8. TV Reception via Social Media Analysis: The Case of *Doc – Nelle tue mani*

Stefania Antonioni, Dom Holdaway

◀ **ABSTRACT**

This chapter adopts a data-led approach to studying the reception practices and discourses on social media of a TV series: *Doc – Nelle tue mani*. The series is one of the more traditional flagship products of Italian public broadcaster Rai in recent years, and one of the most successful Italian medical dramas. The essay examines user interactions with the show on two social media platforms – Instagram and Youtube – focusing, in particular, on the prevalent themes in comments and discussions and the kinds of visual content and images remediated from *Doc*. Data regarding user interactions is scraped using a variety of digital tools and then subjected to quantitative and qualitative readings. The analysis indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected both the production and the storyline of the show, is a recurrent theme in user interactions on Instagram. It also indicates that the most popular remediated content on YouTube refers to the show's music and to its stars, and first and foremost the lead actor Luca Argentero.

KEYWORDS

TV reception; medical drama; *Doc – Nelle tue mani*; Instagram; YouTube.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the digital "lives" of contemporary Italian medical dramas. Specifically, it seeks to examine (i) the reception of this TV genre on social networks, looking at the discourses of fans and viewers in social media comments; and (ii) the terms in which content from these shows (images, scenes, music) is reproduced online. The research findings presented here[1] are a part of the Urbino unit's work on the Italian State-funded PRIN project *Narrative Ecosystem Analysis and Development (NEAD) Framework: A Systemic Approach to Contemporary Serial Products. The Medical Drama Case*.[2] The project is devoted to a macro-level analysis of the medical drama, which is used as one possible example of the "narrative ecosystem" (Pescatore 2018, Brembilla and De Pascalis 2020), principally over three geographical areas – China, the USA and Italy. The objective of the University of Urbino's research unit is the Italian medical drama; our research focuses on the intersections of its textual elements with its production, distribution and reception contexts. In line with this objective, in this article we focus in particular on the online reception and activities of social television (cf., e.g., Schrøder 2018, Ranjana and Ytre-Arne 2018, Livingtstone 2013, Ducheneaut et al. 2008) relating to one particularly relevant case study, in order to question not only the broader tones of its reception, but also the national specificity of those reactions. Indeed, following the central premise of the "narrative ecosystem" model, reception is one of a few contingent factors that can influ-

---

ence the narrative of a serial product externally, leading writers or producers to change the product's direction in response to the audience. Put in other, complementary terms, to demonstrate this link we could invoke to the notion of the "audience in production" as identified by Elena Levine in her study of the medical drama *General Hospital*, to capture the direct impact that (implicit or real) viewers have on set (cf. Levine 2001: 78-80).

Our approach in the essay shares the *NEAD* project's conviction that the medical drama is a particularly relevant and useful object of study in this regard – especially when it comes to reception, as we will indicate. This is both in due to the genre's relevance within mediascapes (often medical dramas are among the longest and most successful TV products, as in the cases of *ER* and *Grey's Anatomy*), but also due to a specific connection between institutions, media, audiences and public discourse – something that is all the more relevant in the years of the pandemic (cf. Rocchi 2019).

Specifically, here we focus on the most popular and successful Italian medical series of recent years: *Doc – Nelle tue mani* (2020-), aired in primetime by the first channel of public broadcaster, Rai 1 and co-produced by Lux Vide and Rai Fiction. Inspired by the true story of the doctor Pierdante Piccioni, the series narrates the experience of doctor Andrea Fanti, a severe and unfriendly but talented doctor who loses 12 years of his memory when shot by the grieving father of a patient who died at the hospital (the 'real' Piccioni lost his memory following a car accident). The amnesia takes Fanti back to an earlier version of his own life, before his separation from his wife, the loss of his son, and the hardening of his attitude toward patients. Like many other medical dramas, the series is structured around both vertical and horizontal narratives, between single patient stories that usually last just one episode and the overarching story of Fanti and the other medical staff. The series has proven to be a great success in Italy, attracting significant audience shares and a great deal of public and critical attention. Across both seasons, the episodes reached between 6 and 7 million viewers on average, and around 29% of the share; this included in particular a young audience (cf. Fumarola 2020, Nicholas 2022). Following this success, it has also been broadcast on television and via streaming in other European, North and South American and even Far East markets.

