FROM *LISTEN* TO *SPEAK*: A RANGE OF POSSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITIES BETWEEN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC IN A CROSS-REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Based on the cross-national survey part of the so called Peoples' Internet (PIN) Project, the article[1] *analyzes social media uses in three different world regions: Europe, US, and China. Within the tradition of the studies on the social uses of the media, the article describes different kinds of social media uses, focusing on different factors that contribute to shape them in a more or less private or public way.*

Social media practices do not differentiate in a simply dichotomous way, as "private" or "public"; rather, they are gradually articulated in a "scalable sociality" that integrates, in different ways, elements of privateness and publicness. In the definition of such a scale, structural and cultural differences among different world regions and single countries play a role, alongside with variables as socio-demographic features, available capitals, and civic attitudes.

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary digital media environments, it is increasingly difficult to clearly understand how internet users navigate between legacy media, new media and social media, continuously shifting from private to public communication, and back again.

Among the several studies that have investigated media usage by internet users, the Peoples' Internet (PIN) Project deserves special attention because of its cross-media and cross-regional scope. Its first wave was a comparative study of media and internet use in nine European countries based on an online survey ran in 2013 (Helles - Jensen 2015; Helles et al. 2015; Vittadini et al. 2015). A second wave of PIN Project started in 2016 and concluded in 2019; the general aim of the study was to compare social uses of the internet across different countries and regions of the world (China, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Hungary, the United Kingdom, and the United States) through a mixed methods approach[2].

Built in the frame of that second wave of PIN Project, this article aims to provide main evidences of how internet users resort to social media to meet their daily needs of both private and public communication. In describing social media uses, the article is rooted in the tradition of the "social uses" of the internet, highlighting different factors that contribute to shape such uses in a more or less private or public way. The main focus of the article is precisely on the private/public distinction, conceptualized not as a dichotomy but as a scale (Miller et al. 2016). Such a scale is based on the degree of proximity of online connections, the boundaries of online attention (from the most intimate and private bonds to a wider network), and the publicness of the issues driving online attention. Addressing different kind of receivers – from one-to-one personal communication to a wider and undifferentiated one-to-many audience – is also considered.

Main socio-demographic variables, household composition, users' economic, social and cultural capital and civic engagement in different kind of organizations have been taken in account, alongside with a cross-regional (and sometimes cross-national) perspective.

I - LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. *Between public and private*

Media systems have always influenced the definition of what is public and what is private (Thompson 1995), with the terms "public" and "private" referring to both the relationship between visibility/invisibility and the relationship between individual/collective interests (Weintraub - Kumar 1997). Digital platforms (van Dijk - Poell - De Waal 2018) further radicalized this process. As a result of the evolution of social

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[2] Main outcomes of this second wave have been presented at the international conference Internets of the world, Carlsberg Foundation, Copenhagen, 4-5 December 2019.

media affordances, users' activities have further been defined as forming a part of the Integrated Public-Private Communication Network (IPPCN), or hybrid public-private forms of communicative action, including media consumption, keeping abreast of news and topics of interest, and obviously expressing oneself (Splichal 2018). In IPPCN, the distinction between public and private depends less and less on the nature of the online spaces where users perform (Papacharissi 2002), and increasingly on the communicative selections they make in terms of the fruition/production of content, and how they share it online.

In the early days of social media use, users' activities were mainly described as social networking activities. Aimed at increasing one's social capital, users' activities have been described as: (1) constructing a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulating a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) viewing and traversing their list of connections and those made by others within the system (boyd - Ellison 2008: 211).

Activities involving constructing a public or semi-public profile and viewing and traversing lists of connections quickly led to the blurring of the boundaries between private and public. Papacharissi and Gibson (2011) describe social media as publicly private and privately public, focusing their attention on how the self traverses from the private to the public and back again by cultivating a range of social behaviors or performances.

