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#GomorraLaSerie: Converging audience and enhanced authorship on twenty-first-century Italian screens

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Based on Roberto Saviano's book *Gomorra* (2006), production of the TV series *Gomorra – La serie* (2014) was met with scepticism as many feared it would glamorise organised crime and, consequently, attract young people toward Camorra affiliation. The series' bleak portrayal of criminals and criminality was offered as a response to such concerns. Despite the preoccupations, *Gomorra – La serie* was hugely successful and, because of its quality, was sold to other countries. In Italy, the series' success can be measured by the popularity of its Twitter hashtag #GomorraLaSerie. Engaged with Henry Jenkins' theories of media convergence and based on a corpus of tweets bearing this official hashtag, this article proposes a quantitative analysis and advances conclusions regarding the Italian TV audience and second-screen viewing practices. Additionally, through a qualitative study of Saviano's tweets about the series, it examines the writer's use of the social media platform as a tool of narrative continuity. Finally, the article highlights a few examples of fan-generated media and concludes with remarks regarding Saviano's problematic position at the centre of a transmedia object.

Keywords: Roberto Saviano; Gomorra; Twitter; television; Camorra; media convergence

In the opening scene of the first episode of *Gomorra – La serie* (2014), the TV series based on Roberto Saviano's successful book *Gomorra* (2006), *Ciro Di Marzio*, a young and rising member of the Savastano Camorra group, gives the older *Attilio* a crash course on social networking. Since *Attilio* is curious about the amount of time that one of his children spends on a computer and is worried about a picture of himself and his wife published on a Facebook profile, he asks *Ciro* about the 'book'. Uninterested in online interactions and feeling his privacy threatened, *Attilio* swiftly concludes the conversation with the threat of depriving the child of the computer. This short scene, set at a petrol station where *Ciro* is filling up a tank with fuel that will be used to set a rival's apartment on fire, introduces two prevalent narrative motifs of the 12 episodes of the first season of the popular television series. First, as is often the case in Camorra movies, it sets the stage for the portrayal of generational differences within the group, with members placed on both sides of a binary divide separating traditional and modern views of the administration of illegal business. Second, the scene provides a first example of the realistic style in which the protagonists will be shown throughout the series.¹ The characters of *Gomorra – La serie*, almost all involved in Camorra-related crimes

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and illicit dealings, are often depicted while engaged in mundane conversations and everyday situations. The life of a camorrista is not much different from that of everyone else: they have families, friends, and teenage children who spend far less time doing homework than messaging on Facebook.²

This opening scene, additionally, implicitly serves a third meta-narrative purpose. It appeals to audience members who are proficient with social networking and reminds them about the online presence of the series. While two 50-minute episodes of *Gomorra – La serie* were broadcast back-to-back on the premium satellite television channel Sky Atlantic on a weekly basis, they were also available for subscribing online viewers on the Sky web portal. The television network also announced and advertised the series on its official online channels: a website, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account. Finally, Sky proposed an official hashtag, that is, a thematic designation that Twitter users can adopt to converge around a topic. The hashtag #*GomorraLaSerie* collected 32,700 tweets during the six-week broadcasting period (6 May 2014–10 June 2014) and entered into the social networking tool's trending list from the broadcast of the first episode.³

This article focuses particularly on the series' echo on Twitter. *Gomorra – La serie*, with its resounding online presence, is the most recent example of an Italian TV series produced by Sky that provides a case study for the emerging phenomena of audience participation and multimedia production. By examining the audience convergence in the official hashtag of the TV series, I show the ways Italian spectators are increasingly engaging with television programmes through social media so that it is possible to evaluate the growing adoption of second-screen practices in Italy. Moreover, by closely reading Saviano's messages about the TV drama based on his literary work, which blends investigative journalism and first-person testimonial account, I explain how the author occupied a privileged position within these Twitter interactions. Saviano's involvement in the creation of the series, his celebrity status within social media circles, and longstanding role as an anti-mafia public advocate allowed him to pursue narrative goals exceeding the fictional world of *Gomorra – La serie*. Thus, in addition to a small-scale quantitative analysis of the audience engagement with and through the social networking site, I use a qualitative approach that focuses on the employment of the official hashtag for storytelling purposes. My intention is to show how, for some of *Gomorra – La serie*'s spectators, Twitter became a source of additional, and sometimes alternative, narration. After an overview of the changes Twitter brings to the practice of viewing and producing television content (and in particular in the Italian context), I examine the ways in which the audience interacted using the official hashtag during the last four episodes of the series. Then, I explore the tweets of Roberto Saviano, a Twitter user since April 2008. Finally, in my conclusions, I consider how the hashtag #*GomorraLaSerie* persisted after the end of the first season and how it transformed into a tool to promote fan-generated media content based on the series.