Doc's popularity also makes the show a useful case study from the perspective of reception analysis. Broadcast in the present (the first two seasons were released in 2020 and 2022, the third is in production at time of writing), the show is emerging at a time when social media marketing for

public broadcasting is at an unprecedented peak, both in terms of output and of audience accustomization. As we will see later, the first part of the first season was released during the COVID-19 pandemic – which is also referenced directly in the show's second season – hence during a moment of more intense online presence and social media use. With this in mind, our aim was to examine social interactions relating to *Doc* and remediated content from the series, with two macro objectives. The first was to understand the prominence of the different medical drama plot "isotopies" identified by Pescatore and Rocchi (2019), i.e. the sentimental, professional and medical. The former two, which refer respectively to the personal-emotional and professional relationships of the characters, are horizontal narratives or running plots that transcend single episodes; the third category refers to the medical "mystery" represented by a (usually) new patient, that is often resolved through a vertical/anthological, single-episode narrative (Pescatore and Rocchi 2019: 110-12). It should be noted, though, that in the case of *Doc*, the medical isotopy also includes the Coronavirus, which was represented in the second season's narrative of the show in a more horizontal manner (as well as having interrupted the production and distribution of the first season). Tracing the isotopies within the show's reception, we moreover sought to study which of these trigger greater audience engagement.

Our second objective was to interrogate what kinds of images from the show are predominant on social media, therefore signaling, hypothetically, the terms of the show's imaginary. We sought to ask which actors/characters, settings and broad aesthetic tendencies are reproduced on social media and which of these gain the highest levels of engagement. This is particularly interesting in terms of the original creations by the series' fan communities.

In order to address these objectives, we decided to triangulate quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. In fact, we used a series of social media scraping tools to study, first, the reactions and conversations generated on Instagram; and, second, the remediations of the TV series' content on YouTube. Specifically, to collect visual and textual data we used data extraction tools provided by CrowdTangle for Instagram, as well as PhantomBuster and the Digital methods initiative tools for YouTube (Rieder 2015), and then we analyzed these contents using an approach of qualitative content analysis.

At this stage of our research, we decided to focus on Instagram and YouTube. These platforms are particularly valuable to our analysis for several reasons: first, the ease of posting audiovisual content (therefore repro-

ducing the original media of the programme); second, the social dynamic of user interaction; and third, the platforms' significant use rate and visibility. Indeed, YouTube and Instagram are the first and third most used platforms by Italians according to Blogmeter's annual survey (data cited in Dara 2022). What remains of this essay is dedicated to the results of this analysis. It is divided into two main sections: the first is dedicated to user interactions on Instagram, the second to remediated images on YouTube. In the conclusion, we offer a handful of reflections on the uses and limits of this approach to media reception studies.

Doc on Instagram: Empathy and the Pandemic

Starting with Instagram, we identified the most popular accounts related to *Doc – Nelle tue mani* in terms of followers. From this point of view, the most popular profile is the official account of the TV show; this is followed by other un-official accounts created by users, yet which, on closer analysis, were not considered to be of particular interest in terms of the number of interactions, comments, etc. Moreover, these secondary accounts raised some problems in terms of searchability and permanence of data. For this reason, we decided to focus our analysis, at this stage, on the official TV show account.

In terms of followers, the profile saw a 96% increase between the first and second season (March 2020-March 2022), but there were several growth phases consistent with the 'bumpy' airing of the TV series caused by the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic that impacted the production of the TV show, which had to be stopped due to the lockdown in Italy from 9 March to 3 May 2020. The first season therefore aired after the lockdown had started, i.e. from 26 March to 16 April for a total of 8 episodes, and had to be stopped in the middle because the remaining 8 episodes had not yet been fully filmed. In this first phase, the ratings were record-breaking, reaching almost 9 million viewers.

The growth of followers in this first season was parallel to that of the audience, rising from less than 7 thousand to more than 51 thousand (+87%). Once the lockdown ended, the crew returned to the set and the second part of the first season aired from 15 October to 19 November 2020, with peaks of 8.5 million viewers for the last episode. In this second airing, followers
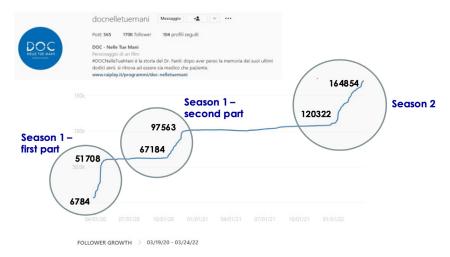
Follower growth of the official Instagram profile "Doc – Nelle tue mani" in the period 03/19/20-03/24/22.

increased from 67 thousand to 97 thousand (+31%). The second season aired from 13 January to 17 March 2022 with a peak of 7.3 million viewers. The account's followers increased in line with the airing, from 120 thousand to 164 thousand (+27%). Each season or partial season thus brought more followers to the show's official profile and clearly also increased the number of comments and reactions to the posts produced.

From this point of view, therefore, it may be interesting to identify which posts recorded the highest number of interactions in total. The post with the largest number of interactions in the first part of the first season is the one announcing the season finale and which, through a brief synopsis of the episode, invites the audience not to make any plans for the next day, with 36 thousand interactions (Fig. 2).

