New-generation Ties: Identity, Social Relations and Digital Technologies among 2G Migrants in Italy

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Abstract

The article describes the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) among 2G migrants in Italy. In accordance with the specific conditions of migration to Italy, the article is mainly focused on the use of CMC among adolescents. It is based on the results of a research project on mediated communication practices, identity shaping and the complexity of the ties in which 2G migrants are involved. Particular attention is paid to the role of CMC in supporting different kinds of family ties: transnational family; immediate group; constructed family (Buckingham & De Block, 2004). The empirical study was developed in two main phases: an exploratory phase (November and December 2009) and a more "intensive" phase (February and June 2010). During both phases we adopted a multi-method approach, including questionnaires and different qualitative methodologies (in-depth interviews, focus groups, shadowing). The research results highlight the use of digital communication technologies in the management of social networks in both real and virtual life, the connection between the use of digital communication technologies, and the different social networks in which adolescents belonging to second generations of migrants are included (family, school-friends, friends and affective relationships).

Keywords: 2G, second generation, migrants, Italy, transnationalism, CMC

Introduction

The mobility of people across national frontiers is a highly relevant phenomenon in contemporary society. The evolution and diffusion of digital communication technologies offer "mobile people" access to a broad range of devices and tools that can support their migration patterns. In particular, social network sites (SNS) and other forms of computer-mediated communication increase the opportunity to build social ties within host countries, while maintaining a connection to homelands.

Researching the use of digital communication technologies by migrants is becoming a crucial point for understanding today's multicultural society. In particular, researching the use of SNS and computer-mediated communication is crucial to understanding migration in contemporary networked societies. In

these societies, the management of multi-layered social relations – real and virtual, weak and strong, close and distant – is a vital activity for migrants. According to several studies, in fact, migrants are involved in complex (and often transnational) social networks (Buckingham & De Block, 2004; Georgiou, 2005; Georgiou, 2006; Hiller & Franz, 2004; Mallapragada, 2000; Mitra, 2001). The study of 2G migrants - one of the most fertile fields in sociological and migration studies (Aparicio, 2007; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; Zhou, 1997) – requires specific attention to the management of social networks since 2G migrants have to manage a complex set of social relations. These relations include: family ties (often constructed or transnational) and peer networks (including migrant and non-migrant peers). Moreover in Italy, where many 2G migrants are adolescents, they share a digital youth culture with their non-migrant peers and different studies suggest that the Italian condition of 2G migrants requires specific theoretical paradigms (Ambrosini & Molina, 2004; Besozzi & Colombo, 2007; Casacchia, Natale, Paterno & Terzera, 2008; Gilardoni, 2008; Giovannini & Queirolo Palmas, 2002; Queirolo Palmas, 2006).

In accordance with these premises, the focus of this article is the use of social media (including SNS and other forms of computer-mediated communication) by 2G migrants in Italy, with particular attention to family networks, to the transcultural identity of users and to social relations with non-migrant peers. This article presents a description of the migrant situation in Italy and a discussion of the theoretical framework and results of a study carried out at OssCom (Research Centre on Media and Communication), partially funded by the Provincial Authority of Milan. In conclusion, the authors discuss how digital communication technologies are used by 2G adolescents in order to manage different kinds of social networks in real life and online.

Migration to Italy

Historically, Italy has always been a nation whose population is prone to emigration. Only recently – in the late '80s and early '90s – has the country become a destination for increasingly intensive migratory flows. Together with Spain, Portugal and Greece, Italy is one of the Southern European countries that in the course of less than two decades have become host countries. In these countries, situated on the borders of the oldest host countries, the immigration phenomenon has been characterized by the arrival of a rapidly growing number of foreign citizens in national contexts that lack consistent migration policies, hand-in-hand with repeated waves of regularization and limited integration policies (Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2007). The trend in immigration to Italy over the last 50 years is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Immigration to Italy over the last 50 years

YEARS	FOREIGN POPULATION	% OF POPULATION
1961	62,780	0.1
1981	210,937	0.4
2001	1,334,889	2.3
2011	4,570,317	7.5

Source: Istat, 2012

By comparison with figures from 2001, the number of foreign citizens in Italy has more than tripled over ten years. By the end of 2011 foreign citizens were estimated to number 4,859,000 (8% of total population) (Istat, 2012). While still substantial, the pace of this growth has declined in recent years due to the economic crisis, the depletion of the diasporic effects of Romania's and Bulgaria's entry into the European Union and the passing of new legislation on the residence of EU citizens in EU countries.

New waves of migration began in the wake of the transformations that affected Eastern Europe in the 1990s and more recently the countries South of the Mediterranean. Migrants coming from Eastern Europe and South Mediterranean countries joined the historical communities that had migrated to Italy earlier, such as the Chinese, Philippine and South American. At present, foreign EU citizens make up 29.2% of migrants in Italy, numbering 1.3 million. About half of these 1.3 million migrants have arrived from Eastern European countries. In particular, the Romanian community numbers almost 970,000 and represents by far the largest migrant group in Italy. The five major communities, at 1 January 2011, were: Romanian, Albanian, Moroccan, Chinese, Ukrainian, and these represent more than 50 per cent of migrants in Italy, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Foreign residents in Italy at 1st January 2011 (in order of first 20 nations of origin)

COUNTRIES		FOREIGN RESIDENTS			COUNTRIES		FOREIGN RESIDENTS		
	TOTAL NUMBER	OF WHICH WOMEN (%)	% OF TOTAL	VARIATION IN % 2010-11		TOTAL NUMBER	OF WHICH WOMEN (%)	% OF TOTAL	VARIATION IN % 2010-11
Romania	968576	54.6	21.2	9.1	Peru	98603	60.1	2.2	12.4
Albania	482627	46.3	10.6	3.4	Ecuador	91625	58.5	2.0	6.6
Morocco	452424	43.7	9.9	4.8	Egypt	90365	30.5	2.0	10.1
China	209934	48.4	4.6	11.5	Macedonia	89900	44.0	2.0	-3.2
Ukraine	200730	79.8	4.4	15.3	Bangladesh	82451	32.5	1.8	11.5
The Philippines	130948	67.2	2.9	8.6	Sri Lanka	81094	44.5	1.8	7.6
Moldova	130948	67.2	2.9	8.6	Senegal	80989	24.4	1.8	11.5
India	121036	39.3	2.6	14.3	Pakistan	75720	34.5	1.7	16.7
Poland	109018	71.2	2.4	3.2	Nigeria	53613	54.2	1.2	10.1
Tunisia	106291	36.6	2.3	2.5	Bulgaria	51134	61,8	1.1	11.1

Source: Istat, 2012

Due to this situation, 2G migrant adolescents usually have the possibility of going back periodically to their homeland, which is often not far from the host country (Bruneau, 2010); thus, they are also characterized by strong ties with friends and family members still living in their homeland, and are involved in physical and communicative flows fostering multi-stranded social networking activity.

