

1 October 2022

Short Paper 1: Historical Cohort (Due: October 3 at 7:00PM)

The Communication World During the Year of My Birth – A Study Behind Communication and Media in 1981

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It was Italy of 1981, a Country starting to experience the prosperity of the forthcoming “Boom economico” (“financial boom years” - [Italy - The economy in the 1980s | Britannica](#)) in an

era where internet was still inexistent but one which was considered by many a “New economic miracle” ([Italy - The economy in the 1980s | Britannica](#)).

Fellow concitizens were surrounded by a world where real human contact and communication was present, compared to today’s cold and mainly virtual relationships. That was a decade in which people, after asking a simple but sincerely-felt “Come stai?” (“How are you?”), often recognized by the hesitation of their friend’s voice if the day had gone wrong. The real feeling of “warmth” was obvious in 1981, but it is not today. Most relationship and friendships were earned under the roof of the same place, often a house, while watching “la partita di calcio” (“a soccer game”) together, on a Saturday evening.

Having a small or large house was not an issue in the Italy of the 1980s. My grandmother always used to say “La casa capi quannu voli u patruni!”, which means that no matter how small the house is, it is the owner’s will and desire to decide how many people are welcomed: Normally, the more the better. Family and friends would spend quality time together, going to the beach, “la pineta” (the pinewood), up to Mount Etna, or the library, heading to a friend’s house with the excuse of watching a movie together.

Life had a completely different taste back in the 80s; there was more fun and involvement.

1981 was the era of black and white home television, cinema, magazines, and radio; it was the year of real family time. Due to inaccessible costs to the mass, there was no color television or premium cable with added costs,



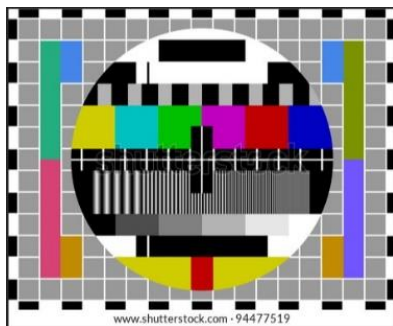
then. Moreover, Italian television was public and merely based on Italian programs. But something happened during those years: Although France and Germany were the most advanced Countries in Europe, it was then that the Italian audiovisual media, and especially “the less-developed” ([Italy - The economy in the 1980s | Britannica](#)) Southern-Italian one, experienced the first extension of programs.

During the 1980s “Milan became one of the world’s fashion capitals [...]”, opening to foreign influences and “bringing billions of lire in business and advertising” ([Italy - The economy in the 1980s | Britannica](#) - The lire was the national currency prior to the euro).

While RAI was publishing, censoring and giving limits, and was only broadcasting in the afternoon, from the hours of 4:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m., the private Fininvest of Berlusconi arose.



RAI only owned three channels: RAI Uno, which was the national leader, showcased sophisticated news, films in first viewing, and the most important variety programs; RAI Due transmitted low-cost news and films of second choice; and RAI Tre consisted of only broadcasting regional news and some non-important movies, within approximately a two-three-hour timeframe. After that,



it was time for the colorful screen to appear, and the audience would just go to bed. However, with Canale5 of Fininvest, life started to change: There was something to watch all day long, from 6:00 A.M. to 1:00 A.M., and the era of TV trash also

inevitably began. Fininvest needed more items to broadcast and started to purchase foreign programs: It was the beginning of “the Japanese Invasion” era ([History Of Italian Culture | 1970 And 1980 | Life In Italy](#)). That Fininvest which previous name was “Telemilano”, as being the local

television for part of Northern Italy, started the Italian globalization journey in 1980 with the acquisition, from Mondadori and Rusconi, of commercial television networks such as Canale5, followed by Italia1 in 1982 and Retequattro in 1984.

Unlike today, it was typical to impatiently wait for Mondays to arrive and watch the best movies ever, and those were normally produced by the American Metro Golden Mayer, therefore non-skippable.

