RESEARCH ARTICLE

Institutional Flows of Communication for Young People on Instagram and the Use of Visual Images

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ABSTRACT: Public communication in digital space is entering a phase of profound change due to the redefinition of the forms of production, dissemination and use of content in institutional networks. This article contributes to research carried out on public communication news flows of SNSs, presenting an analysis focusing on the visual content posted on institutional information channels dedicated to young people and managed by youth policy actors. The content of photos was analyzed in relation to 6 categories of public communication topics, 3 categories of communication aims, 6 categories of visual elements and 10 thematic areas. The empirical basis consists of 702 images taken from 15 accounts of Italian and European youth policy Instagram channels. The results show the main features of institutional flows on Instagram and a comparison with what has emerged from previous research projects relating to Facebook and Twitter. The findings focus on institutional topics and promotional aims and on the weaknesses of the flow of images in terms of social and political issues, engagement, public-service information, semantic autonomy and emotional impact. The limits that emerge from the research identify certain critical questions which indicate a need for further investigation with respect to relationships occurring between public news flows, young people, information requirements and social networks in the public sphere.

KEYWORDS: Instagram, public communication, social networks, visual communication, youth target

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1. Introduction

International public administration studies conducted over the last twenty years identify technological innovation as an essential part of modernization in various areas of the public sector (Raadschelders & Lee, 2011; de Vries, Bekkers & Tummers 2014). Literature on this subject is not restricted to the instrumental level but rather deals with substantial changes and new challenges relating to organization, governance, the relationships existing between institutions and politics, public-private networks, civic engagement, and new public spaces enabling public communication, action and networking (see, for example, Fountain 2004; Noveck 2009; Coleman & Blumler 2009, 2015; Lathrop & Ruma 2010, Canel & Luoma-aho 2018).

These phenomena have substantially modified public administration, the relationship existing between various actors within public spaces and some increasingly significant issues regarding digital media: the transparency and accountability of public action, open data for accessibility to public information and documents, public governance and open government approaches to public affairs based on participation, engagement and the recognition of different stakeholders and perspectives (cf., among many others, Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes 2010; Chun, Shulman, Sandoval & Hovy 2010; Hilgers & Ihl 2010; Mergel 2012; Ducci 2015).

Underlining these transformations, some scholars have renamed the space in which the interaction of social actors occurs, referring to a 'new public space' (Innerarity 2008) or the 'new public sphere' (Castells 2008), identifying the principal trait of a 'plural society'. These views are reflected in a variety of contents, forms of interaction, channels and linguistic codes passing through the public communication flows.

Digitization and the advent of Web 2.0 have resulted in the dematerialization of a part of public and participatory scenarios, which have been transferred to the digital spaces, causing a strong change in the communication system of public actors and organizations.

At the same time all of the actors involved in the process of the production and the use of content actively and proactively participate in an increasingly hybrid and converging digital and media ecosystem, considering the evolution with respect to readers, communicators, the so-called prosumers and produsage in a broader framework for user-led content creation (Jenkins 2006, 2009; Bruns 2007, 2008). On these bases, in the Internet age a complex 'user agency' concept has emerged which recognizes not only the new cultural role of users as facilitators of civic engagement and participation but also their economic significance as consumers, producers and data providers (van Dijck, 2009). These are relational processes facilitated by the use of social media and, in particular, by social network sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Twitter, within an open digital world, recognized as essential networks that allow for the connection of institutions and citizens and building relationships based on the 'conversational convergence' that occurs among a multitude of users (Boccia Artieri 2012; Lovari 2013).

Observing these phenomena and considering recent preferences in the use of social networking, this article intends to contribute to research on social public communication promoted by institutional information channels for young people and presents an analysis focusing on Instagram visual flows. In order to understand the institutional use of Instagram in relation to topics, objectives and issues presented to a youth audience and to identify the informative and communicative character of images, the empirical part of this work examines a reference base formed by Italian and European accounts and compares certain results with previous research carried out on the Facebook and Twitter networks based on the same analytical categories.

2. Theoretical background of institutional social networks and their use by young people

Social media are becoming relevant channels of digital public communication for 'engaged readers' (Chung 2008) and 'networked publics' (Varnelis 2008; Lovari 2013), especially from the perspective of interactive participation and the engagement of citizens in the new public sphere (cf., among many others, Criado, Sandoval-Almazan & Gil-Garcia 2013; Warren et al. 2014)

Over the last two decades literature focusing on the use of social media in public administration has presented studies on many key themes regarding the relationship between institutions and their audiences, such as the 'digital divide', citizen trust, internet strategy and policy, e-participation and tools of change (Magro 2012)[1]. At the level of the theoretical dimension studies have emphasized the importance of analytical categories, indicators and indices of measurement, together with empirical research (see, for example, Mergel 2012, 2013; Haro-de-Rosario et al. 2018; Skoric, Zhu, Goh & Pang 2016) and also experiments (e.g., Jilke, Lu, Xu, Shinohara 2019).

This paper examines social networking services (SNS) – and, more specifically, Instagram, which is compared with Facebook and Twitter in relation to certain aspects – in accordance with the classification that identifies SNSs as one of six categories[2] of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). A 'genus-species' relationship is adopted, and the aims and features indicated in the literature on social media represent the scientific bases referred to in the analysis of our particular scenario. Starting from the essential definition of social media as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technical foundations of Web 2.0, and which allow for the creation and exchange of user generated content" (ibid., p. 61), the empirical part of this work focuses on the use of social media in relation to the need to access information.

Above and beyond the original functions, whereby users are helped to maintain interpersonal relationships, to fulfil the need to belong to a community and to receive social support (e.g., Wellman, Gulia 1999; Boyd & Ellison 2008), the SNSs respond to such motivations as a desire to acquire information or to share and express one's opinions (Whiting and Williams 2013;). In this way, SNSs have initiated a debate concerning the way in which digital media contributes to society by allowing people to become informed, find common causes and participate in public life more often. With regard to such aspects many research projects have explored specific insights, such as that which views seeking information via social network sites as a positive and significant predictor of the social capital of people and their civic and political participatory behaviour (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela 2012) or the manner in which digital media can engage youth (e.g., Bennett 2008). In particular, in the perspective of this paper indications of the relationship between the use of social media news and subsequent effects on the promotion of political participation are worthy of note (Gil de Zúñiga, Molyneux, and Zheng 2014).

Within the public administration context, presenting the open, plural features of the new public sphere as highlighted above (§1), social media are construed as Web 2.0-based technologies fostering engagement with citizens, businesses and other organizations (Criado, Sandoval-Almazan and Gil-Garcia 2013 p. 320).

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[1] A recent review of social media indicates that attention has been paid to the public sector in a variable manner and that studies on administration and political contexts were published in particular in 2010 and 2016, and that there was a low level of interest in these sectors in the period 2011 - 2015 (Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi & Nerur 2018).

[2] The other 5 categories are blogs, virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life), collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), content communities (e.g., YouTube) and virtual game worlds.