Twitter and television: convergence and second screen practices

In 2010, reporting in the *New York Times* that the Library of Congress would start archiving Twitter messages, Steve Lohr suggested that users will likely become more mindful in their writing and sharing of expressions. He then sarcastically concluded: 'People thinking before they post on Twitter: now that would be historic indeed' (Lohr 2010, B2). This caustic comment indicates the widespread scepticism surrounding the messaging service, launched in 2006. BBC News summarised the criticisms of the

platform in 2009, declaring that 40% of the messages sent via Twitter amount to 'pointless babble'.⁴ Yet the number of Twitter users is on the rise, with 284 million active accounts using more than 35 languages and 77% of the users located outside the United States.⁵ While the characteristic 140-character messages are still used for mundane conversations and mindless reporting of everyday activities, Twitter has become an open space for debates in politics, sports and entertainment, a tool for real-time reporting, and a useful news outlet in both local and global emergencies. Twitter's credibility as a global communication and information tool considerably increased following the 2009 Iranian elections and the 2011 uprisings labelled as the Arab Spring, events that were tweeted with hashtags such as #Iranelection, #Egypt, #Libya, and #Bahrain. Subsequently, scholars of various disciplines have researched the platform for large and small-scale studies using Twitter-based datasets.⁶

Communication and New Media scholars have turned to Twitter to reflect on the ways in which it is changing the media landscape in terms of production practices, advertising strategies and stardom. Furthermore, Twitter has provided a new entry point for the study of the audience, or, in Jay Rosen's terms, 'the people formerly known as the audience' (Rosen 2012, 13).⁷ The idea of 'convergence' introduced by Henry Jenkins in his 2006 seminal work *Convergence Culture* is still useful to explain the current state of the media landscape and the interconnections between new media objects facilitated by Internet technologies. According to Jenkins, what characterises the contemporary media system is 'the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want' (Jenkins 2006, 2). The idea of convergence is particularly appropriate when discussing television audiences and Twitter interactions. Television spectators turn to Twitter to find information about their favourite TV shows, connect with actors through a Twitter follow or a direct message, and even access additional media such as videos, interviews, and pictures provided by other users through external links. Mainly, however, television audience members migrate to Twitter to share with others their thoughts about what they are viewing. Spectators engaging in Twitter conversations about a TV drama, breaking news coverage or a major sporting event connect with each other in a new form of public sociability. Ruth Deller aptly notes how Twitter has become for media scholars and operators (producers, writers and celebrities) a way to 'witness "watercooler" TV as it happens' (Deller 2011, 228). TV producers in particular, by advertising and sustaining online conversations through Twitter or other online platforms, increase the possibility of a show becoming a media event with an even larger audience. As Nick Couldry explains, a media event needs to possess the quality of 'liveness', which 'does not require that every element of it be broadcast live, but rather the belief that, taken together, the media consumption provides shared, but privileged access to the event as it unfolds' (Couldry 2002, 286).⁸ Twitter allows the media to construct a liveness effect for media products, 'an assumption of togetherness' that increases the spectators' engagement and the visibility of a show across different media outlets (Couldry 2002, 286).

The American television landscape provides numerous examples of TV series seeking to engage audiences through Twitter and other social media: *Heroes* (2006–2010), *Gossip Girl* (2007–2012), and more recently *Game of Thrones* (2011–present), to name a few. A telling example is the Fox television series *Glee* (2009–present). The show, centred on the high school choir *New Directions*, offers more than one way for spectators to access media content related to the series and to connect with other fans: a website, extracts of the singing performances from the broadcast episodes on

YouTube, competitions on social media, and interactions on Twitter with actors and producers during the broadcast. Of course, this massive online presence, in addition to encouraging spectators' active participation and a deeper engagement with the show's content, is constructed to facilitate the advertising and marketing of the series and to extend the show well beyond its weekly broadcasting on the screen.⁹

The rise of second-screen viewing practices, that is, the growing habit of having a second screen (a tablet, laptop or mobile phone) available while watching television (Giglietto and Selva 2014) intensified the number and scope of interactions happening in real-time during a broadcast. This complicates even further the converging media landscape as casual conversations about TV shows merge with new and existing fandom practices and with ubiquitous online advertising strategies. The 2014 Academy Award ceremony provided a clear example of how much players in the television industry are aware of the phenomenon of live back-channelling and exploit it to increase spectatorship. During the first hour of the broadcast, the host Ellen DeGeneres asked actor Bradley Cooper to take a group picture, a 'selfie', with her and other celebrities, including Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts and Brad Pitt. The picture was then posted on DeGeneres' Twitter account with the objective of obtaining even more retweets than a 2012 picture of President Barack Obama hugging his wife after his re-election (retweeted over 750,000 times). The celebrity-filled picture broke the record in a matter of minutes and was retweeted over a million times during the Academy Award ceremony broadcast. It even caused a short disruption of Twitter services, allowing DeGeneres to boast: 'We broke Twitter!'.

The Italian context and the converging audience of *Gomorra – La serie*

In Italy, Twitter is one of the most used social media tools among the nation's 35.5 million internet users. The April–June 2014 GlobalWebIndex report shows that 45.7% of Italian internet users have a Twitter account and that 16.4% of those are active users, that is, they have used Twitter at least once during the previous month. Besides the data, the multiplying hashtags devoted to TV shows and Twitter accounts of Italian celebrities (such as the soccer player Mario Balotelli or the TV personality Fiorello, two of the most followed accounts) corroborate the perception that Twitter and television practices are becoming more and more interconnected.¹⁰ Increasingly, television producers use Twitter to advertise their new shows, and sports commentators and political talk show hosts alike propose official hashtags for aggregating spectators' comments. Such audience interactions often become part of the show itself, either in dedicated moments throughout the broadcast or by showing selected messages across the bottom of the screen.