These increase considerably in the second part of the first season, with a peak of 101 thousand interactions recorded by a video post that captures a central scene of the twelfth episode, in which the protagonist, Dr. Fanti, gives a motivational speech to his team, inviting them to try to do their best for their patients, standing between them and death, because being doctors means not giving up and repeating to oneself the words "non oggi", "not today" (Fig. 3). The post with the most interactions of the second season registers 235,000 and features various images and a video from the season

FIGURE 2
Top post of fist part of the first season.

FIGURE 3
Top post of second part of the first season.

FIGURE 4
Top post of the second season.

finale, a very moving topical scene in which the death of one of the team's female doctors is recounted, thus favoring the sentimental plot (Fig. 4).

These quantitative data are worthy, in our opinion, of a more in-depth qualitative analysis that allows us to capture more interesting and subjective aspects regarding viewers' interpretations, attitudes and experiences. The institutional image, featuring the cast of the series as a teaser for the last episode, induces fans on the one hand to express their appreciation for a TV show judged to be of great quality, worthy of appearing on OTT platforms ("Questa serie merita di essere proposta sulla piattaforma Netflix o simili"), and on the other hand to express their regret at leaving so soon a TV programme they had grown fond of ("Non ci posso pensare che domani è l'ultima puntata…"). Some of the comments also question the reason for such an unexpected conclusion ("Ma perchè così poche puntate?"). The comments, at this stage, tell of an audience willing to become attached to this product and to create those parasocial relationships that are so important for loyalty to contemporary seriality (cf. e.g., Mittel 2015, Eyal and Cohen 2010, Lather and Moyer-Guse 2011, Russel and Jensen Schau 2014) and that will be demonstrated in the comments to the following top posts.

The comments on the October 2020 post, dedicated to a topical scene which could be related to the professional plot, besides highlighting the skills of the actors, show the audience high level of self-reflection about the pandemic period that has just been experienced. Most of these, in fact, are thoughts about the pandemic and the role of medical employees, their dedication and sacrifice ("In questo period storico non diciamo neanche un grazie ai medici che sono gli unici che non si sono fermati dall'arrivo del covid 19").

There are also those who report on personal life events, family bereavements ("Doveva essere un non oggi anche per mia madre"), which also testifies to how this TV show has been able to graft itself into the particular historical period in which it aired and, at the same time, into the lives of the viewers, who recognized its value of "mediated authenticity" (cf. Hill 2018), which is one of the keys to audience engagement. Many comments, moreover, note the strong emotional impact of the scene and the emotional realism aroused, mainly due to the actors ("Bravissimo è riduttivo ♥"; "Stupendo e credibile 👏👏"). Yet other comments show an intertextual competence of the viewers who recall how the words spoken by Dr. Fanti are reminiscent of those pronounced by Arya Stark *Game of Thrones*: "Not today" becomes "Non oggi" in *Doc*.

The very top post in terms of number of absolute interactions is the one showing one of the most moving scenes of the season finale, which we can relate to the sentimental plot, and obviously account for the great emotions aroused by the scene: "Quanto ho pianto 🥺"; "Ho pianto come se fosse una mia parente"; "Lacrime a non finire 😭😭". This aspect is often linked to the skill of the actors and the quality of the TV series, whose realism is particularly appreciated ("Grazie a tutti per l'interpretazione e la credibilità che avete dimostrato♥"). Another interesting phenomenon emerging from the comments to this top post lays in the parasocial relationships that have been built up over time with the characters, so that the death of one of them also elicits negative reactions and comments, because the viewers grieve the detachment ("Non dovevate far morire Alba!!!"; "No non mi è proprio piaciuto 👎"). There are also comments wishing for a third season, and some others demonstrating the audience's textual competence in comparing this season with the previous one and pointing out its lower quality. It is worth noting the presence, among the latter, of appreciative comments in Spanish, Portuguese, and French, attesting the international circulation of the series, sold in several countries.

If we move on to consider the interaction rate by followers, that is to say interactions divided by number of posts divided by the average followers over the timeframe, the highest rate can be found in a post about the first episode of the first season (34.37% of interaction rate), followed by a post about the last episode of the first season (almost 21% of interaction rate), followed by a post from August 2021, when the series was not airing (almost 21% of interaction rare) and a post about the second episode of the second season. Due to the peculiarities of the comments, we will briefly focus on the last two.

The post of August 2021 is a video in which Doc. Andrea Fanti, invites the Italian population to vaccinate, in order to beat COVID-19 together. The video represents an advocacy activity, on behalf of the TV program and of Italian public service broadcasting more generally, at a time that was still crucial to the fight against Coronavirus. The overwhelming majority of comments express applause, agreement with the message and therefore with vaccination ("Giusto DOC❤. Vaccinatevi"; "Bravo DOC"; "Esatto, se no non ne usciremo mai"). Some also recognize the value of the operation of raising awareness of vaccination through a particularly popular character and series ("Bravi @docnelletuemani, anche l'intrattenimento deve sensibilizzare ❤❤❤"). Several ironic comments show willingness to be vaccinated or to return to be vaccinated if the doctor was Doc (that is the actor Luca Argentero portraying Dr Fanti), while only very few comments show opposition to this message and refer to freedom of choice or the lack of transparency of the operation ("Ma la libertà di scelta dove è finita???"). In this sense, therefore, the comments do not express the polarization one would have expected from such a sensitive topic, but seem to almost totally support the case for vaccination.