Historically, the presence of foreigners has always been concentrated in the Northern and Central regions of the Italian territory. According to statistics, at 1 January 2011 the region of Lombardy boasted the largest number of foreigners (1,064,000, 23.3% of the total foreign population in Italy). Other large groups have settled in the regions of Lazio (over 542,000), Veneto (almost 505,000), Emilia-Romagna (500,000), Piedmont (399,000) and Tuscany (364,000). Rome, with 443,000 foreign residents, and Milan, with 382.000, are the provinces most affected by the phenomenon.

These populations of foreign citizens are structurally younger than their Italian counterparts: while the average age of Italian citizens is 44.7 years, that of foreign citizens is 32.2 years; 4,124,000 of these foreigners (85%) were born abroad, and only 736,000 were born in Italy (Istat, 2012). Due to these structural features of Italy's foreign population, 2G migrants are mostly school-age or younger individuals (Ambrosini & Molina, 2004; Besozzi & Colombo, 2007; Casacchia et al., 2008; Gilardoni, 2008; Giovannini &

Queirolo Palmas, 2002; Queirolo Palmas, 2006).

Data on the presence of foreign students in Italian schools show that foreign students have increased in number from 59,389 pupils in 1996/97 (0.7% of the total school population) to 711,046 in 2010/11 (7.9% of the total school population, rising to 12.5% in Lombardy, the Italian region where the study presented in this article was conducted). At present, foreign students are predominantly at primary school. In 2010/11 foreign students in Italian primary schools numbered 254,644, representing 9% of the total school population. The first and second grades of secondary school came next, with 158,261 and 153,513 foreign students, 8.8% and 5.8% respectively of the total school population. Nevertheless, the trend shows that the presence of foreign students in primary schools is decreasing (from 42.8% to 35.8% in the last decade), while young migrants are increasingly to be found in the second-grade classes of secondary schools. From 2001/02 to 2010/11, the proportion of foreign students in second-grade classes in secondary schools increased from 14% to 21.6%. The Italian-born children of migrants are growing up and heading towards adolescence (ISMU, 2011).

Networked Migrants: the Theoretical Frameworks

Within the broad spectrum of studies of migrants, the connection among digital media and communication technologies, migrants' identity and social networks has been studied from various points of view.

Some important focus points can be detected in studies of traditional media and migrants. For example: media as a symbolic space (a cultural context) in which migrants can acquire a voice as producers of content for mainstream media, ethnic media and the web; media as a repertoire of symbolic resources that migrants can draw on in the process of transcultural identity construction, and media as a socio-technical tool (a cultural artefact) through which migrants can maintain and build ties with individuals belonging to the same or different cultures.

The first two focus points become even more evident when studying digital technologies. The web can be a place where migrants acquire voice and agency (through websites, blogs and so on),   diffuse ethnic content (Mallapragada, 2000; Mitra, 2001) and produce non-stereotyped self-representations of their identity (Georgiou, 2005). Now embedded in everyday life, Web 2.0 offers migrants further and "easy to use" spaces and tools for sharing memories, experiences and other symbolic pieces of their jigsaw-puzzle identity. These opportunities are particularly relevant for migrants who are "in tension between maintaining a distinct migrant identity and acculturation" (Mallapragada, 2000, p. 180). In parallel, digital media are powerful socio-technical tools through which migrants can maintain and build ties with individuals belonging to the same or different cultures, sustain their transcultural social capital (Hiller & Franz, 2004)

and connect transnational and local spaces (Georgiou, 2005; Georgiou, 2006).

Since the early 1990s, the latter topic has been granted more space in the theoretical debate within migration studies, corresponding to the emergent concept of transnationalism and its use to explain some features of contemporary migration flows. The transnationalist approach, in fact, pays particular attention to the complexity of migrants' ties across national frontiers (Bauböck & Faist, 2010), assuming that in contemporary globalized society migration is characterized by an increasing complexity of physical flows and, consequently, of interpersonal relations and ties with people, communities of belonging and spaces.

For example, different migration flows are characterized by opportunities for returning periodically to the homeland, as well as moving from the homeland to hub-countries and away again (Bruneau, 2010). Thus, the ability to maintain dense networks across borders becomes crucial (Portes, 1999). Migrants who cross the borders of European countries, or who reach stabilized ethnic communities and quickly acquire a sufficient socio-economic status, return periodically to their homelands. On the other hand, 2G migrants living in countries where their socio-economic situation is uncertain often plan a new migration for the future. Furthermore, second generations of migrants living with their parents in a host country may maintain multi-stranded social relations across geographical and cultural borders with grandparents or other relatives (Glick Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). All these factors are blurring the boundaries of social and geographical spaces (Georgiou, 2005).

When these multi-stranded social relations are present and migrants have the opportunity to return to their homelands, we face a combination of transnational mobility and locality in the country of origin and/or host country. Here mobility means the physical movement of people in transnational spaces, while locality signifies that the immigrant is rooted or anchored in the host country and/or in the country of origin and goes on to develop/maintain a set of social relations in specific places (Dahinden, 2010). In this case, migrants belong to communities which are both dispersed across countries and connected by constant and intensive interactions that sustain a complex process of material, cultural and mental exchanges (Tsagarousianou, 2004).