The use of online media channels for promotional purposes and for increasing the opportunities for audience participation is a major aspect of Sky television productions and broadcasting strategies. *Quo vadis, baby?* is the first example of an Italian Sky series opening to online marketing and to spectators' engagement through social media. This 2008 series allowed spectators to interact with each other and with the content's creators. In doing so, the series extended its promotional reach beyond the usual advertising channels (i.e. TV ads, posters and interviews in specialised magazines). A blog, Myspace and Facebook account for the main characters, and backstage pictures and videos published on Flickr and YouTube were all part of *Quo vadis, baby?*'s multimedia presence, helping transform the show into a media event.¹¹

Besides the online presence of this and other Sky TV products, such as *Boris* (2007–2008; 2010), a distinctive style and recognised formal quality characterise the original series proposed by this pay operator, which the spectators perceive as refreshing the Italian television landscape. *Romanzo criminale* (2008–2010) is the series that most renewed the Italian audience’s interest in national TV productions. As with *Quo vadis, baby?* and *Gomorra – La serie*, *Romanzo criminale* is part of an extended text that also includes a book and a film.¹² Aldo Grasso notes how ‘high levels of experimentation in writing, style, and expressive techniques’ characterise *Romanzo criminale*, which makes this Sky product ‘one of the best results of the Italian series productions’ (Grasso 2013, 98–99). The success of the series, with its 400,000 spectators on average per episode during the first season, can be measured by the large number of online interactions, particularly on Facebook, around the content of the episodes.¹³ These conversations between fans, often in real-time with the broadcast, seem to foreshadow those happening on Twitter for *Gomorra – La serie*.

Gomorra – La serie, highly advertised on Twitter by Sky Atlantic, was in fact capable of generating thousands of tweets not only bearing the official #GomorraLaSerie hashtag but also fan-generated hashtags based on the characters’ names, such as, #DonnaImma and #GennySavastano. Such online presence makes the series the latest and one of the most resounding cases of the synergistic relationship between Italian television and Twitter.¹⁴ Furthermore, it offers the opportunity to examine the complex layering of interactions surrounding a contemporary Italian TV production, including fan-generated conversations and advertising strategies. A quantitative study of a sample of tweets mentioning the official hashtag permits an exploration of the current state of the converging Italian television audience and confirms the existence of second-screen practices among Italian spectators. To study the interactions between *Gomorra – La serie* and its audience members, I collected over 28,000 tweets with the hashtag #GomorraLaSerie between 29 May 2014 and 2 July 2014. Within this date range, Sky

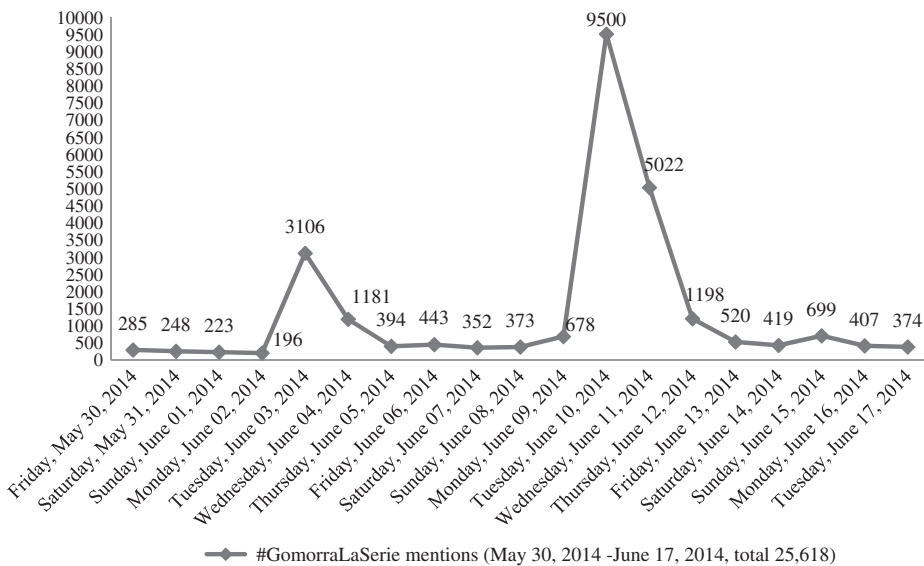


Figure 1 Chart with the number of tweets mentioning #GomorraLaSerie (30 May 2014–17 June 2014). Data collected with Scraperwiki.com.

Atlantic broadcast the last four episodes of the first season of the series on 3 June 2014 and 10 June 2014. Figure 1 shows the number of Twitter messages on a daily basis between 30 May and 17 June, that is, one week after the end of the first season. The first data that the chart shows comprise the increased number of messages in correspondence with the TV broadcast of episodes nine and 10 on 3 June 2014 and of the last two episodes on 10 June 2014.