Another interesting post from our point of view is the one on the second episode of the second season, because in this case a polarization clearly emerges between those who appreciate the show's restart with its twists and turns, the realism with which the pandemic period and the events experienced by the medical and paramedical staff were recounted ("Bellissimo e straziante allo stesso tempo"; "Un inizio col botto!!!! 😍"). But on the other hand many comments showed impatience with these contents and the need for escapism, for light-heartedness precisely because the experience of the pandemic was not completely processed and still too close ("Non avrei afffontato il tema del COVID-19, siamo già stressati, preoccupati e abbastanza saturi"). In particular, negative comments are also expressed be-

cause of the disagreement with the death of a character, to whom the audience had become attached and whom they do not want to let go; this loss is experienced as another bereavement and its logic in terms of narrative development is not fully understood ("Che senso ha la morte di Lorenzo?? Continuo a non capire e soprattutto non riesco a smettere di pensarci, come vi è venuto in mente??? Incredibile 🙉🙈").

In short, therefore, we can say that the number of interactions and comments is favored and is closely related to the sentimental plot, but also that medical and professional issues created a significant amount of engagement, especially considering how much the experience of the pandemic and all the emotions aroused by it were concurrent with the airing of the first season and to be fully elaborated in conjunction with the airing of the second season.

YouTube: Top-Down Promotion, Bottom-Up Emotion

The second part of our analysis concentrated on the video-sharing platform YouTube. As mentioned, the objectives of this section were to understand the typology of videos posted with content relating to *Doc*, the modalities through which the series is used on the platform within top-down marketing and bottom-up fan practices, and which of these typologies and modalities gained the highest interest from users (in terms of views, likes and comments).

In order to address these questions, we compiled two datasets, between 30 September and 2 October 2022, each using a variety of automated and manual data scraping:

The top 500 video results from the query "Doc nelle tue mani". This data was obtained using the YouTube API scraping tools designed by Bernhard Rieder and his team, available via the Digital Methods Initiative (Rieder 2015). These results consist of the top 500 videos geo-localized to Italy, reproduced according to "Relevance" – this is YouTube's term, as per the advanced search filters – with no personalization (i.e., no personal account data or history influencing the results).

The videos with over 25,000 views that emerge from the query "Doc nelle tue mani" on YouTube – again, with no personalization of the account, geolocalized to Italy – with results ordered by number of views. This results in 93 videos. Further specific information about these videos (title, user,

views, comments, hashtags, etc.), were obtained using Rieder's YouTube tools and the API scraper PhantomBuster.

A necessary note on methodology: whether organized by relevance or by number of visualizations, the results in the datasets are nonetheless subjected to further manipulation by YouTube's algorithm. As scholars have indicated, the platform's recommendation system is reliant on a number of different factors – including previous popularity, publication date and thematic affiliation – but also broader social dynamics such as viewing context and (histories of) individual agency (cf. Airoldi et al. 2016, Rieder et al. 2018). The algorithm is also subject to historical change, since the launch of YouTube (Bärtl 2018). As Arthurs, Drakopoulou and Gandini write (2018: 11), faced with this algorithmic fluidity, "research has to comply with the role of this 'black box' algorithm within the specific dynamics observed" (on the concept of the black box, the authors quote Pasquale 2015).

This is the motivation behind our use, for this part of the research, of different datasets: by approaching the content from two different perspectives (relevance and view count/popularity), we hope to guarantee a more representative sample of videos and mediate, to some extent, the subjectivity that the algorithm necessarily enacts. We recognize, however, that the datasets remain a single, personalized snapshot of an otherwise fluid scenario. Indeed, while the results of dataset 2 hypothetically prioritize the most popular videos, we found it still excludes some high-performing videos with over 25,000 views (these were nevertheless excluded from that dataset). Furthermore, while we sought to make the searches as "neutral" as possible, searching without an account (and its viewing history) that would skew results, this nevertheless makes it somewhat unrepresentative of those users – such as specific *Doc* fans – whose own history would indeed skew the results. In short, these videos are not comprehensive, but we consider them to be useful and indicative of general and popular video content regarding *Doc*.

