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### **Research Articles\***

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## Digital (Dis)integration. Narratives and Management of Migration on Social Media

*Giacomo Buoncompagni\**

### **Abstract**

The most recent scientific literature explores the problem of online violence in relation to the capacity of digital technology to promote new discriminatory and intolerant behaviours (e.g. racial, ethnic, religious, gender or sexual orientation), linked to the phenomenon of hate or hate ad personam. For the purposes of the research presented here, among the episodes of online violence identified, it is considered important to dwell, in the first part, on an interesting case of analysis concerning the phenomenon of migration, starting in Italy, in relation to the role of digital media and the narrative methods used to influence public opinion through stereotypes and prejudices and the relative levels of technological risk. In the second part of the paper we will try to go beyond the online narrative of migration in order to understand the risks and the usefulness of the web in the management of the migration phenomenon, investigating online good practices. Through a detailed and up-to-date analysis of the scientific literature on the topic we will try to understand how, on the one hand, the digital world has changed and influenced the perception of migration processes with a focus on Italy, and on the other hand, how the internet and social media have helped in recent years both associations, NGOs and institutions in controlling migration flows, thus limiting cases of exploitation and irregular migration routes. The research questions at the basis of the proposed reflection will be: is the web an intercultural place, supporting migration? are social media only spaces for hatred and violence, as in the Italian case, or do we also find positive examples in the relationship between the web and immigration?

**Keywords:** *cultural integration, risk, perceptions, migration, digital media*

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## Introduction

According to the OSCE Report (2017), the crimes generated by hatred have increased in recent years and have mainly concerned racism and xenophobia.

Emerging from recent research (SWG 2017, Vox 2018) and from the last Report of the Charter Association of Rome (2017), the media narrative in Italy on this theme appears still rather fragmented, violent, confused and intolerant. As highlighted, hate speech does not directly concern the traditional media system, which does not 'process' hate speech. In most cases, we tend to prevent them from becoming vehicles. Rather, traditional media would function as a filter. From these considerations, we can see how hatred would feed on the internet, which is not a cause of the type of language from the large media companies, but a cause of misinformation that has become a worrying informative phenomenon.

This is born and fed by the fact that anyone can access online environments by creating, modifying and using space only for the news and opinions that exist between adverse people, fuelling anger and discomfort, mixing news, political vision and social unease. The result is the creation of a new world view, which is completely re-constructed according to one's own convictions and cultural background: a reality far from the 'real reality', a very personal scenario that feeds on emotions, a one-way communication built not to negotiate, but to confirm one's convictions.

The Cox report (2017) highlighted that the discourse of racist and xenophobic hatred is particularly evident in social channels. This situation seems more evident in the context of the migration discourse: they contribute to forming or deforming the culture of inclusion towards the foreigner, influencing the mental processes of representation of the migratory phenomenon. The critical situation also seems encouraged by the huge volume of posts, comments and articles produced by users related to hate speech: the immigrant often becomes the target on whom to vent anger and frustration.

Further confirmation is available in the Vox 2018 report which, through a mapping of discriminatory tweets, highlights how online hatred towards migrants has almost doubled in just under a year, going from 38,000 tweets recorded in 2016 to 73,390 detected in the following ten months.

These factors, connected to the difficulty of managing a 'disintermediate' virtual space, increase the technological risk of digital media becoming a vehicle for inappropriate and harmful messages, acting as amplifiers of violence.

How does social media influence these narrative dynamics on migration phenomenon with verbal violence and hate speech? What are the different levels of risk on social media? What educational actions are possible to

deal with technological risk? Is the web an intercultural place, supporting migration? This paper explores these crucial questions.

Although there is a large volume of literature on the influence of social media on public opinion attitudes towards migration (Anderson 1983; Altheide 2002; Komito 2011), there are almost no studies on how to direct the risks of technology to a more positive use in virtual communities (Boorstin 1978; Rheingold 1993). This study seeks to inspire a debate on this gap, by investigating the role of social media as ‘characterizing technologies’ (Innis 1950), capable of determining social dynamics and discursive narratives that influence the perception of migration. In particular, the analysis takes as a reference the specific Italian context, to understand whether the ‘immigration’ discourse in the digital public sphere consists exclusively of contents aimed at building a distorted image focused on fear and the clash with ‘the different’, or whether in the last few years, more positive content and openness to the ‘other’ have emerged. The original aspect of this reading lies in assessing possible risks and consequences from the improper use of digital technology, to identify corrective and educational actions, good practises to be promoted in social media by NGOs, associations and institutions. The social media, in fact, can build bad or good narratives of Other, but, at the same time, creating hate speech or tools and spaces to support the migrants in the new host state.