The number of tweets and users is limited, certainly smaller than the entire *Gomorra – La serie* audience (with an average of 700,000 spectators throughout the first season, which is a record-breaking result for a series on the Sky pay-to-view channels), let alone the whole Italian TV audience. Thus, while the analysis of these tweets does not permit broad generalisations, it nonetheless indicates the existence of an Italian television audience interested in using Twitter as part of their entertainment and viewing experience. The higher number of tweets on the days of the television screenings compared with the number of tweets on other days also denotes the growing phenomenon of second-screen users among television spectators. Considering that *Gomorra – La serie* was broadcast on Sky Atlantic with no commercial interruptions, it is possible to deduce that spectators interacting on Twitter during the show were using their second screens to comment on the narrative developments rather than to keep entertained during interruptions in the broadcast. Figure 2, summarising an analysis of the messages on 10 June 2014, details even more clearly the characteristics of this practice. Of the 9500 tweets mentioning *#GomorraLaSerie*, 64.7% were sent during the two hours of the show's broadcast, between 21:00 and 23:00, with a peak of 3283 messages during the season finale between 22:00 and 23:00.

Another detail that emerges from a closer analysis of the 10 June tweets is that, although throughout the day Twitter users sent retweets more than original tweets and direct replies to other users' messages, the number of retweets during the two hours of the show decreased significantly. Twitter users opt for a retweet, readily identifiable through an icon automatically placed on top of the message, for the communicative purposes of validating somebody else's point or spreading rapidly the information provided in an original tweet. For instance, among the most retweeted messages

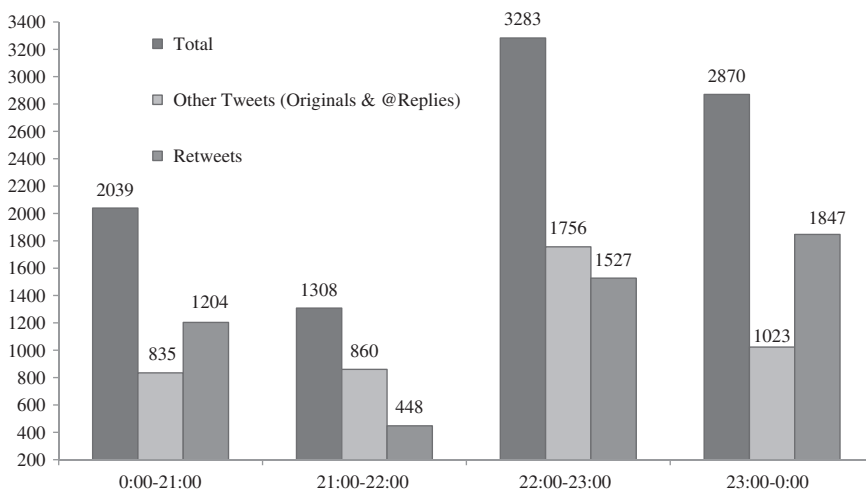


Figure 2 Chart detailing the numbers and types of tweets per time of day mentioning *#GomorraLaSerie* on 10 June 2014. Data collected with ScraperWiki.com.

containing the hashtag #GomorraLaSerie is a tweet by Roberto Saviano with a link to the show's webpage where episodes can be viewed online. Only a closer qualitative analysis of all the 10 June messages would allow for a more precise catalogue of the original tweets, the replies (messages sent directly in response to another user's tweet), and the retweets regarding *Gomorra – La serie*, and permit specific conclusions regarding the communicative practices and intentions of Twitter users. While such analysis would be beyond the scope of the present study, it is possible to argue preliminarily that, based on the drop in retweet messages during the broadcast of *Gomorra – La serie*, spectators tended to use Twitter to express their personal points of view and share directly their emotional responses to the show. The count of the retweets and of the other types of messages sent on 3 June, that is, the day of the previous week's broadcast, shows that this tendency was consistent, at least during the last four episodes of the season.

Roberto Saviano, social media and the defense of *Gomorra – La serie*

Among the hundreds of Twitter users who added the #GomorraLaSerie hashtag to their messages, Roberto Saviano was the one most followed and received the most retweets and mentions, even more than the actors in the series. The writer's use of the series' official hashtag permits us to better understand the concept of convergence when it comes to television production. As I will show, in fact, a qualitative study of Saviano's messages reveals that he used Twitter to continue the narration that he had started through his collaboration with the writers of *Gomorra – La serie*.

Before being involved in the production of the TV series based on his *Gomorra* (2006), Saviano participated in the writing of the screenplays for the theatrical rendition (2007) and the movie (2008) of the same name with, respectively, Mario Galdini and Matteo Garrone. Along with Stefano Sollima, he is credited as the writer and creator of the TV show. Saviano became a Twitter user in April 2008 when he used the social networking platform to announce his participation in the television show *Annozero*, a popular talk show then hosted by Michele Santoro on the RaiDue national channel. The Neapolitan writer was not new to the online world. His first encounter with web-writing practices was with the collective blog 'Nazione Indiana' where he published articles mixing documentary material with fictional style starting in 2003. After the success of his book *Gomorra* and subsequent death threats from high-ranking Camorra criminals, Saviano had to go into hiding and live under police protection. In his subsequent public appearances, the writer has always made clear that this condition of limited freedom is cause for frustration and, at times, remorse for his bestselling book's blatant accusations of Camorra crimes. While his social and public appearances became increasingly restricted and controlled, Saviano's online voice grew exponentially. A few months after opening his Twitter account, Saviano joined Facebook; a website and a YouTube channel complete his online presence.

