

The Role Played by Italy in Media History: Its Historical Problems and Its Recent Innovations in Journalism and Television World

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Abstract

Italy has had a great importance in terms of media in journalism from the middle ages to the present. You can see in this article that, the news letters which were used to inform people about the wars, kings, the important events in Rome Empires. These letters were hanging the city's walls of the Empire's in those days. In 21st century, it has established another empire in Italy which is called "Berlusconi's Media Empire!". I will explain that all the media history of Italy from the Middle Age to the 21st century.

Key words: Italian media history; Journalism; Television

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INTRODUCTION

Excellent reporters and well-known newspapers maintain that Italian journalism has been a model to emulate. Yet, in order to understand the importance of Italy in media history we must take some steps back. According to Alexander Andrews (Andrews, 1859, p. 56), "Ancient Rome is the birthplace of the newspaper, because Rome was the first place to have public newspaper: under Julius Caesar and his successors, a daily record of political news and acts was recorded at Rome and distributed to the

Roman colonies" (Berry, 2008, p. 20). It is a matter of fact that in the 1st century before Christ, Julius Caesar ordered these handwritten news bulletins to be posted each day in the Forum, a large public space carved on metal or stone. The "Acta Diurna" to some extent filled the place of the modern newspaper and of the government gazette, introducing the expression "publicare et propagare", which means "make public and propagate". This expression was set in the end of the texts and proclaimed a release to both Roman citizens and non-citizens. After the empire collapsed, news dissemination depended on traveler's tales, songs, ballads, letters, and governmental dispatches.

A gradual innovation begun only in the 15th century when Filippo Castaldi, doctor and man of letters, received some Chinese mobile characters as a dowry from his future wife, Caterina da Pola, Marco Polo's niece. As 'Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia' citizen, Castaldi began this tradition firstly with glass characters then with wood pads used in a printing press in 1426, twenty-two years before Gutenberg's metal characters. Towards the middle of the 15th century, Venice produced almost the half of the printed books in Italy, becoming the most important European centre about printing art. In the same city, during the first years of 1500, Aldo Manuzio published his "enchiridia" (pocket books). These "enchiridia" were classic Latin books without notes or comments, manufactured with the new character created by Francesco Griffo, italic type. The success of Venice has to be looked in its prime location, making the city a central point of trade between Europe and Middle East. Next to Latin and Vernacular books, also Hebrew and Armenian texts were printed in that period. In 1538, Alessandro Paganini (Nuovo, 1990) published the Kuran in Arabic but unfortunately all the copies were destroyed by the Vatican State. Another key factor that promoted the development of print in Venice is the initiative of some patrician families. Giuseppe Pomba's Company is the first one that,

between 1828 and 1832, tried to direct its attention to the emerging mass market. The society printed the so-called 'Biblioteca Popolare' (Folk Library), offering classic traditional works of Italian, Greek and Latin literature, reaching in very few months the record number of 10.000 copies. It must be said that Pomba was forced to work in a strongly outdated context, where the editorial Italian market was extremely conditioned by censorship and privileges. As well as printing machines, another device has to be well remembered: the telegraph. Its use has been of primary importance for the Italian Unification. In fact, one of the first orders given to the followers of Garibaldi during the war was to take possession of the postal and telegraphic office at first. After 1861, Italy had a strong increase in books production and we see the appearance of newspapers like "La Nazione" (1859); "Il Secolo" (1866); "Il Corriere della Sera" (1876), to mention the most significant ones. By the early 18th century, politicians had begun to realize the enormous potential of newspapers in shaping public opinion. Consequently the journalism of the period was largely political in nature. We must keep in mind that in 19th century the level of illiteracy reached almost 80% of the population (As Gian Luigi Beccaria [Italian historian] wrote "the illiteracy level in 1861 was about 80%. The remaining 20% included also those people that were only able to write their names instead of signing with a cross), hence reading the news was mostly considered a Sunday luxury involving upper classes only. This situation started to change in the years from 1901 to 1914. Giolitti was the Prime Minister at the time and during that season journalism began to side with one party or another, for example in favour of war in Libya or against it. A periodical like the one created by Marxist Antonio Gramsci, "L'Ordine Nuovo", attempted, in 1919, to introduce to readers the concept of new Socialism, and of Humanitarian Socialism. Its aim was to open the eyes of the readers to the growing social problems that Italy was facing in that period. However Fascism, whose leader was Benito Mussolini, was at the gate. Towards journalism, Duce (The world Duce means "leader" or "guide" in Latin. This word was used to refer to Benito Mussolini during the twenty years of Fascism in Italy)'s party moved gradually; but actually the major opponent newspapers were abolished. Ironically, at the same time the government set up the trade union and the journalist roll in order to spread around the common consent. As the dictator once said "Italian journalism is free just because its aim is to serve one Cause and one Regime" (Mussolini's discourse to journalists, Palazzo Chigi 10th of October,