Over the last decade, in accordance with both the current regulations on digital administration and the desire to trigger collaborative relationships with users, some public actors have committed themselves to the acquisition of useful skills for the effective management of the main social networks. This implies an indepth understanding of digital places and, at the same time, a conscious and strategic management of the existing options to generate, convey and share interesting content. The public actors have reacted in different ways - and with different speeds of adaptation - to the use of social networks as public information and communication media. While many still struggle to cross the boundaries of multi-channel communication, some PAs master multi-channel communication strategies that simultaneously convey information via institutional websites and social network pages and profiles dedicated to a particular institution.

In recent years many research projects have shown that social networks are often used to transmit messages, with a one-way communication method, and that civic engagement and the levels of interaction in many administrations are still quite low (e.g., Bryer and Zavattaro 2011; Zavattaro and Sementelli 2014; Zafiropoulos et al. 2014; De Rosario, Martín, Pérez 2016; Bonsón, Royo & Ratkai 2017). Although the institutional use of social media is now widespread in the public sector, understanding how these channels are actually used by public actors remains a key point, and is also one of the underlying motivations of the work presented in this paper.

In this general scenario, as regards the social information flows for the youth target, on the one hand we have to consider the relationship between young people and social media and, on the other hand, between young people and institutions.

The sociology of youth and media generation approaches have also studied many aspects of young people's reliance on social media (Vittadini 2018). Millennials and the Z generation thus become the subjects of an open debate on the positive and negative characteristics attributed to them when they are considered as 'digital natives' (Prensky 2001) and members of the 'net generation' (Tapscott 1998). The relative debate also focuses on the critical use of these labels, considering factors such as the 'technological digital divide', cultural inequalities and different functions of the social media (cf. e.g., Buckingham 2008; Banaji 2011).

With regard to the topic dealt with in this paper it would be opportune to question the concept of a 'digital generation'. Among the main reasons for this we should consider that the youth digital media habit requires civic and democratic models to realize digital models of e-citizenship (Coleman 2008, pp. 202-204). Youth citizenship and political participation in a digital society have to be achieved by affording to young people more autonomy, moving away from the concept of a passive youth target (Collin 2015). Moreover, information professionals play useful and meaningful roles in supporting the current generations of young people (Selwyn 2009).

Despite these limits and conditions it remains true that many young people coming of age today, at least in Western democracies, have grown up with ready access to the Internet, and a large number of them use it more intensively - and, many would argue, in a more competent manner - than the older generations, as shown by a "pervasive digital mediation of the everyday" (Banaji & Buckingham 2013, 8).

From a critical point of view the question of institutional information flows for young people has to take into account the widespread perception that public trust in core institutions is eroding, and youth are often seen as emblematic of this crisis. Nevertheless, in order to respond to this idea the number of studies on new forms of participation in public life and youth activism has been increasing (among others, Norris 2002; Livingston et al., 2005; Loader, 2007; Bennett, 2008; Jenkins et al., 2018). Certain studies have also distinctively focused on the relationship between news consumption and civic participation (e.g., Livingstone & Markham 2008).

Observing specifically the communicative challenge to connect institutional actors with young people, the former have to align and continually adapt their flows to the forms and methods that reflect languages (texts, images, videos, slideshows, file-sharing, hyperlinks, etc.) and applications mainly used by this target characterized by technical skills and rapidly changing media habits.

Regarding the latter, Facebook remains a very popular SNS among young adults, but it is being abandoned by teenagers migrating to Instagram and Snapchat (Alhabash & Ma 2017) and also by users in the 18 to 24 age group (Smith, Anderson and Jiang, 2018).

In one of the most recent reports on the global population published by We Are Social in collaboration with Hootsuite (Report Digital 2020) Instagram ranks third in the listing of the most frequently used social networks and, considering the age of the users of the platform, more than half are in the 13 to 34 age group (71.1%)[3]. The primacy of the giant Facebook, closely followed by Instagram and Tik Tok, is gradually being undermined with the loss of young users aged between 13 and 34 (- 3.4% from 2019 to 2020). In the first quarter of 2019 Tik Tok was the most commonly installed app and today this social network makes it possible to reach a specific target: 69% of its users are in the 16 to 24 age range.

The emerging SNSs have been analyzed from many perspectives and considering various factors. This paper focuses on the visual posts of Instagram, carefully studying their particular features. From the quantitative point of view these flows centred on visual communication reveal a huge increase in the use of visual content in the digital sphere[4]. Moreover, in qualitative terms "A picture is worth a thousand words" is not a merely a catch phrase but the title of IEEE international conferences focused on SNSs, such as Instagram (Silva et al. 2013) and Pinterest (Bernardini et al. 2014), and scientific literature even predicted the popularity of pictures and videos in social platforms (e.g., Schifanella et al. 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Munoz & Towner 2017).

Following the path indicated by psychologists, who referred to this phenomenon as 'the picture superiority effect' (Paivio, Rogers, and Smythe 1968), and by scholars in many other sectors (e.g., Faber 2002), many studies have focused on factors and conditions whereby images can be more memorable, capture greater attention and illicit a more highly emotional response than a text (particularly in commercial advertising and political communication, e.g., Childers & Houston 1984; Pieters and Wedel 2004; Brader 2005; Munoz & Towner 2017).

Within the perspective of this paper, with respect to institutional accounts it is particularly interesting to note the potential capacity of images - e.g., image memes, photographs, posters and videos - to inform young people and generate a creative public debate, to communicate various topics, to achieve certain purposes and transmit messages that cannot be conveyed by words, thus contributing to a more vibrant public sphere (Milner 2013[5]).

This transition from the textual to the visual form allows for an information economy that promotes immediacy in the processing of messages and their decoding times. On the other hand, the interpretative risks

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[3] The ranking includes social media and messaging platforms. Instagram is in the third position, however not considering the messaging platforms. Considering the entire classification, the top seven are: Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp, FBMessenger, Weixin/Wechat, Instagram, Doyin/Tiktok.

[4] A commercial website refers to the quantity of Instagram photos, stating that "if you printed off the 21.9 billion photos uploaded to Instagram in a year, it would reach 6,351 kilometres" (https://cewe-photoworld.com/photos-on-the-web/).

[5] In this context, Milner has argued, for example, that the production and consumption of images in participatory media helps new protest movements, such as OWS, to spread their message and mobilize support more quickly, but also encourages active participation in the public sphere.

of polysemic images and the question of presenting precise content, conveying information and centring on the original communicative purpose, remain unchanged, as has emerged in reflections in studies regarding semiotics, aesthetics and visual culture (Traini 2018; Eco 2016; Pinotti and Somaini 2016). Together with textual strings, syntactic analysis and the stylistic register, the analysis of public communication with multimedia content has to contend with the dimension of the imagination, and it becomes necessary to establish new investigative approaches and specific categories of analysis.