Today, when the writer publishes articles in Italian and international newspapers, such as *La Repubblica*, the *Washington Post* and *El País*, or when he releases an interview or appears on television shows, he uses his multiple online accounts to direct fans to his work through links to articles or videos. Saviano adopted similar advertising techniques, which are not uncommon among cinema celebrities and television personalities who are also social media users, for *Gomorra – La serie*. An official Sky Atlantic advertising image of the series, bearing the schedule time and the hashtag #Gomorra-LaSerie, became, for instance, his cover picture on both Facebook and Twitter. Through numerous tweets, Saviano sent followers to his YouTube video channel to view

backstage videos and a filmed conversation with Marco D'Amore, the series' leading actor. In addition to these more conventional social media uses, however, the author first employed Twitter before or during the early weeks of the broadcast to defend his narrative work, then started messaging about the events depicted in the series explaining how they relate to real events and the Neapolitan Camorra. In other words, Saviano used Twitter as a tool to enhance his authorship and extend his narrative space beyond the screenwriting phase.

Before examining closely these specific uses of Twitter, to better understand the context which engendered them, it is appropriate to highlight the controversies that accompanied much of the production of *Gomorra – La serie* and that, since the success of Saviano's book *Gomorra*, have continued to focus on its author. *Gomorra – La serie* is set between the destitute Neapolitan neighbourhood of Scampia and other desolate areas of the region. Many opposed the TV series' production because it would once again show the worst aspects of Neapolitan and Italian society. Echoing some of the comments expressed regarding Garrone's film, critics of the series feared the social effects of showing excessive violence and glamorising criminals. In the past, similar criticisms have been expressed about other dramatic television productions and films depicting the mafia, from *La piovra* to *Romanzo criminale*.¹⁵ The producers of *Gomorra – La serie* responded by emphasising that the series' setting extended well beyond Naples and stressed how Camorra crime was depicted as it reached other Italian cities and even other European countries. Similarly, Saviano, who has often been accused of profiting from the toils of Neapolitan people who suffer amidst widespread Camorra criminality, emphasised how, while devoted to realistic representation, the series did not intend to portray Neapolitans, but rather the criminal life of Camorra members.

During the broadcast, Twitter became a space for continuing the debate over some of the dangers of the series: the denigration of Naples and risk of inducing young spectators to emulate the series' characters. A few days before the first episode, on 3 May, for instance, Saviano retweeted a picture message originally posted by Marco D'Amore. In the picture, the actor who plays *Ciro* stands by a poster in Naples, a poster that rebukes *Gomorra – La serie* for disparaging the city and its people. As the poster message concluded with a condemning 'Shame on you all!', D'Amore's tweet asserted that he stood behind his work and had nothing to be ashamed of. A bit less confrontationally, Saviano's strategy, much as in the case of his book, was to point out the real historical basis of the series and the connection to the real underground world of Camorra crime. Thus, on 6 May, two minutes after the beginning of the first episode, Saviano declared in a tweet: '#GomorraLaSerie begins. The gaze of Stefano Solima has described a world. A world that exists. A world that is ours.' While not acknowledging his role in the creation of the series, Saviano is much interested in the narrative power of the show and in its portrayal of real events. This connection between fiction and reality, which as in Garrone's film is made real through the visual representations on a screen and not just through words on a page, is at the centre of Saviano's work; the author defends his narrative choices in the name of the urgency of revealing the truth of Camorra crimes.

Following the popular and critical success of the series, much of the controversy decreased. Consequently, Saviano's comments on Twitter with the official hashtag became a way of adding details to the scenes and stories of *Gomorra – La serie*. The author takes advantage of the converging audience, which follows the series on TV and his Twitter account, for a sort of continuing narrative that develops between screens

and media. Moving their gaze between their living room's television and the screens of their mobile devices, or switching between windows on their laptops, spectators can have the full narrative experience of Roberto Saviano explaining the Neapolitan Camorra. Although this use of Twitter allows the series to extend between media and communication channels, I am purposely avoiding Jenkins' 'transmedia storytelling' category because I do not consider *Gomorra – La serie* to be a full-fledged transmedia cultural object (Jenkins 2006, 93–97). Rather than constituting, as in transmedia productions such as *The Matrix* or the *Harry Potter* franchises, discrete and independent narrative elements contributing to a macro-story, Saviano's tweets, while adding characteristics of a transmedia object to the TV series, can be categorised more precisely as examples of narrative continuity.¹⁶