These migrants are committed to building and managing ties that relate to their homelands, to the host country and to the transnational community of migrants (Bruneau, 2010). They act in a transnational space connecting local, national and transnational realities; some of these transnational spaces are grounded in very specific places, while others exist purely in the virtual realm (Georgiou, 2005). Both of these realms are relevant to the identity construction of individuals and communities. In effect, identity changes among migrants are considered to be derived from cross-border mobility and from communication that generates hybrid or blended identities (Dahinden, 2010)

Undoubtedly mobility and multi-stranded social relations do not imply a radical disembedding from

countries of origin or from host countries, or a privileged belonging to a global transnational community (Bauböck, 2010; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2004). Contemporary migrants can be involved in complex negotiations between integration and particularistic attachment to the country of origin or to an ethnic community, and mobility and multi-stranded relations can be the sign of an alternative to integration (Dahinden, 2010)

Despite these critical points, the study of migrants from a transnational perspective retains the advantage of a specific focus on the complexity of transnational relational ties (Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt, 1999).

In contemporary societies, multi-stranded social relations across geographical and cultural borders are often based on technology. For example, within transnational families, low-cost VoIP or social networks are used to sustain familial relations, especially when there are young (digitally skilled) relatives still living in the country of origin or when the cultural and socio-political situation of the country of origin includes a sufficient diffusion of digital technology (as in Eastern European countries, for example).

Regarding cultural identity, for migrants who use digital communication technologies, the homeland culture acts as an emotional and relational glue which gives rise to new ties (often sustained through technology) with migrants sharing the same culture and living in the same or a different host country (Hiller & Franz, 2004). In this complex network of ties the homeland is a relevant symbolic anchor (Cohen, 1997; Faist, 2000; Safran, 1991; Van Hear, 1998), but "there has been an erosion of territory as the pre-eminent marker of community […] and the new markers are more fluid and portable and may have both local and trans-local dimensions" (Hiller & Franz, 2004, p. 735). Furthermore, the possibility of visiting the homeland "virtually" through digital technologies shifts its status from that of a shared memory to an intimate part of everyday life. Different studies have shown that the use of digital communication technologies can question the inevitability of the assimilation process, of the "cultural shock", and the uniqueness of the "ethnic village" as a mediator between migrants and host country (Hiller & Franz, 2004). Moreover, digital communication practices have brought migrants "back in" as important social agents (Glick Schiller et al., 1992).

The focus on digital technologies is particularly relevant when studying second generation (or generation 1.5) migrants, in particular in countries such as Italy, where 2G migrants are children or adolescents and are often involved in the process of establishing roots (elaborating on the experience of belonging) and in mobility routes (returning periodically to their homelands and often planning further migration to other countries). Children and adolescents are in all respects deeply involved in the process of attributing meaning to their lives and in negotiating their identities through social relations (Buckingham & De Block, 2004, p. 4). They are deeply involved in the development of a hybrid identity, belonging to multiple frames "claiming the right to pertain to different contexts and identities, as well as, selecting their own dynamics of

when and how" (Buckingham & De Block, 2004, p. 7). Digital technologies are therefore particularly relevant to their lives, since they provide the tools with which to negotiate their social ties and relations with institutions (Buckingham & De Block, 2004).

Moreover, in real life they experience complex social ties. For example, they experience family as a multiple unit including: a "transnational family" involving parents and relatives living in different countries; an "immediate group" living under the same roof, but often comprising people who are not blood relatives; a "constructed family" including people from the same country who take on a role as a part of a new community in their everyday life (Buckingham & De Block, 2004).

Adolescent 2G migrants are involved in building different kinds of ties (local and transnational): new ties with people who share a common heritage and also with peers with different cultural origins living in the same countries and sharing common experiences (e.g. schools); old or lost ties constituted by expressive and affective ties with families and people who are part of their family's history.

Furthermore, these adolescents constitute an integral part of a specific "youth generation", a generation engaged in a global context where difference becomes a resource for personal achievements and where mobility is a necessary element for development and participation. Their identity is therefore also formed on the basis of this kind of belonging, alongside their "2G migrant" status (Colombo, Leonini & Rebughini, 2009).

In Italy new research questions are suggested by: the presence of new generations of migrants, belonging to the "youth generation" and sharing (at least in part) a youth culture with their Italian peers; the relevance of digital technologies in the media practices of youth.

Some Italian studies of young people's and 2G migrants' use of digital technologies (Caselli, de Cordova, Riva & Vittadini, 2009; Leonini & Rebughini, 2010) suggest the adoption of a "non-marginalizing" approach. This approach is based on the idea that – alongside studies focused on the "marginalization" or integration processes of migrants or the differences among 2G migrants belonging to diverse cultures - it is useful to emphasise the elements of continuity, connections (and also differences) between the youth culture of the receiving country and the new media use of 2G migrant adolescents. Furthermore Italian studies have investigated how the migration experience characterizing the families of 2G migrants and the socialization process shared with Italian peers affect (almost at the institutional level) new media use.

Within these parameters, this article aims to recall attention to the role that communications technologies play in: maintaining and catalyzing relational processes and connections; supporting multiple forms of familial, ethnic (Gillespie, 1995) and generational belonging (Aroldi & Colombo, 2003), and providing support and points of reference for the planning of identity performance.

2G Migrants and Digital Technologies: a Study

Hypothesis and research questions

In accordance with the theoretical frameworks, the study carried out at OssCom assumes that the relational dimension is a central hub of the migration process. The system of transnational relations into which the migrant is inserted sustains belonging, identity and cultural consumption, making these visible also to the observer (Glick Schiller et al., 1992).

Moreover, the study assumes that there is a confluence and a cross-reference between relational dynamics and the practices of communications technology. "Firstly, media technologies can be relational mediators and, secondly, the socio-relational dynamics may play a crucial role in shaping the form, function, and the same sense of cultural consumption and media usage" (Introini, 2008). From this perspective, digital media are both communicative devices for managing relationships and cultural artefacts or environments that catalyze, sustain and reproduce relational activities, and are socio-culturally oriented. Again, the access to digital resources is linked to the morphology of the social network, both in terms of "geography" and location and in terms of "hierarchy" and "relational salience". The dispersed (even if not de-territorialized) relations of 2G migrants in Italy come into close dialogue with their management strategies for digital platforms.

Within this framework, communication technologies play a major role in sustaining and growing social networks that mediate between the need to enhance inclusive dynamics with peer-groups (Vittadini, 2008) and the need to preserve forms of community and "remote" ties. At the same time, users act as real managers (Haddon, 2003), who are able to incorporate the complex configuration strategies of communicative repertoires into their everyday life in order to cope with the management of the social relations on which their identity paths depend.