The first dataset (500 videos, "relevance") indicates an initial set of characteristics of the YouTube videos that engage with *Doc*. First, as illustrated in Figure 5, video uploads are concentrated around the release dates of the episodes of *Doc* on Rai 1. Moreover, if we compare upload date to number of views, as in Figure 6, there is a trend of larger visualizations around release date, indicating more intense interest during the broadcast periods. The figure also demonstrates the growth in interest from season 1 to season 2.
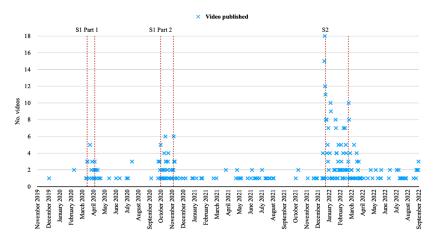
Upload dates of YouTube videos and episodes of *Doc* (first dataset, 500 videos, criteria: relevance). The broadcast periods of the two seasons are indicated with red dotted lines.
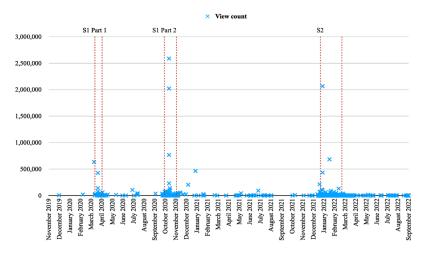
View counts of YouTube videos relating to *Doc* (first dataset, 500 videos, criteria: relevance) and release date, with TV broadcast periods indicated in red dotted lines.

The other principal trend that emerges from the first dataset relates to the YouTubers who appear most recurrently in the list of videos that interact with the series. The top ten channels that recur the most are detailed in Table 1.

CHANNEL	N° VIDEOS	VIDEO TYPE	TOTAL VIEWS FOR THE VIDEOS	AVERAGE VIEWS PER VIDEO
daburch86	67	General TV content	13010	194
Beth Patton	34	General TV content	3110	91
Anlove 84	34	Remixes	50234	1477
UD News	21	Recaps	271620	12934
Alexia	17	Recaps	48809	2871
Rai	9	Promotion, Interviews	556289	61810
Various Artists – Topic	9	Music videos	8324450	924939
JupiterOriny1	7	General TV content	8868	1267
spettacolomania.it	7	Entertainment	286424	40918
Aboutpeppe893	6	Influencer (doctor)	90570	15095

TABLE 1
The YouTube channels with the highest n. of videos relating to *Doc* (column 2), also indicating total and average views for the same videos.

The two highest channels (daburch86 and Beth Patton) are anonymous accounts that reproduce high quantities of short videos of Italian television content. The columns referring to total video views per channel, and particularly the average video views, signal that their content is spread very thinly. We can hypothesize that this is a larger strategy of minimizing production costs and mass-producing content in order to maximize the possibility of some videos gaining high views and subsequent ad profits. Indeed, at time of writing, only 25 of the more than 20,000 videos uploaded on the daburch86 channel have more than 10,000 views (the average is 130 views). This appears to indicate a twofold dynamic: on the one hand, the

potential for the audience's interest in *Doc* within a much broader category of remediated TV content on YouTube; on the other, an awareness of the possibility to monetize that content, including *Doc*, within a "grey zone" – the term is Lobato's (2012: 95) – with regard to copyright law.

The ways that *Doc* content is integrated within YouTube's industrial dynamics around macro themes (TV, music, but also medical content broadly) is also made evident by a pair of videos uploaded by the YouTuber "Aboutpepe893". The user is a doctor who posts content on his own experiences and ironic responses to popular culture. The videos on *Doc* – reaction videos and evaluations of the medical science, all comical in nature – are quite critical of the series. Evidently *Doc* informs just a small fraction of his overall output (six of 811 videos). This content also has a slightly lower average view count (c. 15,000) than for his channel overall, (c. 21,000 per video, though a couple have over 1 million). As with the previous examples, then, *Doc* is integrated into a larger content tendency, and therefore visible, we might assume, to users that are not necessarily fans. The fact that Aboutpepe893 has a relatively high rate of views and average views per video – at least, among the channels in Table 1 – is further testament to how the show can be adapted to broader "grammars" of social media (as per the "Jerusalema" trend, to which we return below). Indeed, not by chance he often reminds viewers to "like and subscribe" – well-aware that it is socially and economically beneficial in terms of visibility.

The most popular individual videos are more comprehensively indicated by our second dataset (criteria: popularity). When recording data for the 93 videos with the highest view counts, we also manually added a typology of the video's genre. This led to seven categories: (i) music videos; (ii) interviews with the cast; (iii) promotion; (iv) recaps; (v) remixes of content from the show; (vi) reproduced scenes; and (vii) miscellaneous: skits, news, behind the scenes, or commentaries.

The most common categories per number of videos are remixes (33% of the videos), music videos (27%) and interviews with the cast (21%); the other categories make up the remaining 19%. "Remixes" are videos of *Doc* content that are re-edited, with a musical soundtrack played over the top. The vast majority of these are dedicated to the romantic relationships between the staff at the hospital – Giulia and Lorenzo, Giulia and Andrea, Andrea and Agnese, Alba and Riccardo. There are some other more broadly thematic videos, referring to, for example, the "not today/non oggi" sentiment that also emerges powerfully in Instagram content, as mentioned above.