## 1. Method and Online Research

In the first part, in particular, this analysis attempts to answer the aforesaid questions with a qualitative and quantitative approach, exploring whether the public discourse in Italy on the net about immigration consists exclusively of content aimed at building a distorted image focused on fear, or whether in recent years, there have been signs of ‘detoxification’ and openings to the ‘Other’. The analysis timeframe covers the period November 2017 to July 2018. The research work is structured in social networks, within the digital platforms Facebook and Twitter, to be more precise.

The choice concerned these two platforms not only because both, particularly in 2018, were included in the top 20 in Italy and globally, but also for the variety of active public that they host, and for their specific characteristics. In fact, while Facebook is still characterized mainly by its playful and socializing dimension, Twitter is configured as the ‘most political social media’, a space that mainly hosts political-institutional discussions

and users registered in political parties, as well as professionals of the world of journalism and institutions<sup>1</sup>.

Analysing both the digital environments means gaining a better understanding of their ambience, in which individuals are able to create social networks, or rather, a space of common living (Boccia Artieri 2012) within the social and digital platforms, where it is possible to observe those cultural forms of connection and participation. To find a large amount of data in a short time, a web crawling program (also called spider) was designed and used, which analyses the contents from a network in a methodical and automatic way, and from a qualitative and quantitative perspective. The designed crawler looked for the word 'immigration' and the related content made available to it from the two platforms; later on, we went on to collect and analyse the various textual contents obtained from pages, posts and tweets.

As a first step, the contents of the theme 'immigration' were found in the two platforms (145,545 for Facebook and 27,700 for Twitter). Subsequently, a further selection was made restricting it to only those keywords considered most significant on the topic sought (subsequently divided into positive and negative) within the text of each article and more present in the literature, that analyses the language of printing in the narration of the migration phenomenon. Specifically, for this research, four macro areas have been identified within the category 'positive words' and 'negative words', as can be seen in Table 1.

For the category 'positive words', the four macro areas identified refer to the following topics:

- inter-culturality: the concepts of education, training, culture of encounter and inter-cultural sensitivity;
- welcome: accepted here as hospitality, openness to the Other, inter-cultural sensitivity;
- integration: being a member of a community, launching a process of cooperation and inter-cultural dialogue between foreign citizens and residents;
- citizenship: rights and duties of a citizen.

The four macro areas identified for the 'negative words' category were:

- crime: with reference to the concepts of 'terrorist', 'thief', 'rapist', etc., often depicted in literature as an immigrant;

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<sup>1</sup> This research work was structured in social networks such as Facebook and Twitter and, having access to the API (application program interface), the page did not have to be analysed, but the text of the posts or tweets, as well as other useful data, were provided directly by the same social networks.

- hatred (verbal): a particular type of communication that uses words, expressions or having as its ultimate goal the expression and spread of hatred and intolerance, as well as the incitement of prejudice and fear towards a subject or a group of people united by ethnicity, sexual or religious orientation (e.g.: ‘dirty immigrant’, ‘drive out immigrants’ etc.).
- fear: in this case, we mean fear as a synonym for ‘insecurity’, ‘closure’, ‘distrust’ in the other, in the media and in institutions;
- invasion: understood as the absence of borders and social and juridical norms that regulate the migratory flow, to the high level of perception of insecurity and to the incapacity of political and military forces in managing entrance into the Italian State.

Increasing the effectiveness of the analysis, all the contents were filtered - that is, those that are passive results in search of keywords; the feedback obtained was 395 classified for Facebook and 460 on Twitter. Each type of content was then subdivided as a positive content (green colour), in the case of only positive, and negative (red) keywords, for only negative matches. The period analysed (the end of 2017 and the first half of 2018) is rather significant, if we want to understand how digital environments have hosted and amplified complex social issues such as immigration, and how these were then narrated and perceived by the connected public (Buoncompagni, D’Ambrosi 2020).