Empirical research in the field of public communication studies and social networks is stimulated by new challenges involving the analysis of visual content and which may present differences relating to different cultural contexts. Considering this possibility, the empirical part of this paper presents a work which focuses on these points using a taxonomy of public communication flows (Mancini, 1996/2002), and taking into account both the international literature cited above and Italian studies on institutional public accounts (e.g., Boccia Artieri 2015; Faccioli & Losacco 2010; Aziz 2015; Leone & Delli Paoli 2016; Ducci, Lovari & D'Ambrosi 2019).

3. Empirical research: cognitive objectives and methodology

The subject of this empirical work corresponds to the images taken from the Instagram profiles of 15 accounts of youth policy actors, at both the Italian and European level, who play an informative role for young target groups.

The 7 Italian channels coincide with the cases observed in previous research conducted on Facebook, in which cases were selected among all national youth information accounts, considering the requirement of a flow higher than 500 posts in 2 years (Leone 2019, 125-148); the same accounts were chosen in order to have the opportunity to compare the 2 social networks. To select the other 8 European profiles the 'Otlas' Partner-Finding Tool was consulted, using as search filters: a) specific activities; b) keywords (youth, art, youth policies, social media, media and communication and policy making). The filtered research produced 52 results, 30 of which had an Instagram profile. Furthermore, the list was restricted, using an arbitrary threshold: only profiles with at least 250 followers were considered.

The empirical base consists of a total of 702 images, which were collected selecting the last 50 published by each account at the time of the survey (February, 2020)[6] and in accordance with a principle of numerical parity as the channels present heterogeneous rhythms in the posting of news items. Considering the latter situation, the alternative of a temporal range would have returned empirical bases quantitatively very different, with consequent comparison problems (Table 1).

The choice to focus empirical analysis on Instagram images stems from an interest in understanding how institutional actors manage information systems for young people related to an SNS with preeminent visual content.

Taking into account the cited work recently carried out in the Italian context on Facebook pages of the same institutional actors selected for this focus on Instagram (Leone, 2019) and also another work on gov-

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[6] The total number is lower than expected because 2 accounts at the time of sampling did not reach the minimum number; therefore, there are 16 images from the National Youth Forum account and 36 from the Barcelona Youth Policy Department. Furthermore, the empirical basis of 'Giovani FVG', which does not manage a profile on Instagram, is made up of the 50 most recent photos identified by the hashtag #giovanifvg (an option used in similar cases in other studies; see Vrana, 2019). The sampling of the images of the Italian profiles took place on 29 November 2019, while that of the European profiles on 10 February 2020, therefore all the photos uploaded after these two dates do not fall within the empirical basis of this work.

ernmental Twitter flows classified with the same analytical categories (Leone & Delli Paoli 2016), some differences in the passage from the analysis of textual communication to the exclusively visual communication were detected.

All Instagram profiles, both Italian and European, were selected respecting a balanced representation between institutional, political and social actors operating in the public and youth sectors.

Table 1 – Account Instagram

Organization Name	Country	Instagram Account	N. Sampled photos
Giovani FVG	Italy	#giovanifvg	50
Agenzia Nazionale Giovani	Italy	@agenziagiovani	50
Eurodesk Italia	Italy	@eurodesk_italy	50
Forum Nazionale Giovani	Italy	@forum_nazionale_giovani	16
Forum Regionale Giovani Campania	Italy	@frg_campania	50
Giovani Sì	Italy	@giovanisi.it	50
Osservatorio Giovani OCPG	Italy	@giovani_unisa	50
Oficina de Plà Jove	Spain	@joventutdiba	36
Lèargas	Irleland	@leargas.ireland	50
European Youth Forum	Belgium	@youth_forum	50
Boomerang Youth Center	Ireland	@boomerangcafè	50
British Youth Forum	Great Britain	@britishyouthcouncil	50
Youth Center Kosmos	Bosnia Herzegovina	@centar_kosmos	50
Eurodesk	Belgium	@eurodesk	50
European Youth Parliament	Belgium	@eyp_network	50
Total			702

Boomerang Youth Centre, a service dedicated to young people, is managed by the Borough District of Drogheda in Ireland and has been active on Instagram since 2015.

Léargas is the Irish National Agency designed to coordinate, promote and disseminate various activities aimed at young people, especially in the context of European (Erasmus +), national and regional projects. It has been active on Instagram since 2016.

The European Youth Forum is an international organization based in Belgium which represents and coordinates more than one hundred youth organizations across Europe. It has been active on Instagram since 2014.

The British Youth Council is a UK national organization that works with young people, up to 25 years of age, stimulating them to actively participate in democratic life at the local and national level. It has been active on Instagram since 2015.

The European Youth Parliament is a non-profit organization, not politically aligned, which encourages young Europeans to actively commit, exercising their role as European citizens. It has been active on Instagram since 2017.

The Kosmos Youth Centre is a non-profit youth organization actively involved in social commitment at the territorial, national and European level. It has been registered on Instagram since 2018.

The Oficina de Plà Jove is the youth policy office of the city of Barcelona. It controls the development and promotion of strategies aimed at supporting young Spaniards and has been an Instagram member since 2019.

The purpose of this work is to answer two main research questions:

RQ1: How are Instagram news flows produced by institutional youth policy actors characterized with respect to topics and purposes? What are the similarities and differences with respect to Facebook information flows of the same actors?

RQ2: What do the visual elements of the posts express, taking into account their features, their aim, style of visual language and thematic areas? Is the visual language adopted in relation to its particular characteristics, with respect to emotional and creative effects in particular (e.g., humour & editing)?

The selected images are classified by analyzing only their visual content. The caption attached to the Instagram post was not taken into account in order to evaluate the semantic autonomy of the iconic content.

The main dimensions of analysis are (Figure 1):

- 6 categories of public communication *topics* - institutional, political, normative, service-oriented, social, engagement;

- 3 categories of communicative aims: promotional, informative and participatory;

- 6 categories of visual elements - identity, community, campaign, information, regram, humour & editing;

- 10 thematic areas – education and training, work and internship, family, creativity, sport, political commitment, social and civic engagement, religion, science and technology, free time, mobility, reputation, untaggable).