The second category is the music videos of the *Doc* soundtrack. The most viewed videos are the topic videos, consisting of a still image of the series and one of the songs; some other videos also contain footage; others still are popular covers of the songs.

Most striking about these videos is the fact that, by a significant amount, they are the most popular videos in terms of views. Indeed, if we take the total views in this sample and re-consider our 7 categories as *shares* of those views, rather than total number of videos, the music videos represent 67% of the views. Three of the 25 videos in this category have over 2 million views (the songs "Changed at All", "Firestones (feat. Nico Bruno)" and "I'll Find You in the Dark", all composed by Tony Brundo); the average view count is 500,000.

The third category is videos reproducing whole interviews, or segments of them, with a variety of the cast members. Most predominant among these is, unsurprisingly, Luca Argentero (a prominent film and television star in Italy who plays the part of Dr. Fanti); we also find many interviews with Matilde Gioli, the actress who plays Giulia, and, to a lesser degree the other actors/doctors. There is a prevalence of cast-members who are also recognizable outside of this programme (e.g., Giovanni Scifoni, Pierpaolo Spollon, Gianmarco Saurino).

Beyond these broader tendencies, we can also identify a handful of other particularly popular videos that signal relative tendencies of the show's reception. The first of these is the single example of a clip from within the series: the characters dancing to "Jerusalema", by Master KG, after a grueling day fighting COVID-19 in episode 2x08 ("Cane blu"). Though part of the episode, the clip is essentially the reproduction of a dance challenge that was popular on social media between 2020 and 2021, and hence the popularity of the video can also be understood within that dynamic. At the time of the study, the video had 683,000 views, 7,000 likes and over 300 comments – the most of any video across the samples. Space limitations prevent a detailed analysis of these – this also lies beyond our objectives for the analysis of YouTube. Limiting ourselves to a superficial overview, however, it is worth noting that the user response to this video is broadly in line with the responses on Instagram, too. Of the 311 comments recorded at the time of the study,[3] the vast majority of them are simple, positive responses

---

[3]   All comments were recorded on 30-09-2022 from the following video: "Doc 2, Ar-

to the scene, the music, the stars and/or to the show more generally: "Adoro questa scena!!!!!"; "I medici che tutti vorremmo"; "Serie televisiva fantastica adoro tutti in particolare Argentero 😍😍🥲". Many of these contain explicit references to emotional responses to the scene: "Mi sono commossa, solo leggere la data 2020, mi è venuta la pelle d'oca."; "Senza parole ...solo grandi emozioni ❤". There are a handful of more negative responses – a few denounce the quality of the show and of Italian TV fiction generally, and quite a few make references to the satyrical TV show *Boris* (2007-10, 2022), either denouncing this as the confirmation that *Boris* foresaw a (terrible) future ("Viviamo in una distopia e boris aveva ragione") or simply commenting famous, satirical lines of dialogue ("la locura René"; "Un paese di musichette, mentre fuori c'è la morte").

As the latter point anticipates, current affairs are present on YouTube, too, including a handful of lengthy diatribes about the invasion of Ukraine and "World War III", and, more importantly, references to COVID-19 and the Italian management of the pandemic. The majority of the latter are positive ("Un grazie con tutto il cuore a tutti i medici , operatori sanitari, tutto il personale medico, ecc. che ha combattuto e combatte il covid. 🫶🫶🫶"; "Bella puntata dopo il covid ci voleva un bel balletto bravi A tutto il cast 🫶 🫶🫶"), though some others are more skeptical, arriving even into the realm of conspiracy theories ("IL LIVELLO DI DEMENZA DEGLI ITALIANI È GARANZIA DI SUCCESSO PER QUALSIASI DITTATURA , NON A CASO ABBIAMO INVENTATO ED ESPORTATO IL FASCISMO OVVERO LA DITTATURA DEL CONFORMISMO AVANTI CON LE DOSI E OFFRITE IL BRACCIO ALLA PATRIA VACCINO E MASCHERINA VERSO IL SOL DELL'AVVENIRE"). None of the comments reproduce or cite Dr Fanti's "non oggi" speech, however. Finally, once again, there are also a number of comments in French, Spanish and Portuguese, which further demonstrate the arrival of the show in global markets.

Relatedly, another high performing video, from the category of promotional videos, is the trailer for *Doc – Nelle tue mani* for Amazon Prime Brazil. The video has a high interaction rate: at the time of the study it had over 90,000 views, making it the 22nd most popular video, though in terms

---

gentero e il cast ballano sulle note di Jerusalema", *Quotidiano Nazionale*, 8 February 2022, https://www.quotidiano.net/magazine/video/doc-2-argentero-e-il-cast-ballano-sulle-note-di-jerusalema-1.7341449. The spelling, punctuation and emphases are reproduced sic, as per in the comments, with no further editing.

of comments – it has 200 – it is the third most popular video in the sample. The comments are almost entirely in Portuguese, with very few exceptions (in Spanish), and they are overwhelmingly positive. In fact, it is difficult to find any negative comments at all, with the exception of one complaint that the trailer presents too much of the story, and a handful that bemoan the lack of an original language audio track on Amazon Prime Video. The positive comments once again pick up on the humanity and sensibility of the show, the positive performances of the actors, and the soundtrack. Of course, it is possible that Amazon Prime Brazil simply repressed any negative comments, with an eye to positive promotion. The outlying popularity and interaction rate remain nonetheless an indicator of the series' success in the Brazilian market.