In the last part of the paper, paragraph 3, we will try to go beyond the risks of the web and understand, through a more theoretical look, if the internet has hosted positive practices, solidarity and inclusive narratives towards the migration issue. In this case, the study of national and international literature on the topic was fundamental. We will try to analyze the internet and social media have helped in recent years both associations, NGOs and institutions in controlling migration flows, thus limiting cases of exploitation and irregular migration routes. The research questions, at the basis of the proposed reflection will be: is the web an intercultural place, supporting migration? are social media only spaces for hatred and violence, as in the Italian case, or do we also find positive examples in the relationship between the web and immigration?

*Fig.1 The four macro areas divided by ‘positive and negative words’*

Positive	Negative
Inter-culturality	crime
hospitality	hate
integration	fear
citizenship	invasion

## 2. Ethnic Violence on Facebook and Twitter. An Italian Case Study Example

The presence of immigration in social media traces a path, already clearly visible in the literature on the subject and in the background analysis described here, which moves with different modalities on two diametrically opposite tracks: pity and fear, understanding and tension. These four elements can be traced back to some social and political events that have affected Italy since the beginning of 2018: the landings that occurred on the coasts of southern Italy, the political elections with the birth of the Conte Government, Luca Traini's racist raid in Macerata, and the strong daily attention paid by the mainstream media to the subject.

Since the early months of 2018, the shipwrecks in the Mediterranean Sea have made news and of particular interest were the cases of the ship 'Aquarius', which for days was filmed in the Mare Nostrum, around the Italian coasts, and subsequently the 'Diciotti case'. Both events were followed in real time by the media and became the subject of a permanent election campaign where all political actors, through online channels, commented and 'personalised' the story by building their own propaganda message. In this way, a climate of resentment was generated and amplified on the Net and in the social networks, where each user communicated his/her feelings.

The situation quickly deteriorated when, a month before the political elections, the raid by Luca Traini in Macerata broke out in the public debate and in the electoral campaign, where the racist and far-right matrix of crime immediately emerged. In fact, the last political elections in Italy on March 4, 2018 clearly show how politics uses social networks to build and feed propaganda. In the 'Barometer of hatred' project, a monitoring conducted during the last electoral campaign in Italy on the use of offensive, discriminatory and racist discourses, Amnesty International pointed out that there have been many political declarations (91%) based on hatred, originating especially from centre-right parties such as Forza Italia (18%), Fratelli d'Italia (27%) and Lega (50%). It is important to remember the communication campaign promoted in the two digital platforms against posts and tweets by the Italian Interior Minister, Matteo Salvini, linked to the viral hashtag #chiudiamoporti, which was launched to prevent the 'Aquarius' ship that hosted 600 migrants on board, from landing on the Italian coast. This strong instability has reverberated in the Italian press and in particular, in the digital environments of Facebook and Twitter.

By analysing the contents in the two platforms, by searching by keywords, it was possible to notice how 'immigration' was understood as 'invasion' and that deviant and criminal behaviour was attributable to it; therefore,

the political theme of security is part of the common narrative framework of the discourse on immigration on the net. These aspects are accompanied by a set of stereotyped language usages, with high levels of verbal violence and explicitly racist expressions that tend to depersonalise the foreigner and to generalize complex situations from the social and geopolitical point of view (immigrants such as terrorists, drug dealers, rapists, criminalisation of NGOs, criminal agreements between Italy and Libya). Another interesting element that emerges from the analysis, especially in Twitter, is that of 'fear' combined with the attempt to 'justify' violence.

The high level of insecurity, and the perception of an increase in criminality that sees immigrants as perpetrators in the first place, have generated a growing attempt to justify the use of violent and racist expressions towards foreigners as a gesture of exasperation with an uncontrollable, highly explosive social situation, created by the migratory flow in Italy (Buoncompagni, D'Ambrosi 2020). The large number of words like 'fear' and 'invasion' that emerged in the analysis indicates how the attitude of closure, the difficulty in establishing a dialogue with the Other, as well as the choice to communicate aggressively, can initially be interpreted as 'defensive reactions' by many users looking for confirmation of their preconceived notions.

Despite the low response in quantitative and qualitative terms, it is, however, possible to underline how the communicative spaces analysed reveal cases to be considered scientifically significant: the signal, for example, of a lower level of intolerance and violence in terms of narration on the subject of immigration, compared to what is highlighted in the literature. In particular, we note a greater level of 'tolerance and openness to the other' on the Facebook platform as, in addition to the presence of posts with a greater number of positive terms (276 against 119 negative ones), there are pages containing events, in-depth studies, online training courses and associations that aim to deepen and enable a better understanding of the migration phenomenon in Italy.