In accordance with this hypothesis, the study was aimed at analyzing the use of digital technologies by 2G migrants and, in particular, the support offered by SNS and CMC to the relational dynamics that feed and sustain the migration experience. More specifically, the study analyzed the social networks in real life and the communication technology practices of young 2G migrants in Italy.

First, we investigated the morphology, distribution and density of the social relations of 2G migrants. The goal was to recognise: the value of different ties, paying particular attention to local roots or, conversely, to transnational connections; the prevalence of "integrative" dynamics with Italian peers, or the investment in ethnic networks. We considered also the relevance of family dynamics both in terms of the willingness to be integrated, or the tendency to invest in ethnic networks, and in terms of social, economic and cultural capital. Finally, we considered the relevance and the extension of the network of relationships with friends and schoolmates.

Second, we carried out a detailed analysis of the use of communication technologies by 2G migrants in order to highlight their role in supporting and enhancing social networks in real life (family, friends, boyfriends and girlfriends; locally or transnationally based) and promoting specific identity strategies.

The research questions were: what role do different kinds of ties (characterized in terms of intensity and values, intimacy, space-time contextualization) play in supporting and promoting the socialization of 2G migrants and the construction of their cultural and ethnic identity? How important are these ties in guiding access to communication technologies, their incorporation and uses?

Regarding SNS and CMC, the research questions were: how are these used to promote (often in parallel) processes and efforts to improve both social inclusion and ethnic identity? What kind of resources do they mobilize in the management of transnational ties with the country of origin and in the daily management of close-proximity relations?

Methodology

The field study was developed in two phases: a preliminary, exploratory phase was conducted in November and December 2009; a second, more "intensive" phase was conducted between February and June 2010.[1] During both phases we adopted a multi-method approach, including questionnaires and different qualitative methodologies (in-depth interviews, focus groups, shadowing).

The exploratory phase

The first phase raised the issue of how to define the research sample in accordance with the specificity of the Italian context. In fact, while the existence of the "second generation" has been attested to and investigated in other countries throughout the last century (especially in the USA), in Italy this phenomenon emerged only recently, along with the rapidly growing presence of foreign citizens on our national territory. Therefore, we decided to use the expression "second generation" in a broad sense, considering also people who arrived in Italy when they were very young and have lived in Italy, as second-generation subjects, for the most important parts of their socialization and education (Portes & Rumbaut, 2005; Zhou, 1997).

The study was conducted on a sample group of students in the third- and fourth-year classes of secondary school, sons and daughters of migrant families. The sample groups were selected from technical schools which host significant numbers of foreigners (more than 30% non-Italian students). Interviewees were also selected in relation to their digital literacy and competency in the use of interpersonal communication devices (mobile phones, instant messaging and SNS).

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[1] The first phase was developed within the framework of the research on "Immigrants and the use of new communication technologies" funded by the Institute of Communication Research A. Gemelli C. Musatti of the Provincial Authority of Milan; the second phase as part of the research conducted for Daniele Milesi's PhD thesis.

Twenty adolescents were recruited from two schools in Milan[2] (ten from each school), including 13 female and seven male teenagers aged between 16 and 18 years, from 13 different ethnic groups.[3] With regard to their residence in Italy, most of these children (11) had been in our country for nearly ten years, some (three) for more than ten years, while others (six) had been born in Italy

Different European studies (Aparicio, 2007; van Wel, Couwenbergh-Soeterboek, Couwenbergh, ter Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2006) have highlighted the continuity between local adolescents and 2G migrant adolescents, especially when referring to people attending high school. According to the studies mentioned, 2G adolescents attending high school belong to "families which have a higher social, cultural and economic capital than families of adolescents who have already entered the working world" (Colombo et al., 2009). The variables affecting the behaviour of these adolescents can be identified in the gender, economic and cultural capital of families and in the level of perceived discrimination, more than in the ethnic group (Colombo et al., 2009). Given the findings of the studies mentioned, we decided not to consider ethnic group as a variable of sampling. Furthermore this choice avoided the risk of overrating ethnicity (Saint-Blancat & Zaltron, 2010) with respect to the differences within ethnic groups and also to the individual agency of 2G adolescents and the influence of other contingencies in defining biographical paths and behaviours (Casacchia et al., 2008; Colombo et al., 2009; Ryan, 2009; Shah, 2007).

As the first step in our fieldwork, a semi-structured interview was used. The interview focused on the family experience of migration, on ethnic identity and belonging, on social networks in real life, and finally on media practices, technological predispositions and the role of communication technologies in the context of everyday life. As the second step, we used a participative form of virtual ethnography called virtual shadowing (Vittadini & Pasquali, 2013). This took place over a period of five days and was based on daily contact between researchers and respondents (via instant messaging systems, specifically MSN). Finally, as the third step we used two focus groups with ten respondents from each of the two schools.

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[2] The Istituto Tecnico Statale per le Attività Sociali "Giulio Natta" and the Istituto Tecnico Commerciale "Schiaparelli-Gramsci".
[3] The most common homelands of the interviewees' families were Ecuador (three individuals), followed by Albania, China, the Philippines, Senegal and Ukraine (each with two representatives). Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ghana, Peru, Romania and El Salvador each accounted for one interviewee.