Figure 1 – Conceptual Map
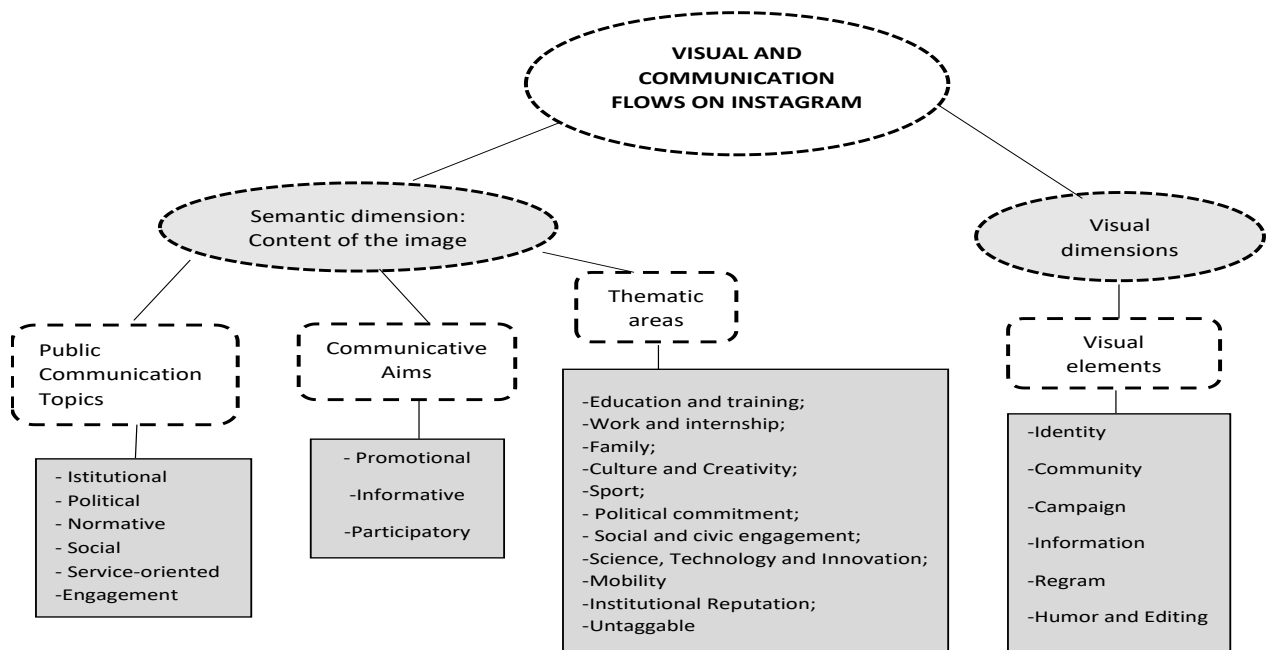
The theoretical-analytical framework is the result of conceptual bases acquired from different sources:

a) topics, resuming the classic taxonomy proposed by Mancini (1996/2002 95-104) based on the "objects of public communication", integrated with the "participatory contents" introduced in recent works (Leone & Delli Paoli 2016; Leone 2019). The operational definitions assigned to each *topic* are shown below:

– institutional: communication regarding the institution itself (its goals, values, and activities);

– political: messages about political intentions, programmes and goals;

– normative: communication of laws, norms, regulations, agreements, legislative processes, etc.;

– service oriented: messages referring to public services and relative information (data, documents, and guidelines);

– social: messages about issues, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour with a view to improving individual or social well-being;

– engaging: messages attempting to engage citizens in policy and decision-making, in events and activities of general interest.

b) For the classification of photos on the basis of *communicative aims*, three kinds of main objectives were identified:

- promotional: aiming at the valorisation of an identity, image and for propaganda purposes, when a particular image, the dissemination of an identity and legitimation represent the main goal;

- informative: a focus on the circulation and dissemination of news and documents on activities, initiatives or services, when the access and transparency information are the ultimate goal;

- participatory: aimed at stimulating active participation on the part of citizens, when shared governance is the main goal.

c) *Visual elements*, a classification borrowed - and subsequently integrated - from studies conducted in the context of social media marketing, to analyze the various commercial communication objectives of globally famous brands on Instagram (Ginsberg 2015)[7]. This classification is based on the identification of the visual elements in relation to the meaning they express and the communicative intention; at this level of analysis, the 'regram' category was also considered, with which the flows of images shared by other accounts are detected.

The corporate communication taxonomy was adapted in order to classify institutional content, identifying 6 classes:

- *identity*, images that have the purpose of promoting and communicating the identity of the account, by sharing the logo, branding elements, photos of the staff or referents closely related to the entity itself;
- *community*, images showing the community of the institution, or that which is involved in an initiative, and shared to enhance the sense of community and collaboration;
- *campaign*, images that express the social purpose, support for common causes, through the presence of visual elements that refer to global events, symbols, solidarity campaigns, posters of events/initiatives promoted by third parties, etc.;

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[7] The classification of visual elements proposed by Ginsberg at the same time acquires and re-elaborates another taxonomy, representing a pioneering element in the attempt to classify the images shared on Instagram by users (Hu, Manikonda, Kambhampati 2014). In addition, it is important to specify that the 'person and product' and 'people and product' categories of the initial taxonomy have been merged into the 'community' variable. Likewise, 'world event' has been placed in the 'campaign' category, and the original categories 'user generated content' and 'regram from celebrity' have flowed into the 'regram' category. However, the categories 'recipes', 'lifestyle' and 'video', were not considered in this paper.

- *information*, images that express the information purpose of the entity. Despite the absence of a textual part, accounts can communicate relevant information by sharing images depicting public news, posters of their own or others' events and initiatives, screenshots of calls or other types of information material;

- *humour & editing*, images featuring engaging and 'digitally edited' content. This class includes only those photos which can be associated with the 'editing' part, characterized by graphic or creative intervention in the images (artistic or creative contents). With regard to 'humour', reference is made to an ironic expressive purpose; the 'humour' section, despite the fact it does not include any of the selected images, has been kept within the classification because, considering the target audience, among the expected results a greater number of amusing and ironic contents was expected (e.g., memes, etc.).

d) *Thematic areas*, this dimension tries to attribute to each image a reference sector, not considering any textual elements associated with the photo (Leone 2019): education and training, work and internship, family, creativity, sport, political commitment, social and civic engagement, religion, science and technology, mobility, institutional image, untaggable[8].

The classification phase involved two analysts and a pre-test (Marradi, 1990) was carried out on a sample of 250 photos to assess the reliability of the taxonomy and the congruence between the interpretations of the different encodings (Diana and Montesperelli 2005). Then, a second reliability check was carried out (Krippendorff, 1980): a 'test-test', in which the two analysts collected information on the same cases (the same images shared on the Instagram feed by each account) using the same dimensions. This operation made it possible to verify the semantic relevance of the response categories of the variables considered and integrated some classes where needed, enabling a better operational definition of each dimension of the visual flows on Instagram.

4. Analysis

As represented by the conceptual map (Figure 1) corresponding to the research design on social information channels for young people presented above, in the following order the analysis investigates: topics, visual elements, communicative aims and thematic areas.

4.1. Classification of images by topics

The analysis of the topics highlights a clear orientation of Instagram flows to *institutional communication* (53.6%) aimed at supporting the image and giving visibility to the organization and its activities. Over half of the classified images express identity traits of the organization associated with the account. The photos depict people connected to the institution, activities that have been promoted, identity elements such as logos, symbols and other communication materials, etc.).

Concentration on this topic is complementary to the disappearance of all other categories, and to a greater extent with respect to what has already been found in an analysis of FB pages (Leone 2019 137). The actors of the youth information networks hardly ever present regulatory posts (0.4%), and the political (4.8%) or social (4.8%) topics are minimal (Table 2).