1928). In 1945 with the end of the war the level of literacy had increased and the request of new sources of news had intensified. A new era began, bringing with it the rebirth of the press. Italian Constitution (1947) underlined this aspect in article 21: "All have the right to express freely their own thought by word, in writing and by all other means of communication. The press cannot be subjected to authorization or censorship [...]" (http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Italy). Almost ten years later, in 1954, RAI began its television service, but it was largely controlled by the Christian Democratic party. The channel tried not to offend the common moral and the kind of information spread in the newscasts was highly pro-government. Opposition parties were essentially ignored. Parts of the early programming were focused on educational content. Productions like "Non è mai troppo tardi" ("It's never too late") and "Un viaggio al Po" ("A journey to Po") were educational programs, which showed people what life was like in other regions of Italy. With the liberalization of telecommunications, in the 1970s, news freed from any political and ideological prejudices were provided, contributing to the growth of the Mediterranean country. However, while television was spreading its wings, newspapers were severely influenced by the power owned by prominent industrialists and financiers. It has been the case of "Il Giorno", owned by Eni's Enrico Mattei; "Il sole 24-ore", acquired by Confindustria just to name a few. The turning point about this issue arrived in 1984 when Fiat, whose president was Gianni Agnelli, accessed indirect control of Rizzoli/Corriere della Sera (RCS). The group had already gained the control of Publikompass, the large advertising agency in Italy. Going to the rescue of RCS gave Agnelli's company the charge of almost a quarter of the national daily newspaper circulation. As Peter Humphreys wrote "[...] the principal motivation for so many of Italy's leading industrialists, businessman and financiers to become directly involved in the press, which historically had not been a lucrative business at all, was the political influence he brought them" (Humphreys, 1996, p. 90). But in order to get to the heart of this matter, the disputal case history of Silvio Berlusconi has to be illustrated. He is the main shareholder of Mediaset, which owns several television channels, the country's largest magazine publisher, Mondadori; and the largest advertising company, Publitalia. Publitalia controls 65 percent of the television advertising market. In addition, one of the country's major nationwide daily newspapers, *Il Giornale*, is owned by Berlusconi's brother.

Tabel 1
Ownership of Some Italy's National Dailies in 1988

Title base	Ownership	Circulation	Title base	Ownership	Circulation
La Repubblica (Rome)	Mondadori	730,000	Il sole 24-ore (Milan)	Confindustria	320,000
Il Corriere della Sera (Milan)	Rizzoli/Fiat	715,000	Il Giornale / Nuovo (Milan)	Berlusconi	275,000
La Stampa (Turin)	Fiat	560,000	L'Unità (Milan)	PCI	300,000
Il Messaggero (Rome)	Montedison	370,000	Il Giorno (Milan)	ENI	290,000