The nature of the most popular videos that include *Doc* content provides the stimulus for some interesting reflections. First, the prevalence of music is striking, revealing a broader impact of the series that transcends to another media: social media and pop music. This also finds confirmation in the second most common category, that of the remixes, which often also include songs from the soundtrack (especially "Changed at All"), as well as in the comments of two videos mentioned here. Secondly, the high percentage of remix videos signals another interpretative key for this series, that evidently foregrounds the "sentimental plot" – one of the three key "isotopies" within the medical drama identified by Pescatore and Rocchi, that emerges horizontally across seasons. These videos indicate the high level of its resonance with fans – especially since the amnesia trope used in *Doc*, as well as some characters deaths, provides the potential to promote different couples at different times.

The medical plot isotopy, on the other hand, is somewhat pushed to the side. This does not appear in any of the highest performing videos relating to *Doc*, with the exception of those produced by real-life doctor and influencer Aboutpepe893. It is implicit in the Jerusalema video, and prevalent in its comments, though there is little indication that we would find the same results in the comments more broadly. Indeed, in the comments on the Prime Video Brazil trailer, COVID-19 is rarely mentioned, and only in anticipations of the second season which, at that time, had not been released in the Prime Video catalogue in that country.

The final and most manifest indication that emerges from the YouTube datasets is that *Doc* exists not as a single phenomenon or a unique product of entertainment or art, but rather the show is adopted and adapted in fluc-

tuating media-industrial dynamics, with aims that shift from promotion of the series to fan appreciations of certain plots, and from monetizing macro themes (medicine, Italian TV) to emotional reactions to songs.

Conclusions

There is evidently much more that could be said about the presence of this series on social media, in relation to the small amounts of data that we have already collected and, of course, by expanding and correlating it with other trends. For now, though, suffice it to indicate some preliminary conclusions. The analysis of comments and engagements on Instagram and YouTube help us to situate the ways that users and fans interact with and respond to *Doc*, therefore demonstrating how social media are a useful arena – alongside the media product itself and ethnographic study – through which it is possible to retrace reception trends.

Our analysis shows that social media engagement is very closely tied to traditional broadcasting, and that the popularity of Rai content on both platforms indicates the relevance of promotional materials as anchors for this engagement. User comments and video uploads reveal the centrality of the sentimental plots of the show, though the medical isotopy also emerges in the medical science (or lack thereof) in *Doc*, and especially through the show's connections to the pandemic. The few examples considered here also signal the multimedia nature of TV consumption here in Italy, as the show itself is tied to other TV productions (in comments, but also as content for high-output generalist TV YouTube accounts), to social media creations, and to the consumption of popular music.

A further trend that emerges quite manifestly from the analysis of Instagram and YouTube is the constant presence of highly impassioned content, through emotionally-charged language and emojis in the comments (both in response to the show and the stars, but also in relation to the bigger global issues of the invasion of Ukraine and the pandemic) but also and especially through fan-made content such as remixes. This ties, broadly, to a characteristic of the current conjuncture regarding the role of affect in popular culture, and more specifically to the attention economy on social media – since affect can be a useful tool to promote high visibility. In their article on YouTube as a research tool, Arthurs, Drakopoulou and Gandini note this tendency, referring repeatedly to a case where "a YouTuber's success and the

outcomes one is able to elicit are partly dependent on the capacity of a certain video to 'work' the platform's infrastructure to an extent that the processes of affect-based monetization are enabled" (Arthurs et al. 2018: 10). Drawing from this context, we hypothesize that the pairing of "affect-based monetization" could be a useful interpretative key for reception studies on social media – especially in the context of the medical drama, considering the same prominence of the sentimental plot.

The analytical methods used in our reception analysis also face some challenges and limitations, of course. The first of these relates to the difficulty of gaining the "bigger picture", both due to the social media algorithm's manipulation of search results, but also to the difficulty of finding content that flies below the radar, i.e., that does not emerge in search results as it does not explicitly reference the series. The second issue instead relates to the heterogeneity of interactions: simply viewing, liking, and commenting are three very different actions based on a great variety of responses. The comments that we see here, as we have illustrated, appear to represent positive or negative positions; the middle-ground remains unclear. With these limitations in mind, it is clear that this initial investigation, while confirming a set of useful tendencies, is a partial view that necessitates further research and expansion with findings from other methodologies and critical-theoretical standpoints (affect theory might be productive, for instance). It is our hope that we will be able to address some of these issues and compensate for the limitations they pose by combining these findings with other methods throughout the *NEAD* project.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Airoldi, Massimo, Davide Beraldo and Alessandro Gandini (2016). "Follow the Algorithm: An Exploratory Investigation of Music on YouTube." *Poetics* 57: 1-13. https://doi.org/10.10 16/j.poetic.2016.05.001.