To gain a better understanding of social media users' behaviors in the hybrid public-private space, we refer to research on, and the categorization of, social uses provided by social media (Stafford - Stafford - Schkade 2004). In such studies, we find specific classifications of social media uses (Lampe - Ellison - Steinfield 2006; Joinson 2008; Alhabash - Ma 2017), including:

1) Background Listening: denoting social media use to read social media feeds and follow people (Quinn 2016; Crawford 2009); according to Crawford (2009), background listening is a form of "tuning in" – typical of media broadcasts – applied to pages and public profiles on social media. A typical form of background listening is following people through social media combined with the quick and unfocused reading of social media feeds, including family and friends' content, such as branding or media pages and public profiles of celebrities.

2) Information Seeking: denoting social media use for finding information about others (Ellison - Steinfield - Lampe 2011; Ellison et al. 2011). Information seeking, according to Lampe (Lampe - Ellison - Steinfield 2006), can be divided into "social searching" when referring to family, friends and friends of friends, and "social browsing", when referring to people with whom there are no relationships offline. Social browsing has been described as relating to politicians, public institutions, and celebrities and can increase the so-called "public connections" of social media users (Couldry et al. 2018). Moreover, social browsing can have the aim of finding out about public and political issues through politicians and political parties or celebrities and web stars who can engage "the otherwise disengaged into a wider field of public debate and concern" (Couldry - Markham 2007: 409).

3) Information Sharing: denoting social media use to "tell others about oneself or post useful information" (Quinn 2016: 70), to "store images and memories in order to remember past events" (Sheldon et al 2017: 644) and to speak up. Information sharing describes the forms of content production aimed at expressing opinions, presenting oneself, speak up, documenting private and public events, building a collective memory, and so on (Joinson 2018; Sheldon et al. 2017).

Background Listening, information seeking and information sharing in the hybrid public-private space of social media are relatively new areas of research.

The scale from private to public that characterizes the different forms of background listening and information seeking makes up the first level of scalable sociality, defined by Miller (Miller et al. 2016) as the specific sociality of social media where niches and gaps along the scale from private to public can be filled. At this level, private and public doesn't refer to the degree of self-disclosure while performing oneself on social media, but refers to the scale that ranges from consolidating a user's network of private ties to listening and seeking information about public persons (celebrities, politicians) and public issues (news and political issues) (*ibidem*).

According to Miller, information sharing occurs within a second kind of scalable sociality: from "private dyadic conversation [to] fully public broadcasting" (*ibid.*: 3). Indeed imagined (and real) audiences of speaking activities range from dyadic conversations to content posted to groups whose borders are under control (or that social media users imagine are under control), to post and comments visible to all internet users which resemble the indistinct public nature of a broadcast communication. Consequently, information sharing activities by users of social media and instant messaging describe – depending on their orientation towards dyadic or fully public communication – "how social media has colonized the space of group sociality between the private and the public" (*ibid.*: X) opening up specific mediated spaces of group communication.

According to the literature on the uses of social media and the two possible scales from private to public and from small to larger groups described above, first research question is:

RQ1 *What kind of social media uses are performed by users, thus producing their scalable sociality?*

1.2. *A cross-regional perspective*

In the last twenty years, media research has increasingly adopted a cross-national approach. Both the reasons for this approach and the related difficulties have been highlighted by several authors. The former concern the processes of globalization that have affected both the media system and the research networks and institutions that finance them. The latter are theoretical and methodological, as well as practical, including the comparative dimension of the research, the meaning to be attributed to the socio-cultural and political context, the problem of assuming nations as units of analysis, the uncertainty of detecting and measuring exactly the same phenomena in different contexts (Livingstone 2003; Boomgaarden - Song 2019).

As far as research on social uses of media is concerned, the cross-national approach aims, ultimately, at "understanding how characteristics of the contextual environment in which individual media users are situated shape their communication processes, and how such processes vary across different settings" (Boomgaarden - Song 2019: 548; Blumler - Gurevitch 1995). What seems more relevant, in this perspective, are not so much the cultural differences of a general nature, difficult to investigate in relation to the social uses of the media without incurring the risk of oversemplifiation or unwittingly adopting Eurocentric stereotypes (Livingstone 2003); it is rather a matter of taking into account cultural contexts as "structures of opportunity" which contribute to shaping individual media exposure. In particular, the different media systems that have developed around the world on the basis of historical, cultural, economic and political differences provide a functional background for capturing and interpreting the specificities that can be found in media usage (McLeod - Lee 2012).