1. BERLUSCONI'S RISE AND MEDIA CONTROL IN ITALY

Differently from other countries, like U.K, Italy has not managed to maintain a high level of independence from political actors on private mass medias. The leader of PdL (Il Popolo della Libertà is a centre-right political party. With the Democratic Party, it is one of the two major parties of the current Italian political system. It was launched by Silvio Berlusconi on 18 November 2007 and officially founded in a party congress on 27–29 March 2009, when Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale were merged together.) party founded Mediaset S.p.A (The largest commercial broadcaster in the country with 3 main national channels and 14 Digital terrestrial television channels. The company is now controlled by his family holding partnership Fininvest with an ownership of 38.6%.) in 1973. It was only in 1984, during Bettino Craxi's (Head of the Italian Socialist Party from 1976 to 1993 and the first socialist President of the Council of Ministers of Italy from 1983 to 1987. He was officially accused of corruption in Mani Pulite judicial inquiry, in 1993. Craxi was a very good friend of Silvio Berlusconi) government, that Berlusconi's stations were declared to be legal (On 16 October 1984, judges in Turin, Pescara and Rome, enforcing a law which previously restricted nationwide broadcasting to RAI, had ordered private networks to cease transmitting). The contest between public and private television had begun. Canale 5, Italia 1 and Rete 4 were primarily focused on entertainment programmes, talk shows, serials and reality shows. It can be said that RAI addressed citizens, whereas Mediaset tried to talk to consumers. Mediaset TV lost its "apolitical" nature in 1994 when its owner, Silvio Berlusconi, decided to run in the general elections. In 2001 the rivalry gained a new length when Berlusconi became Prime Minister for the second time. A meaningful episode took place in Rai1, five days before the elections, the 8th of May, 2001. During a show called "Porta a Porta" Berlusconi held up a piece of paper containing five promises, typed out on lined paper, like lawyers use. It was headed "Contract With the Italians", and continued "between Silvio Berlusconi, born Milan, 29 September 1936 and the citizens of Italy." The document ended with these lines "If after five years, 4

out of 5 promises have not been kept, Silvio Berlusconi hereby undertakes not to contest successive elections" (Shin & Agnew, 1999, p. 146). This has been an example, in Italian television history, of public television used for political and personal purposes. The entrepreneur won the elections but the promises, during the 5 years of his government, had not been kept. In 2006, nonetheless, he run for president. But in order to understand as best as one can the Premier's influence towards media and if one wants to get to the bottom of the matter, it is not possible to ignore the so-called "the Bulgarian Ukase" or "Editto Bulgaro". During a press-conference held in Bulgary in 2002, Berlusconi said: "The use that Biagi, Santoro and Luttazzi (Michele Santoro is an Italian journalist. His program "Sciuscià" in 2001 was full of reportages talking about political and social issues. Daniele Luttazzi is a comedian actor. In his program "Satyricon" he gave space to Marco Travaglio 'Italian investigative journalist and writer', wondering where Berlusconi could have take the money to begin his career.) have made of public television, paid with everyone's money, is criminal. I believe that it is a precise duty of the new management [of RAI] to prevent this from happening again." After this statement, the three journalists were banned from Italian television. The official reason Rai gave at the time was that they were no longer competitive. In one of his last programmes, Enzo Biagi addressed directly to the Prime Minister : "What crime am I supposed to have committed? Rape, murder, hold-up, theft, incitement to crime, forgery, defamation? ... I remain convinced that there is still room for press freedom in our republic ... Mr. Prime Minister, it's not up to you to fire me." This issue also worried the President of the Italian Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi who, during a message to the two chambers of parliament, on 23 July 2002, said: "the goal of the new legislature should be to better guarantee the fundamental rights of the opposition and minorities by means of press pluralism and impartiality. ... without press pluralism and impartiality, there is no democracy"(http://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Italia_23_luglio_2002_Messaggio_alle_Camere_del_Presidente_della_Repubblica_Carlo_Azeglio_Ciampi). One year later, the so-called "Gasparri Law" (Law 3 May 2004, no. 112: "Regulations and principles governing the set-up of the broadcasting system

and the RAI-Radiotelevisione italiana S.p.a., authorizing the government to issue a consolidated broadcasting act” (<http://www.comunicazioni.it/en/index.php?IdNews=18>), officially aimed at preparing the changeover to digital terrestrial television, was actually trying to allow cross-media ownership, reform of anti-trust limits and set the composition of the committee of governors of public Rai television. The edict obviously served the interests of Mediaset Group. On 13th December 2003 President Ciampi refused to sign the broadcast media reform bill, sending a message to both chambers in which he pointed out the fact that it would lead to “the creation of dominant positions” and “in terms of pluralism of news did not appear to conform to the jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court”. The President in particular condemned that Retequattro (Silvio Berlusconi’s third channel) would avoid transfer to satellite before 31 December 2003 as demanded by the Constitutional Court.