@robertosaviano and narrative continuity

At the end of the fourth episode, on 13 May, Saviano tweeted 'Episode four: the massacre of Castel Volturno. To narrate it was painful.' The audience had just witnessed the killing of many black men in a public café. Executing an order from Pietro Savastano, the imprisoned head of the Savastano Camorra group, the killings are brutal, and in the show they are vividly represented on screen. Saviano links the scenes directly to the killing of seven people in Castel Volturno (near Caserta) on 18 September 2008. In *Gomorra – La serie* the massacre is organised in retaliation for the difficulties the Savastano group had in dealing with the local Nigerian group in the drug-trafficking business. During the episode, following the incarceration of Pietro Savastano, his son Gennaro and the other leading members of the group are unable to come to a compromise with the Nigerian boss, who requests a bigger share of the profits. His group is in fact in full control of a small territory and, in exchange for such freedom, gives the Savastanos a percentage of all the profits from the drug trade. A similar arrangement existed in Castel Volturno between local Nigerian mafia groups and the powerful Casalesi clan, precipitating the 2008 massacre. With his tweet, Saviano seems to encourage the audience to fully experience *Gomorra – La serie* in its documentary aspects. While enjoying the TV show and reading Saviano's comments, spectators can gain a better understanding of the dynamics of the Camorra underworld. The reference to the actual massacre of Castel Volturno raises the spectators' awareness of the historical events detailed on screen. For instance, as in the 2008 killings, the shooting happens in a public place (a bar in the TV series, a clothing shop in the real incident) and innocent immigrants are the targets of the killers. Ciro Di Marzio and his men, additionally, wear Italian Police uniforms, exactly like the Casalesi members behind the Castel Volturno massacre.

Homicides and drug-trafficking are not the only crimes at the centre of *Gomorra – La serie*. As mentioned, the episodes transport the spectators to other Italian cities and other European countries. In a 20 May tweet, introducing episodes five and six and completing the narrative structure of the show, Saviano writes '#GomorraLaSerie begins. Tonight, Milan and Barcelona, and not only Naples. It is not defamation to narrate Camorra's power. A power that has no borders.' While emphasising the series' goal of showing the extension of the Camorra's business beyond Naples, this message echoes a previous controversy reported by the media between the writer and, among other northern Italian politicians, the former Interior Minister Roberto Maroni. In 2010, during the television show 'Vieni via con me', Saviano talked about the mafia's expansion into Northern Italy, referring in particular to the Calabria-based 'Ndrangheta and

its contacts with Northern League politicians. Maroni, one of the leaders of the Northern League party, publicly protested against the accusation and obtained, the following week, airtime on the show to talk about the Interior Ministry's fight against mafia. Saviano's words, however, were later confirmed by judicial investigations, which seriously compromised the credibility of the Northern League party among its electoral base.

Episode eight of the series focuses on this connection between Camorra and politicians. In this episode, Gennaro Savastano convinces a young local politician to run for mayoral office in the city of Giugliano. In manipulating the local elections, the Savastanos' goal is to have a foothold in the administrative offices and control all future investments related to the construction business in the area. The audience follows Gennaro's attempts to help the young Michele Casillo's electoral campaign by corrupting potential allies and financing it through seemingly innocuous fundraising events. In the end, however, the elections are decided through the orchestration of electoral fraud. In a tweet on 27 May, while the fraud is being enacted on screen, Saviano writes 'The inner workings of the rotating ballot paper for the first time shown on television #GomorraLaSerie.'¹⁷ Saviano had already talked of this type of electoral fraud in an article for *La Repubblica* titled 'Mani mafiose sulla democrazia' (Saviano 2010). Later in 2013, borrowing the name of a judicial investigation, he called it 'the rotating ballot paper' system in another article for the same newspaper titled 'Quel voto di scambio che uccide la democrazia' (Saviano 2013). *Gomorra – La serie* thus powerfully illustrates a fraudulent electoral practice that Saviano had already explained. His tweet functions as a narrative reminder by highlighting the name of the specific fraud and linking it to previous discussions and to its employment in public elections. In the episode of *Gomorra – La serie*, two of the men closest to Gennaro Savastano take possession of a ballot paper after violently menacing a voting station's election returns officer. One of the group members marks a cross over Casillo's name and gives the ballot paper to a voter. In the enclosed voting booth, the latter places the blank ballot paper received upon entering the voting station in his pocket and casts his vote with the pre-marked ballot paper. To complete his task, he takes the blank ballot paper to Savastano's man outside and receives a hundred euro bill that the camorrista extracts from a huge roll of banknotes. With this system, applied methodically with the help of other voters, Casillo wins the Giugliano elections just as other local administrators, according to Italian investigators, capture administrative seats to serve mafia interests.

A 3 June tweet provides a final example of the narrative continuity between the visual tale of *Gomorra – La serie* and Saviano's Twitter feed. In commenting on the ninth episode of the series, while Ciro Di Marzio is torturing a young woman on screen, Saviano writes '#GomorraLaSerie the pain narrated is inspired by the horror they caused, that Mina Verde has experienced.' Saviano had already told the story of Gelsomina Verde in his bestseller *Gomorra*. Having witnessed the discovery of Gelsomina's body on 21 November 2004, he offered some gruesome details in the chapter devoted to the 2004–05 'Secondigliano War' (Saviano 2006, 95–99). The 22-year-old woman was abducted, beaten, killed, and then burned inside her car. The men of the Di Lauro clan who killed her believed that she could reveal the whereabouts of her former boyfriend, Gennaro Notturmo, member of the rival 'Scissionisti' (Secessionists). *Gomorra – La serie* adds an even more vivid representation of the tragedy with scenes reminiscent of Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). In this episode, Ciro Di Marzio, who is now ousted from the most important business of the Savastanos, orders the killing of a man close to a rival group without his boss's knowledge. His objective

is to create resentment between Salvatore Conte, the head of the rival group, and Gennaro Savastano and, presumably, attempt to take advantage of the ensuing chaos. Danielino, a teenager who started working for Ciro during the previous episode, executes the homicide. The plan goes wrong when Danielino, scared after the shooting, goes into hiding rather than reporting back to his boss. Ciro then takes Danielino's young girlfriend, and after torturing her to learn where Danielino is hiding, kills her. This act, which engenders a series of plot twists during the following three episodes ending the first season, is brutally represented on screen. Saviano, with his tweet's narrative addition, makes sure that no visual sign of cruelty is left without a historical referent.

