representative sample of the target population identified. Our sample includes 6 families with children (18 persons), 2 couples, 2 pairs of roommates, and 3 single persons. All respondents are from Rome. The interviews were conducted from June to September 2013.

[8] Multiscreening means cross-platform consumption. It refers to different devices ('screen') use, simultaneously or sequentially. The devices considered are smartphone, tablet, pc/laptop, TV set.

[9] For this study we re-contacted 750 respondents from the Global Web Index Core Survey, which has a sample of 1000 completes per wave which are representative of the Italian online population. Our sample (708 respondents) covered different age groups (16-24, 25-35, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64 years old). The survey was conducted in October 2014.