Eventually, the Senate adopted the Gasparri Law on 29 April 2004. A fake solution about this subject came with Frattini (Franco Frattini (born 14 March 1957 in Rome) is an Italian politician, he has been a member of Silvio Berlusconi’s government since 2001, and Foreign minister of Italy since 14 November 2002.) Law, submitted by the Government to resolve, among other issues, the media owner/Prime Minister incompatibility. It passed in July 2004 to deal with all conflicts between public duty and private interests of public officials but the chosen legal formula did not fully distance the Premier from his media holdings because does not contain sufficient “preventive” measures for resolving a potential conflict of interest.

The last relevant case is the decree known as “Milleproroghe”. Its aim was to eliminate the prohibition, towards companies holders of national television networks, to gain the control of newspapers. This decree has been put forward during the fourth Berlusconi’s government and it has been declared inopportune by Antitrust (<http://www.agcm.it/en/>) with this press release published in Rome the 01st of March, 2011: “It is inappropriate to endow the President of the Council with the power to decide whether to extend the ban on TV-newspaper cross-ownership beyond 31st March 2011, as proposed in the ‘milleproroghe’ decree.” (<http://www.agcm.it/en/newsroom/press-releases/1936-report-on-ban-extension-on-tv-newspaper-cross-ownership.html>).

2. FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

It is unarguable that ‘the media in a democratic system must be credible and reliable lest they lose their influence and authority. [...] it is usually acknowledged that democracy almost never flourishes without an effective, independent media (Dennis, 1995).’ In 2002 Freimut Duve, who is a German politician, human rights activist, writer

and journalist, at that time, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, pointed out that in Italy, a founding member of the EU, “the present political leadership is not following the constitutional tradition of Europe. Especially the pluralism of the broadcasting media is in jeopardy because of an ownership situation that allows the executive to control both public and private broadcasting media.” (<http://www.osce.org/fom/54213>). Enrico Mentana, the news anchor man long seen as a guarantor of Canale 5’s independence, said that he no longer felt “at home in a group that seems like an electoral [campaign] committee” (http://www.corriere.it/cronache/09_maggio_12/mentana_mediaset_vanity_fair_9dcd7094-3ee9-11de-914a-00144f02abc.shtml), and he eventually walked out in April 2008. On the other hand, Rete4’s news program, ‘TG4’, whose editor-in-chief is Emilio Fede who is an Italian anchorman, journalist and writer. He is, at present, indicted for favouring prostitution of a minor in the framework of the so-called Rubygate scandal, involving Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, dental hygienist Nicole Minetti and Karima El Mahrug Ruby Rubacuori, has been strongly criticized for its political bias in favour of PdL’s party.

During the same year, in June, the lower house of Parliament approved a bill that would impose heavy fines or jail terms on journalists who use transcripts from interceptions without a judge’s permission. The International Press Institute noted that the bill could “limit journalists’ ability to provide the public with vital information” because it would hamper their ability to do investigative journalism, particularly regarding political corruption and organised crime; terrorism and paedophilia.

Reporters would face up to three years in prison and editors could be fined up to €465,000 for making reference to preliminary police investigations, reporting on official investigation documents before hearings have begun, and publishing police interceptions. The European Federation of Journalists also criticized the draft law, stating, “Journalists are not supposed to hide information, whether the source is public or private, and their sources should be protected. Berlusconi’s draft law is contrary to international conventions and to the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.” (<http://europe.ifj.org/en/articles/efj-calls-on-senate-to-oppose-draft-law-on-wiretapping-in-italy>).