Figure 1: Methodology overview: exploratory phase
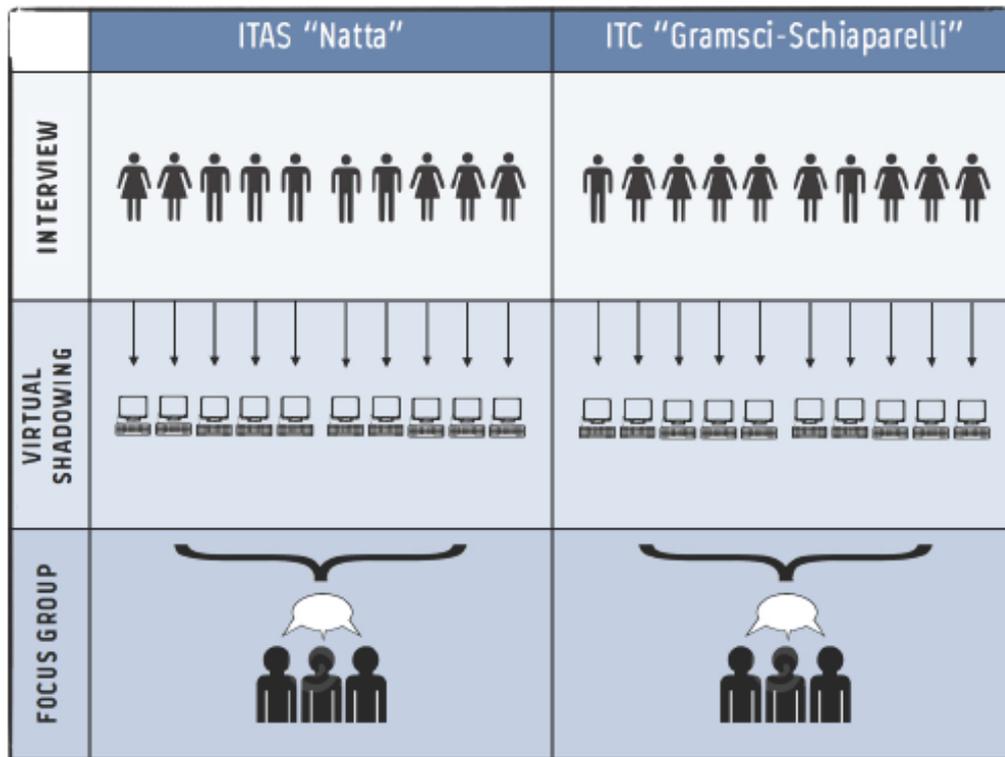
The intensive phase

The second, more intensive phase of the fieldwork established the sample. Focusing on just one school,[4] we decided to ask the entire population of students with at least one foreign parent to participate; around 160 recruitment letters were distributed. The participation rate was very low, achieving a total of only 30 willing subjects; the sample was extremely heterogeneous in terms of school classes, nationality[5] and years of residence in Italy[6]; the average age was close to 18, while the gender balance was 82 % female students.

All the students recruited and one parent of each student were given a preliminary questionnaire, intended to provide background data useful for profiling the respondents, requesting a description of their personal and family social networks and as a preparatory tool for the interview. On the basis of the data collected, eight synthetic indexes were developed in order to measure students' propensity for integration, their

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[4] The Istituto Tecnico Commerciale "Schiaparelli-Gramsci".
[5] Twenty ethnic groups from the most popular in the Milan area: Peruvians, Ecuadorians, Moldovans, Romanians, Chinese.
[6] 14 students had been in Italy "from five to nine years", nine "for at least ten years", seven claimed to have "always" been in Italy.

degree of inclusion in Italian society, degree of investment in their ethnic network, the density and meaningfulness of their family network and their peer group of friends. Finally, each student took part in an in-depth telephone interview aimed at describing her/his social networks in real life and communication technology practices.

Figure 2: Methodology overview: intensive phase
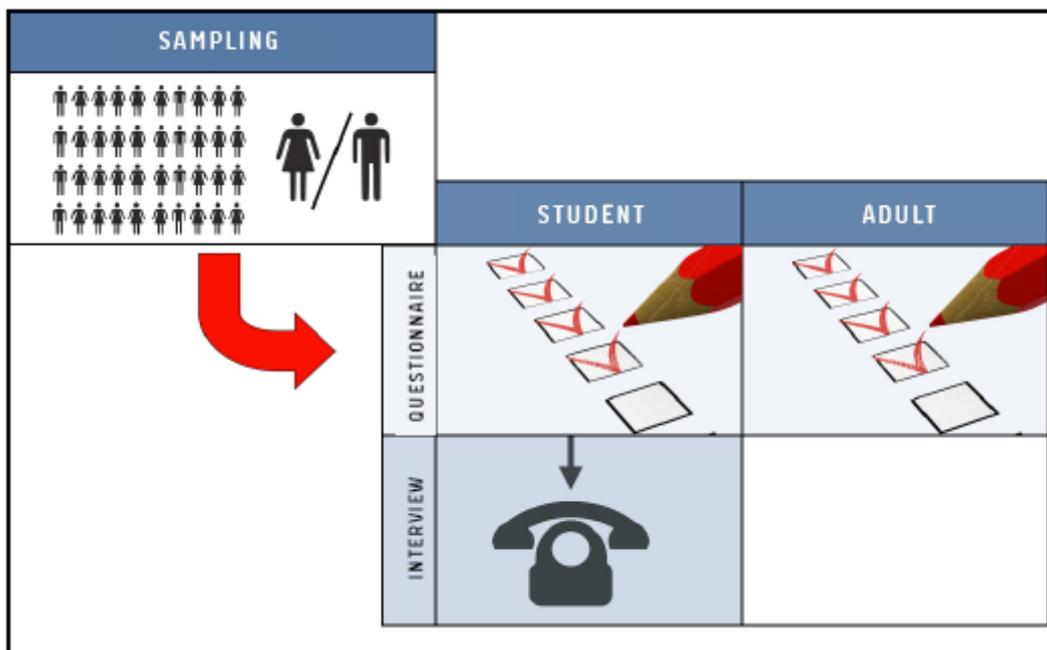
Research Results

The research results can be divided into two areas. The first area relates to the use of digital communication technologies in the management of social networks, in both real and virtual life. The second area relates to the relationship between the use of digital communication technologies and the different social networks in which 2G migrant adolescents are included (family, school-friends, friends and affective relationships).

Digital communication technologies and the management of social networks

All the adolescents interviewed used a wide repertoire of SNS and digital tools (we can define this as their 'digital repertoire') and performed different communication activities in order to talk, share contents and

manage their social networks. Thus, they tended to manage their "networked self" (Papacharissi, 2011) taking into account their multiple cultural identities and their belonging to multicultural social networks, both in real and virtual life.

Adolescents manage their social networks, both on- and offline, at different levels that can be defined as "in depth management", "maintenance management" and "management or strategy of expansion" (Giaccardi, 2010). The first level is aimed at enhancing and supporting significant relationships in everyday life; the second level is aimed at maintaining social relations with friends and relatives who live in different countries or with new friends; the last level is aimed at increasing - through SNS - the number of people with whom adolescents come into contact.