In Twitter, however, the use of a violent and stereotyped language still prevails (397 against 63 positive expressions); so its use, which is mainly of a political-propagandistic nature, probably feeds the verbal conflict.

The Facebook environment shows spaces (pages, events, articles, posts, online listening desks) that literally give 'voice to migrants' or that act as virtual training or awareness-raising services on the subject.

Twitter, on the other hand, shows a 'worrying' level of user saturation, mainly political professionals and political-electoral entertainment people, who build 'one-way' narratives without showing openness to others.

The result is an end-to-end communication used to impose one's thoughts and thus generate conflicts.

Even the Italian newspaper 'Il Sole 24ore' confirms that in 2018, Twitter was reported as being the 'most political social network': Twitter creates a particular type of permanent storytelling, in which everyone is a storyteller, a preacher of himself. In this symbolic space, the communities gather and divide in a fluid and uncontrolled way, and each of them in the constant discussion creates his or her code, language and dialogue.

*Fig. 2 - Presence of positive/negative content on Facebook and Twitter*

	Facebook	Twitter
<i>Positive</i>	276	63
<i>Negative</i>	119	397
<i>Classified</i>	395	460

This situation seems to be intensified when the emphases of certain media representations act as a sounding board in adhering to stereotypes and prejudices, determining 'polarisation' and prolonged discussions on the same subject. The polarisation seems to be dictated by the resonance that some issues have in the national and international media; while in traditional media, there is a decline in alarmist tones, in social media, the language often becomes vituperative. The level of verbal violence changes, therefore, is based on the communicative space used; so both the type of public and the nature of the social network influence the outcome of the communication itself.

In particular, a 'differentiated' vision of racism (Cox 2017) emerges in relation to the narrative on the migration phenomenon: the difference does not represent an opportunity for comparison, but rather an impediment to living with and tolerating the other.

This vision is unleashed, above all, with forms of incitement to hatred and verbal aggression, in which technology becomes the privileged channel of expression. By supporting the concept of media as 'languages' (and not just tools for transmitting content), it is impossible not to consider the idea, supported by the sociologist Harold Innis, concerning the fact that every form of communication has a bias (understood both as influence and as prejudice). The term bias, in the sense of 'deforming influence', indicates how the media (even the digital ones) heavily condition the existence of a civilisation by

controlling the 'time' of communication (reinforcing memory and collective consciousness) and acting on 'space' (transmission to information distance). The bias considered instead to be 'prejudice', is an even more complex concept. The media determines the characteristics of a civilisation, by conditioning the thought processes that have developed over time; the bias of the media therefore gives rise to the difficulty of understanding other cultures, especially when subjects, emotions and different sensitivities co-exist within a single informational environment, in a constant condition of inter-connection. Nevertheless, the analysis highlights the possibility of constructive use of social spaces, capable of bringing out places and communities for constructive discussion and comparison on the theme of migration. The search for keywords on the Facebook pages has found the presence (even if rather limited) of 'positive' contents (immigration desks, events, training courses, pro-immigration pages, associations, etc.). The presence, even if minimal, of positive feelings, helps to perceive the social injustices and the portrait of the victim, in a dimension that is no longer virtual, but real. Confirmation also comes from the first Community Standards Enforcement Preliminary Report, which summarises all the actions that violate the standards of the Facebook community. From the reported data, it emerged that between January and March 2018, more than 600 million items of fake and pornographic contents have been removed and 3.4 million items of graphic content were considered violent<sup>2</sup>.

Specifically regarding hate speech, 2.5 million items of content were removed. It is possible to state how the 'sensitivity' and the attention of the public on the subject of immigration in Italy, together with the technical-juridical interventions by the managers of the various online platforms, are certainly two valid initial tools to make room for 'positivity' and to develop greater awareness and critical thinking.

This means that despite the high risk, in techno-informative terms, the virtual environment giving voice to a communication capable of bringing out places and communities for discussion and comparison on the theme of migration, cannot be ruled out.

This happens when the media narrative operated by the web and the tools offered by the new media enhance 'inter-cultural sensitivity' (Bennet 2015), with an educational and formative approach against violence and with a positive impact on the community.

In this way, the same online communication against all forms of discrimination and violence becomes a counter-narrative that, from a post or a tweet, can grow, involve and create participatory forms of dissent.

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<sup>2</sup> Link: <https://transparency.facebook.com/community-standards-enforcement>.