Organizations such as Freedom House (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=1>) deals with similar issues. They support the expansion of freedom in the world, making public every year their own report Freedom of the Press. Through an index that estimates the degree of print, broadcast, and internet freedom in every country in the world, Italy has been considered a partly-free country for press freedom in the years 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2009 and 2010.



Figure 1
Map and Chart of Press Freedom 2004



Figure 2
Map and Chart of Press Freedom 2011

In 2004 report (referred to the previous year), it was classified in 74th position out of 193 states analyzed, below Botswana and Solomon Islands. Seven years later the Mediterranean country reached number 75 below South Africa and Serbia. Freedom House noted that Italy constitutes “a regional outlier” and particularly quoted the “increased government attempts to interfere with editorial policy at state-run broadcast outlets, particularly regarding coverage of scandals surrounding prime minister Silvio Berlusconi.” (<http://freedomhouse.org/images/File/fop/2011/FOTP2011OverviewEssay.pdf>).

Press Release 2 May 2011 (p. 12) Furthermore, as promulgated by “Reporters without Borders” (http://arabia.reporters-sans-frontieres.org/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=20) some journalists investigating mafia and other gangs activities, do it at risk of their lives.

To clarify what proportions the phenomenon takes,

the association known as ‘Ossigeno’ (<http://www.ossigenoinformazione.it/>) has reported that at the moment in Italy there are at least 12 journalists under protection (like Roberto Saviano, **Lirio Abbate**, **Rosaria Capacchione**); 78 cases of reprisals; 23 out of these 78 threats involve a whole editorial staff, including in the list 400 reporters. This happens particularly in the south of Italy.

The kind of retaliations involve acts like torching of cars and doors homes, threatening letters and intimidation of their families, all in the guise of “advice” given to those who persist in exposing what has gone wrong in Italian society.



Figure 3
Journalists Under Threat in 2010

(<http://www.ossigenoinformazione.it/wp-content/2011/07/1.cartina.pdf> For further information about how many journalists have been under threat in 2011 : http://www.ossigenoinformazione.it/wp-content/2011/11/tabella_ossigeno_14112011.pdf) Thus, it is obvious that the informative system comes out extremely damaged. Just an unorthodox way to relate to journalism can bring some fresh air in a working contest often stuck in the past.

3. A NEW ERA

On March 26, 2010, a new era begun with a one-night show called “Rai per una notte” by Michele Santoro. This program was transmitted on web streaming and some digital and analogic stations receiving massive mediatic attention. The program hosted numerous journalists and comedians who argued that their work was obstructed (censored) by the Prime Minister. The production was able to go on air thanks to 50.000 people that gave a contribution of 2,50 € each. The other one-time television event, “Signori, entra il lavoro. Tutti in piedi” was broadcasted in June, 17 2011 in order to celebrate FIOM’s (Italian Metalworkers' Federation) 110 years. The theme of the program -work- underlined the situation that many citizens are living in this age: economic and subsequently personal instability. But it has been only with the program “Servizio pubblico” (Public Service), marked as a “revolution” in the understanding of the Italian television service, that the experiment of Santoro brought innovation

in an influence-free TV. Furthermore, it has been the first program in Italy which exploits all the potentialities of Internet and Social Networks. Aired November 3 on various local TV stations, on the web and on some channels from Sky, it is the 'son' of previous projects such as 'Rai per una notte' and 'Tutti in piedi'. Santoro's monologue, during the first few minutes of the show, starts with this sentence "We must make the revolution. This is our little revolution, civil, democratic, peaceful". Looking towards newspapers, it is impossible not to mention 'Il Fatto Quotidiano'. The journal is the first independent printed paper in Italy not receiving public fundings. It was founded on 23 September 2009 and has been edited by Antonio Padellaro since then. About this new adventure the patron said "We have tried to create something that did not exist in Italy before, and we have shown that this can be done. We have shown that one can produce information without depending on political or

economic forces. A newspaper that has a property and not an owner. A newspaper that should never ask for anyone's permission".