At the level of "in depth management", SNS are used to consolidate social relationships in real life. The teenagers interviewed, as well as the platform shared with Italian adolescents (Facebook), also used whichever SNS was most used in their family's homeland (especially QQ for the Chinese community, Hi5 for the Latino community, Friendster for the Filipinos, VKontakte and Odnoklassniki for boys and girls of Eastern European origin). These different platforms were used with different functions: while Facebook was devoted to maintaining relationships with Italian peers, the SNS used in the family's homeland was used to maintain and consolidate the ethnic component that contributes to the shaping of young 2G migrants' identities. These SNS were often a place in which 2G migrants managed their s Italian and ethnic social networks separately.

> "On Facebook there are school friends or, in particular, my classmates (girls)… Italians… whereas in HI5 there are my South American friends." (Ecuador, F18)
>
> "I open two windows at the same time… one on HI5 for my [Peruvian] friends and one on Facebook, for my classmates and school-friends!" (Peru, F19)

The activities of "maintenance management" are aimed at maintaining contact with people no longer or not yet immediately accessible. CMC tools are thus used firstly to maintain the weak ties with friends who still live in the family's homeland (for instance, with peers encountered during holidays spent in the homeland). In this case, SNS are used in accordance with a logic of monitoring based on "secluded observation" and with complex strategies for modulating presence and visibility. Secondly, CMC tools are used to manage the strong family ties, as well as instant messaging (IM) and VoIP (Skype) to facilitate more intimate forms of communication. In fact, the synchronicity of instant messaging systems and the visual dimension of video calls via VoIP enable a feeling of "being there" that makes conversation with family members more emotionally dense and meaningful (Vittadini, 2009; Milesi, forthcoming). This second use - depending on the context of resource constraints, accessibility, literacy and incorporation - can be focused or distributed. Even the phonecall has a festive trait and it is invested with an unprecedented gift value.

> "Usually I heard this friend on MSN… only occasionally by phone... usually I buy a phone card… every time. Just when it's her birthday… I buy the phone card to call her on my mobile phone… because one euro goes down each minute… got it? So it happens only in the most important occasions… or when something important happens… There must be some special occasion…" (Ecuador, F21)

Finally, the "maintenance management" activities are particularly salient in the stage of crossing thresholds, which is accompanied by a radical redefinition of the relational order. In this case, SNS and CMC tools are usually used to ensure continuity and maintain bonds in the presence of what we can call the "relational jumps" that occur when young 2G migrants face new relational contexts (for example, a new school or city) (Giaccardi, 2010).

On the third level, that of "expansion strategies", SNS are used to increase the number of friends, and especially to increase ethnic relations with peers who share the culture of the familys' homeland. These are often based on playful and expressive conversations, or on the celebration of ethnic identity.

> "Last time, on Facebook, I received an invitation for Chinese New Year's Eve. I received an invitation for an Asian Party… Chinese or Asian boys and girls were invited and also people who are in touch with the Asian community and at that time there was the Chinese New Year […]. Nothing special, the invitation was on Facebook… if you confirmed and gave your e-mail, you received the invitation via e-mail […] there were a lot of my friends… a lot of friends and a lot of acquaintances… Let's say that the event was quite big, including not only my friends or my company." (China, M18).

> "On this website [Nasza-Klasa], we met just on this website… because they were looking for Polish people living in Milan… so they contacted me… In particular a girl contacted me, we started chatting… and then we realized that we attend the same school… then we became friends." (Poland, F19)

Networks of social relations and the use of SNS and digital communication tools

Regarding the relationship between the use of digital communication technologies and the different social networks in which 2G migrant adolescents are included, the use of digital technologies can be described by reference to four different kinds of social networks: the family, the group of schoolmates, the networks of friends and that of intimate relationships.

The first to be considered is the "family network". By "family network" we mean, first of all, parents and siblings living in the same household, where relationships, spaces and economies of meaning are articulated in a complex ecosystem (Aroldi & Vittadini, 2010; Silverstone, 1999). This inner "family network"

is often supported, in the case of 2G migrant adolescents , by a wider family group involving, for instance, uncles and cousins (Di Nicola, Stanzani & Tronca, 2008; Donati, 2007). This "extended family network" is particularly important for migrant families because it is a constant reference point, even when it is physically dispersed (also at a transnational level), and it is often reinforced, enhancing both vertical ties (for example, uncles or grandparents) and horizontal ties (for example cousins).

In family networks with a high degree of internal cohesion and density, the most used digital communication technology is the mobile phone, especially the voice-call. Mobile phones are used as a channel for always-on connectivity (ensuring availability even when the subject is mobile) and on-the-go micro-coordination (Mascheroni, 2010). In such families, the choice of the same mobile phone operator enhances, over and above the cost-effectiveness of a price plan, the strength of ties between the members of the household.

Family networks with a high transnational dispersion (members living in different countries) face certain critical issues, including the time-lag due to geographic distance and the high costs of international calls. At the same time, phonecalls are characterized by a feeling of emotional communication that is similar to face-to-face contact with their own kin. To handle this situation, transnational families tend to differentiate sets of digital communication tools, and to broaden their "digital repertoire". While the (mobile or landline) phone still plays a leading role, at the same time the need for a more intimate form of communication is covered by synchronous communication systems, such as instant messaging and VoIP (Skype), supported in most cases, by the use of a webcam. These systems, in fact, provide a communicative interaction that simulates a real co-presence, allowing a direct and immediate conversation because it is synchronous and visual. The use of these services often requires the intervention of relatives or acquaintance who play the role of "local experts", providing the "tech set" procedures and managing the interaction. Thus, this kind of communication is possible only within a framework of cooperation within the kin network. Notwithstanding the generational digital divide and the gap in knowledge and skills in the use of computer tools between grandparents, parents and children, the role played by the younger members of the family as "local experts" reinforces family solidarity and cohesiveness:

> "We really make an appointment… My grandmother goes to my aunt and asks her to prepare everything: the computer; the internet; the webcam. My cousin prepares, she must be there because she puts everything in operation and so we can see each other." (Ecuador, F18)

Furthermore, digital communication technologies used to communicate with peers host kin communications (Milesi, forthcoming; Vittadini, 2009). Uncles, aunts (in some cases even grandparents, if digitally literate) are included in instant messaging contacts (Yahoo or MSN) or are Facebook friends.