The author, adopting the role of an enhanced narrator, continued to offer details through his Twitter account during the closing episodes of the series. Saviano was particularly active during the last two episodes on 10 June. In addition to thanking all the important members of the TV production and the three directors of the series (Francesca Comencini, Claudio Cupellini, and Stefano Sollima), he reminded the audience that what they were experiencing was a re-enactment of the 2004–05 Secondigliano feud, with youngsters chatting about the best 'ways of dying' and family members offered as collateral during crucial meetings. After the end of the first season, Saviano returned to Twitter to advertise his writing and public appearances and to comment on world events. Additionally, though, he continued to use the hashtag #GomorraLaSerie, particularly for endorsing fan-related media production. In the next section, before some final considerations, I will talk of specific instances of such grassroots productions.

Conclusion: #GomorraLaSerie beyond *Gomorra – La serie*

In his influential essay 'Quentin Tarantino's *Star Wars*? Grassroots Creativity Meets the Media Industry' in *Convergence Culture*, Jenkins explains that the web provides the perfect infrastructure for sharing popular culture re-productions that in the past would have had a limited audience, if any. Talking about 'grassroots creativity', Jenkins underlines the potential relationships, conflictual or collaborative, between media producers and fans who are themselves producers of media objects.¹⁸ In the case of *Gomorra – La serie* fan creations, Twitter provided the ideal platform not only for sharing with other spectators, but also for getting immediate feedback from the TV show's cast members and production crew.

The account @GomorraLaSerie, an unofficial channel started by 'Supporters of *Gomorra – La serie*' the day of the series' premiere, is the first example of a fan-based production of cultural material related to the show. The people behind the account used the 140 characters and the official hashtag for disseminating quotes from the show, sending encouraging messages to the actors, and posting images of the broadcast. They also retweeted messages from other Italian celebrities commenting on the show and from more official channels related to *Gomorra – La serie*, such as the Twitter accounts of Sky Atlantic, the cast members and Saviano. While not proposing creative examples of media productions, this account, with its 10,000 followers, became a hub for conversations about the series and a radiating centre for additional materials related to the show: backstage images, interviews, actors' appearances in other performances, and so on.

Another Twitter account, @GomorraVignette, offers 'humorous cartoons' made of caricatures, photomontages and fake Facebook conversations with fictional accounts of the series' characters. Mostly active during the show's broadcasting period, the account provides an example of fan-generated media objects that represent, as Jenkins notes,

‘unauthorized and unanticipated ways of relating’ to *Gomorra – La serie* (Jenkins 2006, 133). Basing their works on the main characters’ personality traits, the producers of @GomorraVignette feed on the success of the series and add comedic twists to the original narrative.

Similarly humorous, the videos produced by the collective ‘The Jackal’ and titled *Gli effetti di ‘Gomorra – La serie’ sulla gente* are much more detailed in their quality. Expert creators of viral videos with large numbers of fans on their online communication channels (over 30,000 followers on Twitter and even more on their YouTube channels), this group of Neapolitan media producers created three successful short videos in which one Mr Cavastano, whose only way of talking is through quotes of *Gomorra – La serie*, is involved in surreal everyday conversations with his pizza deliverer in the first episode, with his barista in the second, and with a waiter in the third. Following the success of their videos, ‘The Jackal’ also created a line of T-shirts with Mr Cavastano’s face and various quotes from the show.

Gomorra – La serie’s producers’ response to these grassroots experiments denotes more than just a ‘collaborative approach’, to put it in Jenkins’ terms (Jenkins 2006, 167). Some of the actors of the series, and Saviano himself, endorsed these creative media content productions with their tweets and helped their success by retweeting them. Saviano particularly enjoyed ‘The Jackal’ videos and their capturing of the popular appeal of the slang used by the series’ characters. Salvatore Esposito, the actor who plays Gennaro Savastano, even participated in the second episode of *Gli effetti di ‘Gomorra – La serie’ sulla gente*, while Roberto Saviano appeared in the last one. Further confirming the existence of second-screen users, these examples also demonstrate that some of those users watching and tweeting were doing more than just recording appreciation for the series. A privileged user like Saviano used Twitter to fill the gap between fictional representations and real events; other users, more or less skilled with online media productions, imagined and promoted new ways of creatively engaging with *Gomorra – La serie*’s content. All of them, in any case, freely entered into an advertising process in which self-promotion, as in the case of ‘The Jackal’, and Sky Atlantic’s promotion of the series blurrily intersect.