This counter-narrative exploits the technique of 'positive virality', the transparency offered by the new media, and carries a sort of social sanction that weighs on those who commit racist acts.

This different approach to narration pays more attention to solutions rather than to the problems described in the facts and in the stories told. The idea of communication/information stems from the need to promote professional practices with the aim of reporting information and narrating stories in a 'constructive' way: finding solutions to reported problems, raising awareness and involving readers.

The objective is to investigate and to furnish credible answers to various social problems, highlighting the way people can develop, and giving particular importance to how and why (Brutera and Springhetti 2018).

However, the virtual communities that positively describe the migration phenomenon resist for a short time, or rather, have peaks of concentration determined by particular political and social events (such as the case of the *Aquarius* ship). A significant cultural effort is needed by developing on the Web the empowerment of new subjects and groups and political and cultural innovation (D'Ambrosi and Polci 2017), or by seeking the digital inclusion of already politically and civilly active citizens (Livingstone and Helsper 2007). Moreover, the ability to understand and interact with these tools through appropriate languages, to analyse information as well as the ability to search and share ideas, requires investment in training courses aimed at a greater awareness of the opportunities and risks of digital media. Recently, Commission has adopted a Code of Conduct against online hate speech: social media such as Facebook, Twitter and the other social network have a collective responsibility in promoting freedom of expression throughout the virtual world. Along with this aspect, it is necessary to identify effective tools and training paths for the use of social networks, connected to the ability to interact with and relate to other subjects in a constructive and responsible way. It is a question of using technology aimed at a 'transmedia culture' (Jenkins 2007), in which the integrated use of the media is crucial at a strategic, organisational and regulatory level in promoting a common mood, for actions of raising awareness and contrasting violence. In this way, for example, the strongly dramatic tone of online social campaigns could leave room for a positive approach, with a key role for testimonies and advocacy. The platforms could provide an interesting perspective to work on, especially due to the greater involvement they can offer in relation to users (D'Ambrosi et al. 2018; Buoncompagni 2021).

It should also be added that the information overload and the meeting of different cultures/publics in individual spaces with diversified infrastructures,

have made it more difficult to understand phenomena which, in order to be understood, need 'sensitivity' and 'openness' to diversity.

### **3. Is the Web an Intercultural Space? Risk and Good Practices Online for Immigrants**

After analysing this first scenario taking Italy, as a case study example in the representation of immigration in the social media, the research question at the basis of the second proposed reflection will be: is the web an intercultural place, supporting migration? are social media only spaces for hatred and violence, as in the Italian case, or do we also find positive examples in the relationship between the web and immigration? Let's see now what are the risks for migrants in social media and if and how the Internet has so far supported the good practices implemented by institutions and associations in favour of the migration phenomenon.

The evolution of the web is, today more than ever, the main tool of interaction that primarily facilitates communication between geographically dispersed immigrant communities in every part of the globe. Previously, different media such as a letter, for example, allowed an asynchronous communication between immigrants and their motherland and had a dual function: to convey a message and symbolically represent an affective bond that had existed for some time.

Smartphones and social networks, with instant messaging and online video calling functions, build real-time communication bridges, personal and professional, with any type of recipient; it is for these reasons that for immigrants and asylum seekers who try to enter Europe today, not only the traditional infrastructures (railways, air ports, stations ...), but also the electronic-digital one (tablets, apps, sites and platforms) online ..) are important.

This ICT revolution has facilitated human mobility processes and the possibility for individuals to always stay in touch, only apparently reducing the costs and risks of migration (Cusimano, Mercatanti 2017): in general terms, in fact, the new forms of communication have not only produced positive social effects, but have also become instruments of market of violence, intended as a violation of social and legal norms.

Technological changes (information overload, lack of space and time boundaries, high levels of active participation of the Net users) have been so rapid that in the years immediately following the explosion of the Internet, the authorities are no longer able to keep up, as the old crime patterns were

no longer the same and the ineffective security policy strategies, especially if applied to the online scenario (Douglas *et al.* 2006).

The new communication and information platforms are tools that facilitate the migration experience starting from the organization of the trip, but sometimes they also constitute a danger because, for example, the digital traces left can be used by human traffickers to threaten and claim services (Shelley 2014; Koslowska 2016).