Italy, the Belpaese, spends about 180 millions of Euro at year (<http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2010/11/14/miracoli-di-carta/76811>) to finance the press. The amount of public support every 1000 readers in Italy is 8.79 Euro. In other European countries the data are the following: France 8.15; Usa 4.02; Uk 2.43; Germany 1.8; Finland 0.64. United States, for example, spend only 16% for inhabitant but they have, compared to Italy, 94% readers more for 1000 inhabitants. That is why the experiment carried out by Padellaro marks a turning point in the Italian print journalism. This brand-new way of reporting the news, assisted by other forms like the ones mentioned before, can make the difference in a country -- Italy, where the information field is in a very delicate balance.

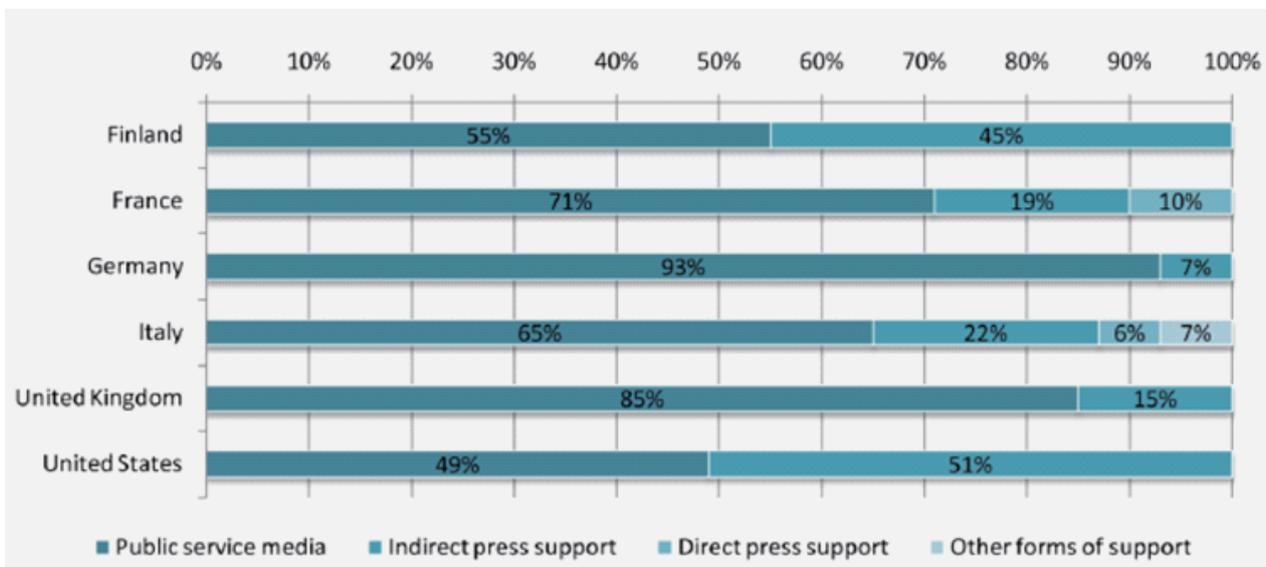


Figure 4
Composition of Public Support

(http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/fileadmin/documents/Publications/Working_Papers/Public_support_for_Media.pdf)

CONCLUSIONS

If we want to analyse the role of Italy in Media History, first we must highlight some of the few points already mentioned. To begin with, a low level of readership through history (<http://www.audipress.it/>) has brought the Mediterranean country to be characterized by numerous ups and downs in newspaper market. Often linked to the family that owns the paper, some regional newspapers are

nationally distributed but they tend to convey a regional bias. Notwithstanding, the patterns that have characterised most Italian journalism have been 'a heavy focus of the media on political life, and the relatively elitist nature of journalism, not addressed to a broad mass public.' (Halli, & Mancini, 2006, p. 102). Secondly, public and private television cover the news in very different ways, as shown in the figures below.