A second network to be considered is related to school. School is, in fact, a major site of socialization where adolescents perform and experiment with different strategies for building ties. Two strategies emerged as relevant: the first, labelled as "bonding orientation" (Putnam, 2000), moves towards the ethnic community in order to foster closed and exclusive relationships on an ethnic basis. The second strategy, which can be defined as "bridging orientation" (Putnam, 2000), is aimed at the activation of a more open social process, enhancing the relationship with the group of Italian classmates and/or peers of other nationalities.

Local SNS (especially Facebook) are the preferred tools for "bridging" activities; SNS are, in fact, a space where one can explore and strategically experiment with a "controlled" interaction (Ito, 2009). Facebook thus contributes to the maintenance of social relations of "disengaged" reciprocity, or to an initial approach to classmates as a "bland" and cautious entry into the class group.

> "At present, since a week ago, I speak… I speak with everyone… everyone is speaking with me… yesterday we spoke… and then I didn't have Facebook… but now I have Facebook and I speak with everyone… my classmates… until now I didn't have it… […] I use Skype only with my friends in Moldova, because I can speak well… with Italians Facebook is easier… I have time to understand and answer and write without rushing." (Moldova, F18)

In the case of "bonding" activities, mediated interaction focuses on the SNS most used in the homeland of the family since this provides a sense of security. A similar orientation of bonding occurs in adolescents characterized by a high level of investment in the ethnic network. This investment is supported by the "constructed family" (Buckingham & de Block, 2004) and the network of friends from the same ethnic group, but outside school. Therefore, the "ethnic SNS" is enhanced as a separate and exclusive relational space of which transnational adolescents claim a membership that goes beyond the common school boundaries and embraces the far broader, external universe (both local and transnational).

> (I) - *How come you have more ties with other people than with your classmates?*
>
> "Well, perhaps because they are South Americans… I'm more familiar with them… In practice I met her on the first school day… I thought she was in my class and I thought: "I'll make friends with her"… and she – in the end – told me that she was in another class… then we met and we made friends… Then she introduced me to these other girls and boys who are South Americans, out of school… Then - ok- I didn't decide… we met and made friends…" (Ecuador, F18).

The third network to be considered is that of friends external to the school. SNS (Facebook, when shared with friends in the country of origin, or the various ethnically orientated social networks) include relationally intense contacts, but also involve weaker forms of peer relations.

> *And who comments on your Photos?*
>
> "Friends in Italy and abroad."
>
> *Also in the Philippines?*
>
> "Yes, whoever wants to comment on them… they say how I've changed…"
>
> *And do you like to upload content on Facebook?*
>
> "It's my favourite activity… photos… […] They are people who I knew when I was there and who I don't meet anymore… I don't speak with them on Skype, they are only acquaintances… but we still keep in touch." (Philippines, F22)

The most significant interactions, intimate and emotionally rich, are managed through tools such as Messenger (especially on the transnational level) and, even more, via Skype and mobile phone (engaging a narrow and exclusive network of contacts).

> "If I have to say something important I use Skype... For triviality I use Messenger... If I have to talk seriously with someone, explaining something important, I use Skype, to talk... Messenger would be out of place... I don't know why... Indeed, to hang out, or to have a chat, Messenger... [...]. It depends on the people, with someone I use Facebook or with most, Messenger... With true friends of mine, if I have to talk about important issues, or if we haven't been in touch for a while, I prefer to use Skype..." (Brazil, F18)

Furthermore, SNS support the circulation of user-generated content (UGC) and the sharing of cultural products (video, music, images) that nourish social relationships. The "culture" set up and carried by these products has very different operating ranges, which in turn can affect entire areas of cultural or subcultural micro-accumulation. QQ, for example, establishes a transnational cultural flow that brings together an important part of the Chinese community. Latin music activates forms of social recognition and catalyzes exchanges and sharing within the South American community, both on a local basis and on a transnational level.

> *And what about South American music and movies... Are you following them...?*
>
> "Sometimes... I listen to South American music... I've got a cousin of mine, who lives in Ecuador... We chat on Messenger and he tells me about the news... because here you can't listen... he tells me about new songs... and then I download them." (Ecuador, F18)

In other cases, the emerging tastes and consumption practices of more of a proper sub-culture, including musical references defined in terms of genre and area of origin, act as a cohesion factor for transnational networks (Milesi, forthcoming; Vittadini, 2009).

> *And here in Italy are you still following this punk music scene from Eastern Europe?*
>
> "Yes, yes... [...] There is the internet.... I listen to them anyway... I see things posted by my

> Ukrainian friends... Since I'm a big fan of some punk bands... I look for them... there is no need for my friends to be updated... I do it alone... stuff goes around... My friends know them too." (Ukraine, F17)

The fourth and last network to be considered concerns intimate relations with the opposite sex. Transnational adolescents can be divided, once again, into young people oriented towards the construction of strong new bonds with Italians, and young individuals who present deep ethnic ties that constitute a cultural space of social interaction. The first group is oriented toward the choice of a boy- or girl-friend as a further assumption of independence from their ethnic network, and tends to prefer Italian boys and girls. The second group tends to promote emotional ties in continuity with their ethnic and cultural universe of reference, considering as "natural" and "assumed" that they choose a boy or a girl belonging to their own ethnic network.

> *"Is your boyfriend Italian or Egyptian?*
>
> No, he's Egyptian!
>
> *You say that as if it was taken for granted…*
>
> No, because … I don't know *(laugh)*
>
> *But is it obvious that he's Egyptian, or just happened?*
>
> No, no … it's obvious!
>
> *Why? You told me "I was born in Italy"…*
>
> No, it's because I'm not 100% Italianized; I'm something like 50% and 50%, so I feel more comfortable with the Egyptian side…
>
> *What do you mean by "I feel more comfortable with the Egyptian side…"?*
>
> I don't know… since I was a kid my parents brought me up with the Egyptian mentality… Then, growing up, it obviously changed… so now I'm a half-and-half… but, I don't know, if I think of a guy, it comes naturally to me think of an Egyptian one!" (Egypt, F19)

Despite this variety of situations, there is a substantial homogeneity in the usage of digital communication tools. What is significant is the absolute centrality of phonecalls. Especially in those cases where there is no exclusive ownership of a computer and no privacy, a love affair is one of the few relationships to be managed primarily through the use of mobile phones. A mobile phone is used also when the sentimental relationship is managed at a transnational level, even if the high costs of phonecalls might suggest a greater investment in the SNS or cheaper services.