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[8] This category includes images without identifying visual traits or with generic content that cannot be precisely categorised.

In second place, 28.9% of the images shared on Instagram are comprised in the *engagement* topic. They are posts that stimulate participation in an initiative, research or a survey, or are aimed at inviting young people to be active resources for common interest in the public space.

Corresponding to almost a third of the posts, this participatory content presents a certain weight, especially in comparison with the other categories, which at most reach a level of 6-7%; however, the percentage is lower than that found in the analysis of the FB pages, which reached almost 44%. For both social media the content that promotes participation in cultural and social events, initiatives or projects prevails. Involvement in the decision-making processes remains minimal or absent, and in fact the posts inviting readers to express their opinions, offer an evaluation or vote are residual. The scarce use of these forms, considered essential in literature for the development of digital citizenship, indicates a participatory communication which is currently limited. This occurs in a manner concomitant with downsizing as reported by studies and empirical research on the interactive and democratic potential and also confirms in the case of Instagram a use of the social network as a broadcasting channel (§ 2).

Also as far as *service-oriented* communication is concerned there is a significant difference between the two social networks. The previous analysis confirmed the public function of FB which was recognised in 22.5% of classified posts. In Instagram posts this aspect is substantially reduced to 7.3%. These results raise various questions with regard to the different use of SNSs, considering both the different potential expressed by each platform and also the different use of social channels on the part of the same organization.

Rather than the use of Instagram the main issue here seems to concern image-based communication compared to the use of different levels of communication (textual, audio, static and dynamic visual). In this regard, the results of the analysis of the topics communicated on Instagram appear to show strong limitations on service-oriented subjects - referring to training and work opportunities, calls for projects, etc. – which, however, social networks such as FB fulfilled, also receiving good user feedback.

On the other hand the differentiated use of social networks might mitigate results which show a reduction of social media flows related to opportunities and political contents. In this regard the study cited above, which applies these same analytical categories of topics to the flows conveyed on Twitter by government institutions, finds that political posts cover almost a third of the total messages analyzed (28.5% on an empirical basis of 5,328 tweets shared by 9 Italian ministerial accounts; Leone, Delli Paoli 2016, 406). Service-oriented information reaches even 44.3% of the total on Twitter vs 7.3% on Instagram. Based on the same classification, these comparisons allow for an association between certain social networks and some communication functions or, in this case, some topics of public communication.

Considering only the Italian accounts because they are also present in the sample of the previous survey on FB, the regional channel GiovaniSì and the Youth National Agency use both social networks for institutional communication but almost exclusively entrust the dissemination of information and the stimulation of participation to FB. The posts aimed at engagement are mainly shared on the FB page also by the Youth Observatory. The latter submits 22% of service-oriented topics to Instagram, and to a significantly greater extent than the other accounts (4 of which do not show any posts of this kind).

Extending our reflection to the other accounts included in the analysis on Instagram, out of the 15 accounts that were examined there is a sole profile which is active also on the front of political communication. This is the British Youth Council (30%), an organization which by its very nature is a bearer of points of view and politically oriented strategies. With respect to our empirical base the differences between Italy and other countries cannot be considered as significant with regard to political topics for various reasons: the concentration of political content only on the British Youth Council channel, the poor consistency of politi-

cal contents in general and the fact that the European sample has 8 accounts in comparison with a total of 7 Italian accounts.

Table 2 – Topics for Instagram account

Account	Public Communication Topics						Total
	Institutional	Political	Social	Normative	Service-oriented	Engagement	
#giovanifvg	4	0	0	0	6	40	50
	8%	0	0	0	12%	80%	100%
agenziagiovani	39	0	3	0	5	3	50
	78%	0	6%	0	10%	6%	100%
eurodesk_italy	26	0	2	0	6	16	50
	52%	0	4%	0	12%	32%	100%
Forum_Nazionale _Giovani	7	4	2	1	1	1	16
	43,8%	25%	12,5%	6,3%	6,3%	6,3%	100%
frg_campania	26	2	6	2	6	8	50
	52%	4%	12%	4%	12%	16%	100%
giovanisi.it	46	0	1	0	0	3	50
	92%	0	2%	0	0	6%	100%
giovaniunisa	33	0	3	0	11	3	50
	66%	0	6%	0	22%	6%	100%
TOTAL ITA	48%	18%	50%	75%	69%	37%	45%
joventutdiba	22	0	4	0	5	5	36
	61,1%	0	11,1%	0	13,9%	13,9%	100%
leargas.ireland	20	0	0	0	7	23	50
	40%	0	0	0	14%	46%	100%
youth_forum	24	8	7	0	0	11	50
	48%	16%	14%	0	0	22%	100%
boomerangcafe	11	0	1	0	1	37	50
	22%	0	2%	0	2%	74%	100%
BritishYouthCouncil	26	15	0	0	1	8	50
	52%	30%	0	0	2%	16%	100%
centar_kosmos	27	0	5	1	0	17	50
	54%	0	10%	2%	0	34%	100%
eurodesk	37	0	0	0	2	11	50
	74%	0	0	0	4%	22%	100%
eyp_network	28	5	0	0	0	17	50
	56%	10%	0	0	0	34%	100%
TOTAL EU	52%	82%	50%	25%	31%	63%	55%
Total	376	34	34	4	51	203	702
	53,6%	4,8%	4,8%	0,6%	7,3%	28,9%	100%

Other profiles that present a distinct contribution are the Italian *#giovanifvg* and both Irish cases of the municipal youth centre *Boomerangcafe* and *leargas.ireland*, a national agency, strongly committed to com-

munication aimed at engagement (80%, 74% and 46%, respectively). Other accounts promoting youth activism are *eyp_network and centar_kosmos* (34%) and *Eurodesk_Italy* (32%). Excluding the few Italian cases, with respect to the engagement topic it is possible to note the greater contribution on the part of the European youth information channels (63% of engagement posts, corresponding to a third of all posts that were analyzed).

Furthermore, only two profiles show a certain distribution of the posts among the different categories of topics: The Youth Forum and the Campania Regional Forum. While favouring institutional communication, these accounts deal with at least three other topics (with percentages between 12% and 22%): both are attentive to engagement and social communication and, distinctly, the Belgian account covers the political category while the regional account covers the service-oriented topic.

The profiles which on the other hand present a greater concentration on institutional communication (exceeding 70% of the published images) deserve further examination. The highest percentages concern the Tuscan channel GiovaniSì and the account of the National Youth Agency (NYA), respectively 92% and 78%. A total of 60% of the institutional images posted by NYA are strongly identity-based, with some depicting the director, and others showing the director and other staff members with small or large groups of young beneficiaries of the promoted activities. It is thus a form of institutional communication that focuses attention on the work team and on the visibility of the initiatives implemented. On the other hand, the institutional posts published by GiovaniSì highlight a focus on recipients, with almost all of the posts presenting the testimony of a young man/woman. In half of the cases this occurs through images which also present a superimposed comment and in the other half a photo is presented with the face of the beneficiary and with a testimony noted in the caption (with a hashtag, such as #fareimpresa #casa #lavoro). The posts forming part of the latter group focus mainly on people and their faces, reflecting the widespread custom of posting on Instagram images of people in order to capture emphatic and emotional reactions (Bakhshi, Shamma & Gilbert, 2014).