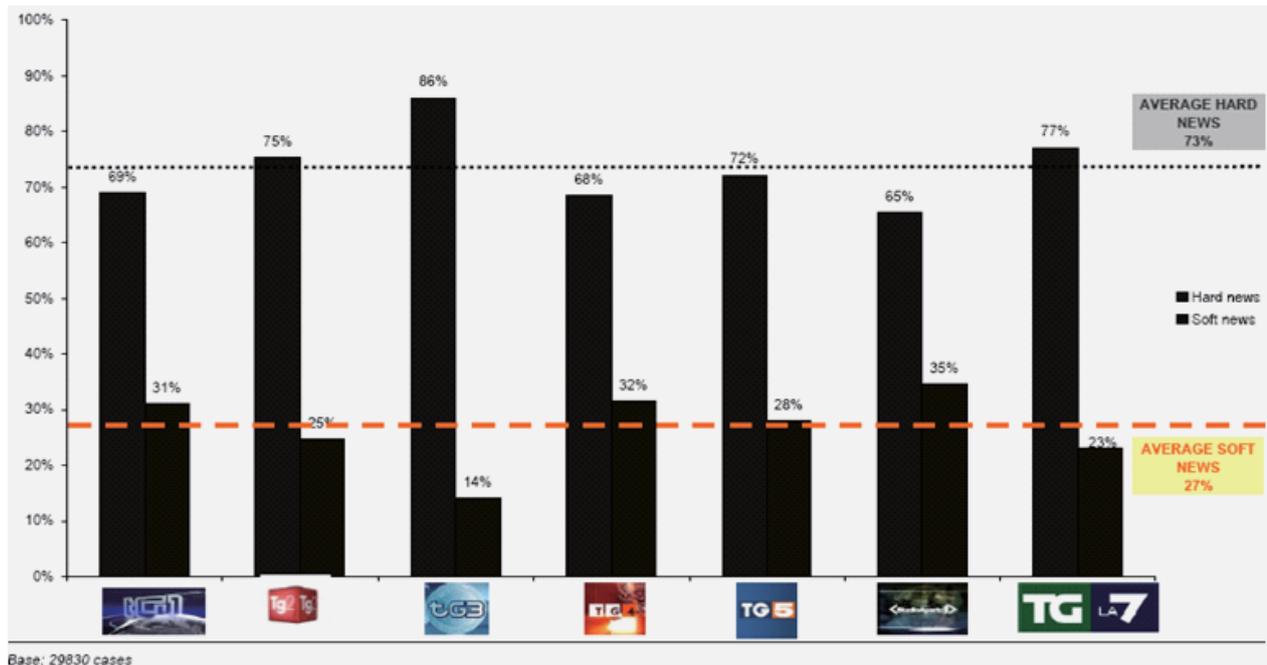


Figure 5
Type of News by News Programme (Period: September – December 2010)
 (<http://issuu.com/mediapolicy/docs/osservatorio-marcegaglia-report-16-september-2011>)