Inspired by the literature on the subject (Achotegui 2005; Dekker, Engbersen 2012; Cheesman 2016; Connor 2017), we tried now to analyze in more detail the relationship between the migratory network and the use of specific social media by identifying four dimensions believed to always be present, sometimes overlapping, in the different phases of the migration process: the first three concern activation, reactivation and maintenance of share capital, the fourth, the information infrastructure of the new media that allow the exchange of information in time real.

The multifunctionality of new technologies allows migrants to consider new routes, evaluate the costs and opportunities of their project, understand how to manage and receive money better, as well as being able to consider both the possibility of crisis and emergency situations, as well as contact with human traffickers, both to receive information and services that the host State offers to new arrivals.

Specifically, the first dimension concerns the maintenance of the personal network.

The Skype instant messaging platform, for example, created in 2003 in Estonia, was the first fundamental medium for synchronous, digital and real communication, as well as Whats App in the following years, as free and simple services in the fundamental use for maintaining constant relationships with relatives and friends: forms of communication of this type fall within the concept of Connettography (Khanna 2016), a neologism that indicates the geopolitical weight of factors such as ICT that cross state borders.

Within the second dimension, the possibility / ability of immigrants to resume and strengthen their contacts emerges both in the new country and in their territory of origin.

In this case, the most used medium is Facebook, a social network service created in 2004, as through a 'special algorithm' it favors the creation of chain contacts highlighting on the bulletin board users names of people who are friends of friends, considering some common elements such as geographic location, nationality, preferences of the connected user ( Achotegui, 2005; Buoncompagni, 2021); the activation of the personal network, on the other hand, concerns the coming into contact with subjects known or not in the host country.

Also in this case we find the same social network for the presence of virtual groups (or communities) united by the commitment to collect stories and experiences of immigrants living in a certain place, taking advantage of the public and transparent dimension of the digital communication space; it is a form of socialization, inspired by the principles of solidarity, comparable to the traditional meeting places where the new arrivals went for the first information on the host country.

The fourth and final dimension concerns the possibility of accessing a free, open source information space from which to draw news, personal contacts, border controls, services or social services offered by the State of destination.

Regardless of the route, from the country of origin and destination, those who decide to migrate risk encountering the racket of human traffickers who, in most cases, decide the times, costs and methods of a very often improvised journey.

Recent Europol data (2016) show how 90% of immigrants arriving in Europe rely on organized crime for logistics and travel that generally takes place by land with regular public or private transport, buses, trains, trucks or by sea (for e.g. an 8-10 meter dinghy where 30 to 40 people are boarded); It is also estimated that there are around 250 illegal hotspots on migration routes to the European Union for the collection and disposal of migrants.

The traffickers network covers over one hundred countries: in 2015 the turnover in the trafficking of immigrants was 6 billion dollars and the average per capita cost of a clandestine journey from Africa or Asia to the Old Continent fluctuates between 3 thousand and 10 thousand dollars, the payment methods used are cash (52%), *hawala* (20%), *money transfer* (2%), exploitation of immigrant labor (0.2%).

The United Nations (2000) defines trafficking in persons as an organized criminal activity, which takes place beyond national borders and which consists in the recruitment, transportation, transfer or reception of people, through the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, receiving payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation or the prostitution of others in forms such as sexual, forced labor or slavery including the removal and sale of organs.

The *traffickers* run this profitable business, making use today of the latest technologies available in order to conceal their criminal activities; the success of the Network therefore provided not only quick access to information for our world, but suggested faster and more efficient ways of making organized crime work; according to the FBI, in 84.3% of cases, traffickers use the Internet for the trafficking of migrants and sexual exploitation, advertising victims to customers on real platforms ( Lambruschi, 2019).

Since 2015, organized crime has made extensive use of false identity documents, allowing many illegal immigrants to present themselves as fake asylum seekers.

One of the focal points of this *hub* of international counterfeiters, was the band formed online through Facebook (obscured today), with over 120,000 subscribers and the name *The Traveller's Platform* : within the page were provided guidance on routes to take, news of 'last hour on departures and, above all, they put human traffickers and potential customers in contact ( Europol, 2016).

Once the terms of the operation were agreed, in a few weeks any person of Albanian or Kosovar origin (at the risk of rejected by the EU because not a victim of wars or from conflict countries) could try to enter Europe as an asylum seeker and be welcomed as a refugee *with* a Syrian passport in hand.

According to Europol (2016), from a geographical point of view, the trafficking routes of human beings coincide with those that allow the transport of drugs, weapons and any other illegal product, and criminal gangs operate within this space. which cooperate by providing services and logistical bases as real 'polycriminal geo-political' actors.