Although the channels presenting the highest percentages correspond to those of Italian actors, the frequency of this type of institutional flow is equally distributed between Italian and other European accounts. Considering also each Instagram account selected, the percentages are higher than 40% in any case, except for 2 accounts which appear to be the highest with regard to the topic of engagement: #giovanifvg and boomerangcafe. The institutional communication of Eurodesk Europe is also quite considerable. It is dedicated to information on the activities that the European network carries out for young people, conveyed through images edited with a label indicating the area in which the organization operates (e.g., Learning, Internship, etc.).

The latter case offers a new starting point for open general reflection on the particular features of communication entrusted to images. The need to label posts - which can become a way to graphically customize shared content - leads to reflection on the actual semantic autonomy of images, and on the effort that accounts make to exploit the expressive potential of social networks based on visual codes.

4.2. Analytical categories of the visual dimension and communicative aims

Moving from the examination of the topics to that of the visual elements, the images were classified according to some criteria partly borrowed from corporate studies on the visual contents of Instagram, partly meeting the non-commercial purposes of public communication, as specified in §3.

Through the identification of the elements present in the image and the interpretation of the communicative intention expressed, the classification has shown the following results (Table 3): the representations of groups or other elements indicating a sense of community and relationship (community) appear in 34.2% of the posts of the 15 profiles examined; an almost equal percentage concerns the images aimed at highlighting identity traits of the organization (identity), a second substantial part of the empirical basis (31.8%).

Linking these categories to topics further highlights what has already emerged from previous reflections on *institutional* images: i.e., a use of Instagram aimed at enhancing the organization itself, through the sharing of identity aspects (staff, logos, citations and statements, etc.) and the sense of community (photos of groups, meetings, etc.). These are in fact the highest categories (43.4% and 37.8%, respectively) related to the institutional topic (Table 4). The *identity* and *community* categories, in relation to all topics, jointly collect over 65% of the empirical base, leaving only 11.4% of the total for *information* purposes and reducing to 7.4% the awareness flows through the promotion of social *campaigns.*

These data are in any case substantially confirmed in the analysis of *communicative aims,* which proposes the low share of posts for *informative purposes* (14%) and reveals a clear majority of images for *promotional* purposes (64%).

The results consolidate the hypothesis of the diversification of the purposes of social networks managed by the same institutional editorial staff. For Instagram the great consistency of the institutional topic assumes - at the level of *visual elements* and *communicative aims* - an almost entirely promotional and minimally informative declination. On the contrary, on Facebook the report appears reversed, considering that 65.9% of the flows are informative (associated with engagement, institutional and service posts), and only 15.6% of posts have promotional purposes (Leone, 2019 141).

Also on Twitter the informative purpose of the posts exceeds the promotional aim, but with a much smaller difference compared to Facebook (54.9% and 43%, respectively); Leone & Delli Paoli 2016,408).

With regard to the third classified purpose - participatory - Instagram presents a more intense communication activity (22% of the total images), which includes images concerning group activities, training initiatives, photos of events and posters of invitations to participate in events or join the activities of the sponsoring organization.

The pre-eminence of institutional topics, identity and community as visual elements and promotional purposes outline the features of flows typically based on one-way communication (§ 2), with traits aimed to present the organization which is managing the communication to legitimate itself, create visibility and attract consent with respect to its activities.

The engaging power of the images in Instagram is not so weak, considering the fact that, while on Facebook institutions encourage young users to actively participate through a multiplicity of formats[9], on Instagram only the graphic features and editable components can achieve this aim. The participatory aim is left only to the visual elements, which have the purpose of arousing interest or a sense of curiosity in the observer. In fact, many of the posted photos present events and initiatives with respect to which the organization is a promoter or a guest, and indeed they have the purpose of involving followers through a virtual narration and, that is, a sort of exclusively visual narrative or story-telling.

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[9] In this regard previous research on Facebook flows has explored in greater detail the distribution of some contents and has revealed an interesting percentage of posts aimed at activating the target through calls/competitions, invitations to events, and surveys/requests for adherence. Nonetheless, the 22% of posts with participatory purposes emerging on Facebook corresponds to only half of the analogous Instagram category.

Table 3 – Visual Elements for Instagram account

Account	Visual Elements					Total
	Identity	Community	Campaign	Information	Humor & Editing	
#giovanifvg	11	23	3	12	1	50
	22%	46%	6%	24%	2%	100%
agenziagiovani	18	22	3	0	7	50
	36 %	44%	6%	0	14%	100%
eurodesk_italy	20	14	7	2	7	50
	40%	28%	14%	4%	14%	100%
Forum_Nazionale_Giovani	6	7	1	0	2	16
	37,5%	43,8%	6,3%	0	12,5%	100%
frg_campania	17	8	7	12	6	50
	34%	16%	14%	24%	12%	100%
giovanisi.it	13	22	1	0	14	50
	26%	44%	2%	0	28%	100%
giovaniunisa	23	3	6	7	11	50
	46%	6%	12%	14%	22%	100%
TOTALE ITA	47%	45,9%	42,3%	42,3%	42%	45%
Joventutdiba	21	5	2	0	8	36
	58,3%	13,9%	5,6%	0	22,2%	100%
leargas.ireland	16	13	5	10	6	50
	32%	26%	10%	20%	12%	100%
youth_forum	15	14	7	3	11	50
	30%	28%	14%	6%	22%	100%
boomerangcafe	7	12	1	25	5	50
	14%	24%	2%	50%	10%	100%
BritishYouthCouncil	7	31	4	0	8	50
	14%	62%	8%	0	16%	100%
centar_kosmos	13	28	3	3	3	50
	26%	56%	6%	6%	6%	100%
Eurodesk	19	13	1	3	14	50
	38%	26%	2%	6%	28%	100%
eyp_network	17	25	1	3	4	50
	34%	50%	2%	6%	8%	100%
TOTALE EU	53%	54,1%	57,7%	57,7%	58%	55%
Total	223	240	52	80	107	702
	31,8%	34,2%	7,4%	11,4%	15,2%	100%

A further category contemplated in the visual elements aims to detect keying[10], which requires an analysis of the content on a different level, linked to the use of *humorous codes and graphic editing* (table 3). On Instagram, where the presence of these visual languages is expected, the presence of posts characterized by this

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[10] The concept of keying is construed in the manner conceptualized by Goffman (1974, 2001, 83-116). The key is a transformation, according to which an element, already significant with respect to a certain framework, is subjected to a second-level interpretation.

keying is limited to 15.2% and all cases refer only to the use of graphic processing, while no images use a humorous or satirical code.