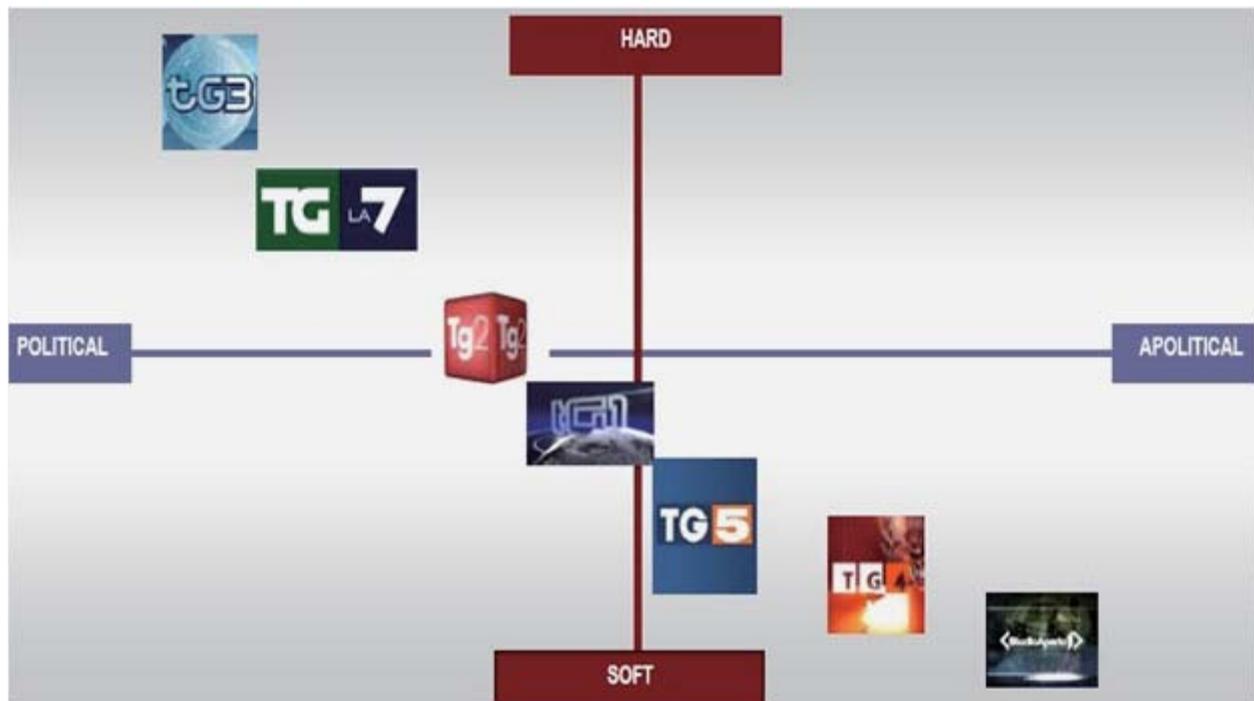


Figure 6
News Programme Editorial Positioning
 (<http://issuu.com/mediapolicy/docs/osservatorio-marcegaglia-report-16-september-2011>)

Just three news programmes (Tg3; La7; Tg2) focus their attention on hard news, referring to up-to-the-minute news and events that are reported immediately like politics, war, economics and crime. As we can see from the tables, there is a television channel detached from the duopoly Rai-Mediaset. This channel is called La7, owned by Telecom Italia Media and launched in 2001. Ten years later (2011) the channel began doubling its rates, also thanks to current News Director Enrico Mentana and his program TG La7. Last but not least, Internet has been a source of uncensored information for many people who want to go to the bottom of some crucial issues. About 51.7% of the Italian population used Internet on 2010. Web and social-network services are becoming an interesting arena for alternative information. The most visited web sites are newspapers' web versions with Repubblica.it and Corriere.it on the top. Additionally, some blogs – like “*Il Blog di Beppe Grillo*” (<http://www.beppegrillo.it/>), run by former TV entertainer Beppe Grillo – are enormously successful, it is in fact one of the 10 most read blogs in the world. In the last years, Grillo has campaigned for removing members of the Italian Parliament who have criminal convictions and has organized two big mass protests. We must keep in mind that one of the limiting factors for freedom of press in Italy is the difficulty of becoming a member of the journalistic profession. To be hired in a news organization, a journalist has to be a member of the Italian Society of Journalists. That is why in the last decade Internet has become an open-window for those Italian citizens who want to play an active role in the development of civic responsibilities, political awareness and critical skills in their society. But while Internet still remains an occasional and secondary source of information, TV keeps on influencing the public opinion. All the aspects explicated in this essay have made Italy an unconventional country if we talk about its role in Media History.

Even if its background and some constraining events in modern era have prevented its rising in the Olympus of journalistic world, Italy remains a firm point particularly about investigative journalism. With Berlusconi's resignation things for press and television industry are of course not going to evolve within the foreseeable future. As mentioned before, one must keep in mind that Italy is still dealing with threats against some reporters firstly and with varied mass-media restrictions secondly. Even though freedom of expression is protected by the Constitutional Law, this kind of changes could take years to happen.

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