Conclusions

In conclusion, four main topics are worth discussing.

First, as already mentioned in the previous part of this article, the transmigratory experience brings tensions into the household, "stretching" and "unbalancing" it (Bonizzoni, 2009, 2010), and leaves scars even after the family is reunited (Leonini & Rebughini, 2010). The resultant "detachment" between "family" and "household" implies long-term, wide-ranging changes, which are even more evident in "transnational families".

The rift between the socio-relational dimension of the "family" and the spatial dimension of the "household" sometimes produces flexible boundaries in the family network, leading to an emphasized relational and emotional inclusion of non-family members (e.g. so-called "caregivers"). In other cases, the "stretching" of family boundaries goes beyond the space of the household, producing contrasting dynamics of exclusion in which the closest bonds and relationships (e.g. between brothers and sisters) lose strength because of a spatial distance that over time becomes more and more "experiential" and connected to cultural remoteness.

Within this framework, media technologies and CMC contribute to the redefinition of borders, enhancing links and connections, maintaining long-distance relationships and overcoming, at least in part, the constraints of "here-and-now" interaction. Digital communication technologies act as resources that help individuals to cope with the "expanding" boundaries of the family network, making these more elastic, more ready to respond to stress and expansion, longer-lasting and, if necessary, allowing them to return to their original shape (in the frequent cases of family reunification). Through the dynamics of synchronization, real-time communication tools re-enact the sense of spatial proximity and intimacy; SNS establish forms of remote monitoring and access to cultural groups that preserve the labile horizons of relationships, which are still relevant to the maintenance of a sense of continuity and consistency in the relational framework; communication via VoIP (e.g. Skype) contributes to the management of intimate interactions, enhancing the sense of proximity and the shared communication spaces via webcams.

Secondly, research outcomes confirm the complexity of the socialization trajectories and the variety of social networks activated in everyday life by our 2G respondents. Equally complex are the variables that come into play beyond the "time variable", understood as both the age when the path of migration began, and the length of the individuals' stay in the destination country. This factor is highly relevant, so much so that it is defined in the literature as a criterion for the splitting of migrants' children into "generational classes" (Rumbaut, 1994).

Some of these variables are features of social networks (their size, the values that they are given, their cultural orientation and spatial distribution), but the internal dynamics of the migratory path,

unacknowledged by the linear approach (just think how the frequent return to the country of origin often rewrites a profound relational geography), or the belonging to a consolidated extended and structured ethnic network (as in a community such as the Latino or Chinese) are equally relevant. The school context, above all, can be used to extend the boundaries of ethnicity, both as a self-reflexive space for ethnic identity and as a resource used to enhance contacts with the peer group.

All these wide-ranging processes are rooted in everyday communication practices which appear to be "natural" and spontaneous. Their role in supporting and catalyzing relational processes and links, in substantiating various forms of family, ethnic (Gillespie, 1995) and generational (Aroldi & Colombo, 2003) membership, while simultaneously providing new forms of contact, presence and participation in society (Ito, 2009), is very relevant.

Communication technologies and the digital environments used by the young children of migrants become social spaces and resources, both tactical and strategic, within which specific identity proposals are shaped and promoted. In fact, these media not only help to enhance opportunities for personal contact within networks, thereby increasing and strengthening the possibilities for sharing and the consequent dynamics; they also constitute areas of cultural and relational reflexivity, spaces that make these children's adherence to symbolic models and membership of social networks visible and tangible.

Third, "transnationalism" seems to be a suitable approach for people characterized by their simultaneous participation in both poles of the migratory movement (Vertovec, 2003) and "frequently commuting between them" (Ambrosini, 2008). In such a disseminated relational framework, digital media play a decisive role in reconfiguring the "phenomenological geography" (Moores, 2007) of the young children of foreigners in Italy.

Finally, something must be said about CMC and SNS as stages where social performances are given and reflexivity is empowered. In performing their "identity proposal" in front of their peer groups, our respondents were oriented toward strategies of *bridging* or *bonding* (Putnam, 2000) by a plurality of factors that can be related to the features of their social context: for example, the possibility of exploiting ethnic identity in socialization with some people from the same country, or the degree of open-mindedness in their group of Italian schoolmates. Within the school framework, all the provisions to support the foreign students' curricula (for example, Italian language courses and study aids) are crucial. Other features affect the "migration profile" of the child (e.g. the length of time spent in Italy, the age and school grade) and his / her socio-relational orientation (e.g. the degree of ethnic network involvement, established friendships beyond the school context, their families' social and cultural capital). The density of friendship networks is also a highly relevant factor when speaking of social capital.

Within this framework, asynchronous communication tools such as SNS allow 2G youngsters to handle their identity, simulating and representing their "social desirability": for example, the meticulous composition of their posts and comments in order to make these seem spontaneous and relaxed, could be described as "controlled casualness".

These features are crucial in the reported cases of young people who have only arrived in Italy recently: for example, asynchronous and "kept" interaction can allow these youths to deal with the initial embarrassment caused by lacking a more confident knowledge of the Italian language. SNS, therefore, supports participation in a shared space within which personal and group identities become manifest, and forms of interaction and aesthetics are normatively meaningful. In establishing and performing their "social desirability", the SNS allow those "foreigners" who are looking for inclusion (and its rules) to take a position within the social space; simulating social interactions, SNS provide a wonderful resource for familiarization with the new social context. In the same way, some children who are strongly oriented towards transnational identities, and closely linked to peer-groups in their homeland thanks to frequent journeys and visits, use SNS to maintain and enhance these ties.

Migrants' young children therefore show a particularly vivid and evident approach to the role played by communication technologies in such "transitional" situations, where certain "experiential thresholds" are associated with a redefinition of the social landscape; this is a sort of "relational jump", a moment of transition between different school grades and classes, between education and the working world, or in the move between one city and another: in all of these cases, SNS "become extraordinary tools of both bonding with the lost friends and of 'repositioning' in the bridging of new friendships and relationships, to be monitored in a strategic online and offline mix" (Giaccardi, 2010, p. 150).

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