That past image of the lion opening his mouth wide-open and the consequent excited glance of the audience just gives chills; however, it would be preferable to not even



mention the behind of the scenes of this catching and spectacular intro, that “Circus way” of achieving a goal. It could be interesting to mention, instead, that “television studies emerged as an academic field in the 1980s and 1990s under the rubric of Anglo-American cultural studies [...]” (E. Thompson (2020), *How to Watch Television*, New York University Press, Page 14), and foreign Countries would not do anything else but using those to enrich their own ideas. The news, in fact, would finish at 8:30 p.m. in Italy and, afterwards, a cinema critic would share a brief new kind of analysis around the upcoming American movie; then, at 9:00 p.m. sharp, it was “roar” time.

"In audiovisual media, the extension of programming from morning to night has the consequent need of acquiring foreign products, in particular Nord-American, from TV shows to telenovelas, from reportages to serials, which results in factors of cultural colonization."

(Translation of one of the considerations my mom made during my interview to her on Saturday, 24

September 2022)

The above confirms the beginning of globalization. Watching a foreign “text” means experiencing cultural differences: Coca Cola, French fries and hamburgers were not part of Italy until the commercialization of such products; however, contrary to nowadays, films in original language did not exist in Italy; every single production, including the famous Japanese animated cartoons which were widely distributed across Italy, both on public and private TV channels

([History Of Italian Culture | 1970 And 1980 |](#)

[Life In Italy](#)), to entertain children and adults,

was dubbed in Italian; and it was very common to watch films with local accents –

i.e., Roman, Milanese, Neapolitan, no matter their origins. Italia1, for instance,

broadcasted Bim Bum Bam, a Northern-Italian “box-program” consisting of anything

which could entertain children – Arts & Crafts, news, story time, Japanese animated cartoons dubbed in Italian, contact-us conclusions.

With the expansion of globalization, the auteur cinema began to exist. That RAI,

which before used to censure anything imaginable because it was illicit and was against the Italian politics of the moment, was now broadcasting films which carried forward political thoughts that were against politics. Film directors started to produce texts which were outside of the box



according to the culture of the moment. These included scenes of topless women, the typical image of a group of friends joking around a boat while showcasing their buttocks to the crowd at the beach (typical movie scene of that decade). They were films which criticized society, about rape and forced marriage, for instance; texts committed to dealing with topics which, until then, were a total taboo.

The Italian audience of 1981 would not consume videorecorders and videocassettes at



that time, though, but the true symbol of the 80's, the Polaroid, and audiocassettes could already be found, and my home had a myriad of them.



Music-cassettes, which mainly reproduces music and songs of the most recent famous films, were not only sold in the renowned music store of the city but they could also be found in the same wraps of books, daily newspapers, and periodical magazines. Newsstand

owner could now offer more than just the daily newspaper to their customers; and the boom of wealthy newsstand owners began.

With the release of Polaroids, there was not a weekend day trip which could pass without taking any sort of picture, perhaps, next to a Fiat 500 in mustard color or a 127.

During travel, no matter the length, Polaroids would



go alongside with postcards and letters; and locations were only possible to be guessed.

“For a more direct and warm relationship, besides using telephones (at that time the public SIP rotary phone boxes with chips, and rarely private rotary home phones), which would allow you to slightly capture the other interlocutor’s mood, it was common talking to your loved ones and opening your heart by writing letters by hand; and that same letter had to be written over and over again if you wanted to make a ‘bella figura’.” (“good impression”)

(Translation of one of the considerations my mom mentioned during my interview to her on Saturday, 24

September 2022)

In the past, going to “Il Signor Marano”, the well-known store downstairs, to purchase *unbranded* eggs, milk, and deli was normal. However, with commercialization and the new media, showing off branded products was now a necessity, but consumers had to find them elsewhere, making those tiny shops no longer enough. That is when larger distribution centers, the famous supermarkets like A&O and Despar, started to be designed and built. Newspapers and magazines were now displayed in larger centers, and toys (normally, Mattel, Chicco, and Gig) could be purchased while grocery shopping.