Arthurs, Jane, Sophia Drakopoulou and Alessandro Gandini (2018). "Researching YouTube." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 21(1): 3-15. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517737222.

Bärtl, Mathias (2018). "YouTube Channels, Uploads and Views: A Statistical Analysis of the Past 10 Years." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 24(1): 16-32. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517736979.

Brembilla, Paola and Ilaria A. De Pascalis (eds) (2020). *Reading Contemporary Serial Television Universes: A Narrative Ecosystem Framework*. New York-London: Routledge.

Dara, Virginia (2022). "Italiani e social media 2022: i dati di Blogmeter." *Inside Marketing*. https://www.insidemarketing.it/italiani-e-social-media-2022-dati-blogmeter/.

Ducheneaut, Nicolas, Robert J. Moore, Lora Oehlberg, James D. Thornton and Erik Nickell (2008). "Social TV: Designing for Distributed, Sociable Television Viewing." *International Journal of Human-Computer Interaction* 24(2): 136-54. https://doi.org/10.1080/10447310701821426.

Eyal, Keren and Jonathan Cohen (2010). "When Good Friends Say Goodbye: A Parasocial Breakup Study." *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*. 50(3): 502-523. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15506878jobem5003_9.

Fumarola, Silvia (2020). "Ascolti 'Doc', Argentero torna e sbanca l'Auditel, quasi 7 milioni e mezzo per la serie di Rai 1." *La Repubblica*, October 16. https://www.re pubblica.it/serietv/rai/2020/10/16/news/doc_ascolti_nuovi_episodi-270688587/.

Hill, Annette (2018). *Media Experiences: Engaging with Drama and Reality Television*. New York-London: Routledge.

Lather, Julie and Emily Moyer-Guse (2011). "How Do We React When Our Favorire Characters Are Taken Away? An Examination of a Temporary Parasocial Breakup." *Mass Communication and Society* 14(2): 196-215. http://dx.doi.org/10.10 80/15205431003668603.

Levine, Elena (2001). "Toward a Paradigm for Media Production Research: Behind the Scenes at General Hospital." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18(1): 66-82. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295030109367124.

Livingstone, Sonia (2013). "The Participation Paradigm in Audience Research." *The Communication Review* 16(1-2): 21-30. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714421.2013.75 7174.

Lobato, Ramon (2012). *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution*. London: Palgrave Macmillan-BFI.

Mittel, Jason (2015). *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: New York University Press.

Nicholas (2022). "*Doc – Nelle tue mani 2*: analisi ascolti della seconda stagione." *BubinoBlog*. https://bubinoblog.altervista.org/doc-analisi-ascolti-della-seconda-stagione-della-serie-tv-con-luca-argentero/.

Pasquale, Frank (2015). The Black Box Society: The Secret Algorithms That Control Money and Information. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Pescatore, Guglielmo (ed.) (2018). *Ecosistemi narrativi. Dal fumetto alle serie TV*. Roma: Carocci.

Pescatore, Guglielmo and Marta Rocchi (2019). "Narration in Medical Dramas I. Interpretative Hypotheses and Research Perspectives." *La valle dell'Eden* 34: 107-15.

Ranjana, Das and Brita Ytre-Arne (eds) (2018). *The Future of Audiences: A Foresight of Interfaces and Engagement*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rieder, Bernhard (2015). "Home." YouTube Data Tools (Version 1.30) [Software]. https://tools.digitalmethods.net/netvizz/youtube/.

Rieder, Bernhard, Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández and Òscar Coromina (2018). "From Ranking Algorithms to 'Ranking Cultures': Investigating the Modulation of Visibility in YouTube Search Results." *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 24(1): 50-68. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517736982.

Rocchi, Marta (2019). "History, Analysis and Anthropology of Medical Dramas: A Literature Review." *Cinergie* 15: 69-84. https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2280-9481/8982.

Russell, Antonia and Hope Jensen Schau (2014). "When Narrative Brands End: The Impact of Narrative Closure and Consumption Sociality on Loss Accomodation." *Journal of Consumer Research* 4: 1039-62. https://doi.org/10.1086/673959.

Schrøder, Kim Christian (2019). "Audience Reception Research in a Post-Broadcasting Digital Age." *Television & New Media* 20(2): 155-69. https://doi.org/10.11 77/1527476418811114.

TV RECEPTION VIA SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS:
THE CASE OF *DOC – NELLE TUE MANI*