Placed at the centre of the production and advertising processes of *Gomorra – La serie*, Saviano’s position becomes ever more problematic. In addition to the transmedial characteristics of the TV series achieved through the use of the official hashtag and of the fan productions, one could argue that, although probably inadvertently, over time, *Gomorra* is itself transforming into a transmedia object. With a book, a theatre piece, a movie and a TV series, and adding the countless articles, interviews and television appearances on the topic, *Gomorra*, almost like a brand, crosses media and has continued to captivate audiences since 2006. Saviano’s stories recompose and popularise the complex topic of the Camorra as in a puzzle. There is certainly merit in creating world-wide awareness of the dangers of organised crime. Yet, while I am not among the harsh critics of Saviano’s works, I wonder if the multiplying of *Gomorra*-related content, including fan-generated products and online advertising campaigns, corresponds to a trivialisation of the problem rather than a promotion of compelling responses. Saviano’s use of the #GomorraLaSerie hashtag for drawing connections between the fictional world of the series and historical reality seems to address, albeit unsystematically, this issue. Nonetheless, while acknowledging the quality of *Gomorra – La serie*, we are left to ponder whether the effects of *Gomorra*’s converging narratives result solely in ridiculing laughter, or whether they can lead to more profound acts of civic engagement.

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Notes

1. As I will show, Roberto Saviano talks about the series' realistic style in terms of its connections to documented events of the history of Camorra and of the verisimilitude of the characters for their language, methods, and criminal behaviours. While a full discussion of the series' realist representation as a result of narrative and visual conventions goes beyond the scope of this article, I note how Saviano's 2006 book and the subsequent movie directed by Matteo Garrone in 2008 engendered a lively debate regarding realism and the documentary value of both works. See, for instance, Benedetti et al. (2008), Casadei (2010), Poggi (2011), Serkowska (2011, particularly XVIII–XXVI), and Antonello (2012).
2. In a *Variety!* online review, *Gomorra – La serie* has been equated to the American series *The Wire* (2002–2008), probably because of both series' focus on the drug-dealing business (Vimercati 2014). The Italian series, however, particularly for the everydayness of its characters and their conversations, can also be connected to *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) (Willis 2002; Toscano 2014).
3. The data regarding the hashtag #GomorraLa Serie were reported online by the Italian news agency Ansa on 11 June 2014 (Ansa 2014; retrieved in February 2015). On Twitter's homepage, users find a list of 'Trends', that is, a series of hashtags and keywords which are currently being used in large numbers of tweets. By default, this list is tailored to the users' interests, determined by their location and by whom they follow. The trending list can also be set to display popular topics among users of a certain location.
4. The BBC News article was based on a Pear Analytics study of 2000 messages in English, retrieved over a week. The study is available here: <https://www.pearanalytics.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Twitter-Study-August-2009.pdf> (retrieved in February 2015). For the BBC report, see <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8204842.stm> (retrieved in February 2015). The study was the source of other similar news reports by CNBC, NBC, and the *Daily Mail*.
5. 'Twitter Facts' available here <https://about.twitter.com/company>, retrieved in February 2015.
6. For a succinct overview of the ways in which Twitter has been studied since 2006, in parallel with a narrative of the evolution of the tool, see Rogers (2014).
7. The definition was originally posted on Rosen's blog and is available here: http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_fmr.html.
8. In a subsequent article, Couldry (2004) introduces the idea of 'online liveness' to describe the online co-presence of spectators (356).
9. For a thorough analysis of the 'Glee case', see Benecchi and Colapinto (2011). See also Vellar (2011) for a study of *Glee* and an Italian audience.
10. See Grasso and Scaglioni (2010) for an overview of the practices of convergence in the context of Italian television.
11. See Benecchi (2013) for more details about *Quo vadis, baby?*, particularly regarding its online presence (126–129).
12. The 2004 novel *Quo vadis, baby?* was the basis of the 2005 film of the same title directed by Gabriele Salvatores. Similarly, Michele Placido directed *Romanzo criminale* in 2005 after the 2002 publication of the novel with the same title by Giancarlo De Cataldo.
13. D'Aloia (2010) accurately describes the audience response to *Romanzo criminale*. He refers specifically to the online reception on Facebook (204–209).

14. Twitter Italy ranked the hashtag #GomorraLaSerie third in the list of trending topics in the category 'TV Series' for the year 2014 (data available here <https://blog.twitter.com/it/2014/2014-l-anno-su-twitter>, in the Livia Iacolare's blog entry '2014: l'anno su Twitter'). The first hashtag of this category was #BraccialettiRossi, a Rai production that pursued aggressive online marketing strategies, targeting its teenager audience with an app and a video contest. As part of the contest, messages with the official hashtag and links to the fans' video were posted automatically on Facebook and Twitter.
15. See, for instance, Nespoli (2013) for criticisms of *Gomorra – La serie's* violence, and Caprara (1995) and Maltese (2000) for the polemics surrounding *La Piovra*. See also Fumarola (2008) on *Romanzo criminale* and Giancarlo De Cataldo's explanations of the importance of representing evil in fictional works.
16. Jenkins's entire chapter "Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* and Transmedia Storytelling," in *Convergence Culture*, 93–130, is relevant for the understanding of 'trans-media storytelling'. I will return to this category in my conclusions.
17. As another Twitter user aptly noted, this kind of fraud was also shown in Gabriele Salvatores' 1993 *Sud*.
18. For Jenkins' full discussion of fan-generated media, see the chapter "Quentin Tarantino's *Star Wars*? Grassroots Creativity Meets the Media Industry", in *Convergence Culture*, 131–168.

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