Like any business, that of illegality also follows the laws of the market.

In recent years the demand on the part of immigrants seeking benefits and services to get to Europe has increased and the crime offer was not long in coming; between 2014 and 2015, in fact, the percentage of counterfeit suspects increased from 3% to 18% and the documents mainly requested for immigrants were not passports or identity cards, but the breeder documents (birth certificates, marriage certificates..) useful for fraudulently obtaining refugee status for long-term entry and stay visas (Connor 2017).

To underline how times and rates, as well as the payment methods, imposed by traffickers, constantly change according to the routes to illegally reach the EU; in recent years the Balkan route and that of the central Mediterranean have been the most debated and each time the *modus operandi* adopted has been different.

Faced with this scenario, however, it is necessary to highlight how technology is also a medium of salvation and a strategic tool applicable to intercultural and emergency policies by the European institutions and by all communities.

In a survey conducted by the New York Times (Brunwasser 2015) it was revealed how digital tools (maps, itineraries and useful tips via social networks) have allowed thousands of exiles marching from the Balkans to Europe to become autonomous from traffickers and able to provide the right *GPS* coordinates of the safest and least controlled routes by the border police

even to their companions traveling to the same or different destinations, by storing the maps on their smartphones .

Currently, information technologies also allow natives to play a role in the migratory network.

An important case concerns the *I sea* application, born from the collaboration between the NGO *MOAS* and the *Gray for Food company* ( Rogers, 2016 ) : after downloading the app on a smartphone, the application captures satellite images of the waters of the Sea Nostrum which divides them into thousands of small portions, each of which is assigned to users available to monitor it to identify any boats of immigrants in difficulty.

If the check provides a positive result through a click, it is possible to alert the rescue authorities who are aware in real time of the position of the boat in the sea; the main purpose of the application is the creation of a large *database* capable of identifying sea routes with a significant presence of traffickers to get to the coasts of the Old Continent.

There are further examples of ‘digital good practices’ that are capable of fighting cybercrime and illegal immigration and which are at the disposal of refugees.

The Mikkelsen brothers founded *Refugee United* ( RefUnite ) in 2008, a digital platform in 15 languages that provides users with free technological tools to unite what conflicts divide: their family.

Furthermore, considering that 50% of the world’s population does not have access to the Internet and almost one billion are illiterate (digitally speaking and often also of their own language), RefUnite, in collaboration with Facebook, has created a network of agreements with local radio and operators that allow the diffusion of vocal messages of refugees looking for relatives and friends in remote rural villages or in large refugee camps.

*Welcome Refugees*, on the other hand, is a special *Airbnb*, dedicated to asylum seekers in Germany; by following the instructions for registration, it is possible to indicate within the portal one’s availability to host a refugee at one’s home (Mente, 2017) .

Similar hospitality services are present in the EU States, such as France (where we find *Calm-like at home*) and *Refugee Hero*, in Holland, a recently activated service that involves involvement and support also by local churches and mosques.

From a more institutional point of view, it is important to remember how the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has experimented with various projects that involve the application of new technologies in the management and reception of humanitarian immigrants.

With the digital *ProGres database*, however, created at the end of the nineties during the Kosovo crisis and updated in the last four years, detailed

information (names, surnames, age, health problems .. ) is being collected on people who have applied for international protection (UNHCR, 2018) .

*Proges* is used as a tool to verify the real identity of refugees by crossing the information collected in many UNHCR fields with biometric data, iris scans, fingerprints, thus avoiding giving help to 'false refugees'.

In order to combat trafficking and violence, various telecommunication companies such as *British Telecom, Microsoft and Nokia* have worked, since 2018, on the *Tech Against Trafficking* project with the aim of initially mapping all *hi-tech* initiatives to combat modern forms of slavery.

Afterwards, once the data has been processed, a three-year strategy will be built and applied that will support the most effective projects (for example, the development of *clouds* and applications to communicate victims, emergency numbers operators and the police ).

All opportunities and strategies of 'detoxification' of the web from new forms of deviance and violence, many still in the testing phase, demonstrate how a strategic and conscious use of new technologies can contribute to creating a strong and positive network of action.