Table 4 — Visual elements for topics

Public communication topics	Visual Elements					Total
	Identity	Community	Campaign	Information	Humor & Editing	
Institutional	163	142	15	12	44	376
	43,4%	37,8%	4%	3,2%	11,7%	100%
Political	8	14	6	1	5	34
	23,5%	41,2%	17,6%	2,9%	14,7%	100%
Social	2	10	11	3	8	34
	5,9%	29,4%	32,4%	8,8%	23,5%	100%
Normative	2	0	1	1	0	4
	50%	0	25%	25%	0	100%
Service-oriented	10	1	4	17	19	51
	19,6%	2%	7,8%	33,3%	37,3%	100%
Engagement	38	73	15	46	31	203
	18,7%	36%	7,4%	22,7%	15,3%	100%
Total	223	240	52	80	107	702
	31,8%	34,2%	7,4%	11,4%	15,2%	100%

This is rather unexpected in digital environments with a strong expressive and visual potential, and in contexts where there has been much discussion about the diffusion of 'memes' as new communicative, creative and artistic forms. Finally, in the classification of visual elements, the *regram* variable has been included, which refers to those images published by other accounts and shared by the organization on their profile (Ginsberg, 2015). In the set of Instagram flows analyzed, these cover 3.4% of posts, indicators of content generated by other users who circulate and multiply through sharing, for positive or negative reasons (in the case of shared posts to express disappointment) or for specific reasons.

4.3. Recurring thematic areas on Instagram

With regard to the recurring themes in the observed accounts, as Table 6 shows, Instagram favours cultural and artistic themes (15.1%) followed by *social and civic engagement* (11.7%), *training, work and political commitment* (all around 10%).

The comparison with the *thematic areas* detected on the Facebook pages of the same Italian accounts shows similar results, except for a stronger recurrence of posts related to work (18.4%) together with *reputational* posts (18.9%). The substantial coincidence of the top positions is not surprising considering the nature and sphere of action of the organizations promoting these flows, which present a strong awareness of the priorities and critical issues of the youth situation, both in Italy and in Europe.

In addition, on Facebook there is space for religious matters not detected by Instagram data. Contrary to what one might imagine, given the use of the platforms of young people, no attention is paid to *sport* (1.1%) and *family* issues (0.4%). Equally unexpected is the lack of sensitivity to news about the *environment*, especially on Instagram, considering the recent phenomena related to the popularity of Greta Thunberg and the Friday for Future movement.

Table 5 – Communication Aims for Instagram account

Account	Communication Aims			
	Promozionali	Informativi	Partecipativi	Total
#giovanifvg	8	6	36	50
	16%	12%	72%	100%
Agenziagiovani	41	4	5	50
	82%	8%	10%	100%
eurodesk_italy	26	6	18	50
	52%	12%	36%	100%
Forum_Nazionale_Giovani	10	1	5	16
	62,5%	6,3%	31,3%	100%
frg_campania	26	14	10	50
	52%	28%	20%	100%
giovanisi.it	42	1	7	50
	84%	2%	14%	100%
Giovaniunisa	40	8	2	50
	80%	16%	4%	100%
TOTAL ITA	49,3%	36%	41,5%	45%
Joventutdiba	23	9	4	36
	63,9%	25%	11,1%	100%
leargas.ireland	20	12	18	50
	40%	24%	36%	100%
youth_forum	32	7	11	50
	64%	14%	22%	100%
Boomerangcafe	6	25	19	50
	12%	50%	38%	100%
BritishYouthCouncil	38	4	8	50
	76%	8%	16%	100%
centar_kosmos	12	4	34	50
	24%	8%	68%	100%
eurodesk	34	7	9	50
	68%	14%	18%	100%
eyp_network	33	3	14	50
	66%	6%	28%	100%
TOTAL EU	50,7%	64%	58,5%	55%
Total	32	7	11	50
	64%	14%	22%	100%

Approximately 15% of *reputational* posts and an equal quantity of non-classifiable (*untaggable*) posts have been identified because they do not allow for the identification of any reference sector. An example of this can be the image of a landscape or any environment without interpretable signs. Considering the accounts selected for empirical research, the most highly engaged Instagram profile on youth issues - especial-

ly related to critical work and the professional situation - is GiovaniSì.it (46% work and 30% training and internship). The most highly concentrated flow on a single dominant issue is that of the British Youth Council, as already highlighted, oriented towards political commitment (48%). The National Youth Forum (37.5%) and the Campania Regional Forum (20%) also share political images, although in a less incisive way. Another marked characterization, with 38% of the posts published, is highlighted in the images relating to the cultural and creative sector published by the NYA.

Table 6 — Thematic Areas for Instagram account

Accounts	Training	Work	Family	Creativity and Culture	Sport	Political commitment	Social and civic engagement	Environment	Science and Technology	Mobility	Institutional reputation	Untaggable (n.c)	Total
#giovanifvg	8	5	2	27	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	6	50
	16%	10%	4%	54%	0	0	2%	0	0	0	2%	12%	100%
agenziagiovani	2	1	0	19	0	4	3	1	0	2	5	13	50
	4%	2%	0	38%	0	8%	6%	2%	0	4%	10%	26%	100%
eurodesk_italy	7	1	0	7	0	3	6	0	1	12	7	6	50
	14%	2%	0	14%	0	6%	12%	0	2%	24%	14%	12%	100%
Forum_Nazionale_Giovani	2	2	0	1	0	6	4	0	0	0	1	0	16
	12,5%	12,5%	0	6,3%	0	37,5%	25%	0	0	0	6,3%	0	100%
frg_campania	2	7	0	2	4	12	5	8	0	1	7	2	50
	4%	14%	0	4%	8%	24%	10%	16%	0	2%	14%	4%	100%
giovanisi.it	15	23	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	5	3	50
	30%	46%	0	0	0	0	8%	0	0	0	10%	6%	100%
giovaniunisa	12	5	0	5	0	1	7	0	2	1	8	9	50
	24%	10%	0	10%	0	2%	14%	0	4%	2%	16%	18%	100%
TOTALE ITA	68,6%	61,9%	66%	57,5%	57,1%	37,6%	36,6%	60%	37,5%	25,4%	34,%	36,2%	
joventutdiba	0	8	0	5	0	1	4	0	0	6	5	7	36
	0	22,2%	0	13,9%	0	2,8%	11,1%	0	0	16,7%	13,9%	19,4%	100%
leargas.ireland	6	3	0	5	0	1	9	0	0	10	8	8	50
	12%	6%	0	10%	0	2%	18%	0	0	20%	16%	16%	100%
youth_forum	0	5	0	6	0	8	7	2	2	3	6	11	50
	0	10%	0	12%	0	16%	14%	4%	4%	6%	12%	22%	100%
boomerangcafe	2	0	1	18	3	0	3	0	0	0	18	5	50
	4%	0	2%	36%	6%	0	6%	0	0	0	36%	10%	100%
BritishYouthCouncil	0	1	0	1	0	24	3	3	0	0	4	14	50
	0	2%	0	2%	0	48%	6%	6%	0	0	8%	28%	100%
centar_kosmos	7	2	0	3	0	1	9	0	0	16	2	10	50
	14%	4%	0	6%	0	2%	18%	0	0	32%	4%	20%	100%
Eurodesk	5	8	0	6	0	1	7	0	2	11	10	0	50
	10%	16%	0	12%	0	2%	14%	0	4%	22%	20%	0	100%
eyp_network	2	0	0	1	0	7	10	1	1	1	13	14	50
	4%	0	0	2%	0	14%	20%	2%	2%	2%	26%	28%	100%
TOTALE EU	31,5%	38%	33,3%	42,4%	42,9%	62,1%	63,5%	40%	62,5%	74,7%	66%	64%	
Total	70	71	3	106	7	69	82	15	8	63	100	108	702
	10%	10,1%	0,4%	15,1%	1%	9,8%	11,7%	2,1%	1,1%	9%	14,2%	15,4%	100%