The need of stopping at a myriad of different stores, before finally reaching your destination, was almost extinct.

It was an enthusiastic Sunday tradition and warm feeling waking in the morning, dazzled by the Sicilian sun, and delighted by the music coming from the truck of the most extravagant neighbor and seller. “Giuvaanni” (Sicilian for “Giovanni”) used his truck to sell the most recent albums and cassettes, such as those of BeeGees and *Saturday Night Fever*, Berry White, and Gloria Gaynor; and my dad would not skip his weekly routine of gifting the family with the purchase of those amazing entertaining audiocassettes.

This is to say that my parents and relatives did not enjoy large stores; they would rather go to the multiple trusted stores to socialize with the owners, who were typically friends of them growing up, and be gifted with the freshest product samples and enjoy that extra sale.

If we were not home speaking two different Sicilian dialects and Italian while listening to



extremely loud Rock 'n Roll and Dance music in English, coming from my dad's record player, dancing in a mere smoking zone and, therefore, smelling like cigarettes, we were in the family car enjoying that last release from *Grease* while speaking a partial Italian, a mix of Italian and Sicilian, and heading to the family summer or country house.

Cigarette? Yes, cigarettes! There were no rules back then.

I would confirm with sarcasm that I started smoking while still in my mom's womb. Rooms and locals were just foggy; you could barely see the other side of the room, or a movie if you were at the cinema. In the 1980s, no one considered how risky it was, especially for babies. The most important thing was, in fact, to socialize, spend time with family, and enjoy life.

Unlike nowadays, going to the cinema was considered a wealthy activity and, no matter the family income, if you were found at the movie theatre, you were part of that elite.

Loud Sicilian talking while studying was common in my surroundings; and Garzanti or Treccani encyclopedias were fancy to have back then. They filled houses of those who cared about knowledge and the "correct way of speaking", Italian; no matter the family's income, everyone had to own some sort of encyclopedia, a good or bad edition, as that was for the future of one's own soon-to-be Italian-speaking children. Due to their high costs, parents would apply for loans

and pay for it in installments, but it had to be done: We newborns had to speak proper Italian and needed encyclopedias for school and research assignments. Although it was in reality too early to even think about it, there was no mere escape.

Although the technological progress and its consequent “starbene” (feeling good), the genuineness of enjoying little has been lost favoring a solitude of luxury.

In the 1980s life was simple, a period in which there was more time to devote to loved ones, where you would drink coca cola from the same cup as newly friends. Nowadays, on the contrary, and even worse with the pandemic, life is complicated and chaotic; everyone tends to simplify it by using *short* text messages (note the italic), the well-known SMS, and social media but messages are commonly misunderstood.

We live in an extreme situation caused by unsustainable rhythms imposed by globalization; we are all experiencing a robotic communication, which is contemporary brief and virtual but, simultaneously, remarkably multicultural, and somewhat multilingual.

Interviewee

Rosa Consoli (Catania, Italy; 1953), my super mom

References

- [What happened in my birth year?](#)
- [Italy - The economy in the 1980s | Britannica](#)
- [History Of Italian Culture | 1970 And 1980 | Life In Italy](#)
- E. Thompson (2020), *How to Watch Television*, New York University Press, Page 14
- [History Of Italian Culture | 1970 And 1980 | Life In Italy](#)
- [Due modalità contrapposte di comunicare. Confronto tra mass media anni 80 e attuali \(condivisionedemocratica.com\)](#)

Links (Most imaged are linked to an Italian page)

- <https://youtu.be/zphyTvqfGLE>
- [Anni '80 le migliori sigle dei cartoniNerds' Revenge \(nerdsrevenge.it\)](#)
- [BIM BUM BAM trasmissione cult anni 80 90 con curiosità, FOTO e VIDEO \(curiosandonelpassato.altervista.org\)](#)
- [I favolosi anni 80: BIM BUM BAM con il nostro amico Uan \(tuttoanni80.blogspot.com\)](#)