## Conclusion

Two scenarios were therefore presented. The first, taking an Italian case as reference, concerns the high levels of online violence in the public representation and perception of migrants, especially in Twitter. The second scenario shows, in small doses, how NGOs and institutions try to go beyond these representations to use the power of social and digital media to support the migration phenomenon and reduce the risk of migrants falling into the hands of (cyber)crime. This seems possible with the help of media interconnection and transparency.

Migrants move within a public and interconnected space that is re-defined precisely by the new technologies that represent their economic and social condition and attribute meaning to their mobility, create new conditions for forms of identity experimentation. These favor the experimentation of new forms of media-action and intercultural sensitivity between migrant and host society, between social and virtual spaces and lay the foundations for trying to identify and define a possible transnational-digital public sphere, in which fruition and media contents define a new communication environment where it is possible to draw on specific identity resources by creating new forms of narration of diversity and otherness, comparison and exchange with the Other, as an opportunity for learning and intercultural encounter. Even the institutions, within this new global scenario find themselves rethinking new

strategies in terms of social and communication policies, trying to counter the great problem of organized crime now also present online.

The human traffickers are actively using both surface network and the shadowy network to manage their crimes in the sale of and in the recruitment of victims. There is still much work to be done to understand and delete this new crime.

This work requires further understanding of the situation, development of technology, training of the people involved and governmental cooperation at a global level.

Recognition of the Other is therefore possible only through a critical attitude towards the representation of the latter, conveyed by the media, by the social and intercultural policy strategies offered by the European institutions and, no less importantly, by the level of security in physical and virtual spaces; all this represents a question of 'care' (awareness), of hospitality and a search for the meaning and social meaning of modern information and communication, integration and being in community, concepts completely reformulated by the new media.

The multicultural-interconnected space is a reality that coincides with the space of global communication, but also of non-communication: it is in fact a fragmented, polarized, dispersive, insecure place, where reality very often shows itself in the concreteness of its contradictions.

The irresponsible and superficial use of electronic and digital media has led over time to a distorted and spectacularized representation of good and justice, strengthened by the presence of deviant phenomena and violent behavior in our society, fueled by lack of education, self-control, difficulties in building empathic relationships, insecurity, low self-esteem and information overload.

To effectively deal with crime and insecurity, caused by the emergence of social phenomena that are difficult to govern (such as immigration), communities need to be consulted and more involved in the problems they face every day. .

A task that we could all try to attribute to ourselves could, first of all, be to restore order and clarity in our communication, taking greater 'care' (Couldry, 2015), ie. developing the ability to predict the consequences of what we say and post on social networks every day, while cultivating reading skills and critical analysis in the face of what the media offer us, leaving less space for emotions in favor of a more reflective and open attitude. Another point to consider is the detachment, which is still too evident, and a level of trust and collaboration that is limited between law enforcement agencies, institutions and citizens.

In the interconnected world, involving the increasingly multicultural population represents a complex and still open challenge in communicative and institutional terms; this open attitude should lead to greater trust in the political and judicial system through forms and channels of public communication.

Police forces, for example, have a fundamental role in communicating with local communities to prevent and control crime, guarantee social order and constant control ; in this regard, the role of social media and communication technologies could strengthen and support this task.

In most cases, law enforcement agencies have joined the virtual dialogue by entering the hyper-connected world, making the results achieved and the investigative action program implemented against the various forms of crime public more transparent.

The public communication of the police forces now addresses, through the language of the web, the user directly, keeping him updated and making him a participant, but always respecting the traditional procedures adopted in cases of crisis and emergency, through the traditional media channels, such as organizing press releases and conferences and by interacting with journalists and institutions.

The interaction between the police and the public, within social networks, is useful not only to keep the connected user updated, but also to be able to evaluate information and multimedia material that could prove useful during the investigation: photos, videos, posts o suspicious tweets, fake profiles; the user can use new technologies to report deviant or criminal behavior in real time.

In reality, the involvement of the community has become an essential component for all anti-crime units in order to create a real social and investigative network that directly involves Municipalities, Regions, schools, social services, public and private sectors.

Media professionals can also contribute with an updated and less spectacularized narrative, by checking the sources and official social pages of institutions and law enforcement agencies, educating the public on crime prevention strategies and how to recognize risk factors.

However, the media can negatively influence human behavior with a major impact on the perception of insecurity.

The spectacularization and exaltation of violent words/actions, often attributed to immigrants, gives little space to the story of the victims, but, at the same time, some digital spaces are emerging in which to talk about cooperation, diversity and interculturality, without conflicts, it is now possible.

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