In line with its institutional mission, almost one out of 4 images uploaded by the Youth Observatory account on Instagram to a considerable extent concerns the area of training with respect to work (24% vs 10%); on the other hand, the reverse occurs on the platform of the Jouventutdiba, which manages Youth policies in Barcelona (22% work vs no training coverage).

Another element which is not so obvious emerges from the presence of the theme of mobility (limited to 9% overall) covered almost exclusively on European channels: Centar-Kosmos (32%), Eurodesk (32%) and Eurodesk Italy (24%), leargas.ireland (20%).

The comparison between FB and Instagram makes it possible to trace further significant differences in use between the two media. For example, while the Campania Regional Youth Forum on Facebook shares every single initiative for reputational purposes, on Instagram the thematic area *reputation* is not exploited (62.3% FB vs 14% Instagram).

Finally, research carried out on Facebook, which offers a variety of communication levels (visual, textual, multimedia, etc.), did not perceive the need for a residual category for unclassifiable content. Moreover, the presence of the *untaggable* thematic area among Instagram posts - when analyzed exclusively with regard to visual traits - seems to confirm a very underestimated potential of image power compared to the semantic autonomy of the same.

5. Conclusions and future work

 The The first research questions of this study, aimed at investigating the characteristics of Instagram news flows offered by institutional actors to respond to the information needs of young people, has identified the following pre-eminent traits (RQ1). With regard to topics, *institutional communication* is the most relevant for Instagram, oriented towards enhancing the image of organization members and increasing the visibility of their work. In fact, as shown by the second step of the analysis which focused on purposes, the attention centred on the promotion of the activities and identity of the organizations leaves a very low percentage of content with informational aims. On the contrary, the availability of studies based on the same classification system makes it possible to establish that on Facebook the values of these categories are reversed.

Unlike Facebook and Twitter, in the case of Instagram the engagement component is reduced and less service-oriented information is conveyed, while the same limits relating to the dissemination of regulatory, social and political content occur. On Facebook the first topic is engagement, taking precedence over institutional communication, and in the third position there is the service function. Service content excels on Twitter, followed by political and, thirdly, institutional content.

These results show that the use of several social networks by public actors that engage in information activity reflects important efforts to produce multiple news flows in the public space and, at the same time, also reveals a relevant differentiation of topics and purposes. This point of arrival raises some critical questions with respect to the information needs of young people and the importance to inform and to be informed in the space where an encounter occurs between institutions and the younger generations.

Some aspects may be considered preliminarily for a conclusive reflection.. Many of the youth studies and research on young people and social media cited above (§2) reveal the existence of a relationship between socio-demographic variables, mainly the users' age and their SNS habits. Among the particular characteristics of the youth target emerge the rapid changes from one channel to another. In these transitions, as is currently happening with the loss of young users on Facebook, where does this youth target access those catego-

ries of topics covered by the older SNSs and not recovered by the newer services? Could the reduction or the absence of some topics on a new SNS depend on technical limits of the specific medium or would every platform be able to adapt languages and tools, converting the news in different communication codes? These questions require further study.

A central question for this work regards the difference relating to the quantities of posts classified in different topic areas. As reported, the Instagram accounts - and particularly the Italian ones - present poor flows relating to public interest topics, such as social and political contents. This point stimulates reflection on the functions of these institutional youth communication channels. In this regard more specific attention may be required on the part of public institutions with respect to some topics considered useful for the cultural, civic, social education and growth of younger people considered as persons rather than SNS users. These aspects recall the literature oriented to the thesis that the youth digital media habit is connected to civic and democratic models to realize digital models of e-citizenship (Coleman 2008). Together with the traditional educational and social institutions which play a role in the growth of young people, the media themselves also have useful and meaningful roles as information systems in supporting the new generations (Selwyn 2009). In other words, assuming this perspective, the full or almost complete absence of social, political and civic contents - confirmed also by the low percentage of visual *campaign* elements – highlights a limit in relation to the institutional mission of news channels managed by institutional actors and directs the focus onto topics and purposes that have to be considered as non-optional by youth workers, mainly for news networks in the public sphere.

Differences relating to the prevalent thematic areas reflect the lower level of sensitivity of Italian accounts concerning political commitment and social and civic engagement, compared with the other European profiles. On the other hand this is confirmed by the higher percentage levels of training and work-related thematic areas, coherent with a higher percentage of service-oriented content.

With regard to the potential of the visual elements of posts (RQ2) the analysis of features, aims and styles of the images and thematic areas reveals, in summary, that it would be opportune to engage in further studies in relation to the visual level which is not used in accordance with its particular expressive power and the discrepancy between the visual content of the image and an associated comment or caption.

What is most affected by this abnormal condition is the classification of thematic areas. In fact, some images did not allow for any identification of a pertinent sector and this could only be deduced from the caption, which was not considered in accordance with a methodological choice. In other words, on Instagram images are often conveyed without semantic autonomy, which, during the analysis phase, forces the researcher to use the textual part.

Moreover, the significant quantity of images classified under *creativity and culture* indicates the presence on Instagram of content regarding the 'consumption' of cultural and entertainment content. This would appear to indicate that the institutions and associations that work with young people and present information on Instagram take advantage of the opportunity to convey attractive content. However, this appears to be an infrequent propensity regardless of the potential of the media used, and considering the multiplicity of options available for image processing and the variety of expressive languages and keys, as ascertained in the cited literature on participatory digital processes. The absence of images in the humour category is an evident indicator, revealing that at the moment these flows do not contribute to "a more vibrant public sphere" (Milner cit. §2).

On the other hand, reflecting on the more residual categories of the thematic areas, a lack of sensitivity observed in institutional information regarding certain topics, such as environmental issues, which have recently strongly involved young people, deserves attention.

The limits and gaps that have emerged shed light on critical issues relating to the current use of information on social channels, but at the same time the limits indicate various useful directions for the development of these flows and for the realization of a better form of communication, connection and opportunities for young people who engage in networking.

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