Boomgaarden and Song (2019) present a wide overview of studies that are part of the tradition of a comparative and cross-national approach to media use, most of them in the realm of political communication and people's engagement with the news (Lizardo - Skyles 2009; Nielsen - Schrøder 2014; Kalogeropulos et al. 2017).

Also the PIN Project, aiming to compare social uses of the internet across different countries and regions of the world, relies on the macrolevel classification of nations and countries along the lines of different media systems. By geographical point of view, in order to grant a certain stage of maturity of internet use, it was adopted as a criterion that at least 50% of the population must be at least occasional users of the internet. Countries have been selected in order to represent different cultural and historical backgrounds and distinctive types of state organizations, referring to media systems theory (Hallin - Mancini 2004; Brüggemann et al. 2014; Castro Herrero et al. 2017) and considering the various roles which the state can play in regulating, funding, and operating media.

According with such a comparative cross-national perspective, second research question is:

RQ2 What are the main differences in social media uses across World regions and national contexts ?

1.3. *Other variables*

Background listening, information seeking, information sharing, and their distribution along the scales from the private to the public and from smallest to largest groups, can also be described according to socio-demographic variables.

The use of social media, in terms of frequency and selectivity, is influenced by socio-demographic variables (Hargittai 2008, Hargittai - Yu 2011) and in particular by age, gender, education and ethnicity. In addition, different social media uses vary on the basis of socio-demographic variables including full-time or part-time occupational status or student status. For example, Joinson (2008) describes gender, occupational status and age as predictors of social searching uses.

Furthermore, socio-demographic variables influence the choice of whether a user directs their attention towards their most intimate and private network of relationships

or towards persons and themes related to media and public life. As Kaye (2011) points out, several studies have shown how some socio-demographic variables influence the use of social media to learn about politics (Johnson et al. 2010).

In particular Kaye (2011) shows the importance of gender and age (being female or younger emerged as predictors of social media use to learn about politics), while income and education are not significant, even though it has emerged that social media users interested in politics tend to have a lower income and shorter education than those who use blogs.

Finally, listening and information seeking about celebrities have also been shown to be influenced by socio-demographic variables. In particular the "public connections" studies of Couldry and Markham (2007) demonstrated that age, gender, class, the level of participation in organizations and social capital are significant variables in predicting interest in celebrities.

In line with the literature on the uses of social media and how socio-demographic variables are relevant in predicting these uses, our third research question is:

RQ3 What socio-demographic variables affect the orientation towards more public or more private uses of social media?

II - METHODS AND MEASURES

Methodological core of the PIN Project consisted of representative surveys of the online population in China, the US, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and the United Kingdom; alongside, analysis of the available data about Web traffic and an ethnographic fieldwork in China, the US, and Denmark have been made; some document and indicator studies of policy and regulation, and user surveillance, in different regions have also been collected.

Online surveys have been conducted in summer 2018 in US and Europe by an international provider (YouGov); in China CTR Market Research carried out the face-to-face surveys through multi-stage cluster sampling from December 2018 to March 2019 in order to cover internet users across the country, including both rural and urban areas. The sample, weighted by age, gender, education, and geography, was made of 10772 respondents: China (n = 1617), Denmark (n = 1510), Germany (n = 1511), Hungary (n = 1505), Italy (n = 1514), the UK (n = 1610), and the US (n = 1505).

Population survey aimed to gather data about the use of media and communicative patterns across countries to analyze them in terms of frequency, intensity and purposes and identify trends and user characteristics. Questionnaires contained 54 questions about media usage, communication with other people, internet uses, social media and message applications, socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. In order to map the relationship between formally organized and informal aspects of citizens' social engagement, also participation in various social and cultural activities has been investigated.

The article presents the results of a part of the whole project, namely the section of the questionnaire focused on the use of social media and instant messaging apps

(Q29-Q32). In order to answer the first research question, the scalable forms of sociality supported by social media have been operationalized with reference to these questions.

We described social media uses distinguishing between two scales: scalable social listening and scalable social sharing, being the former a kind of Listening and the latter a type of Speaking, as follows (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 – *Scalable Sociality and Social Media Uses*

Scalable social listening (Listening)	Background listening (Q30)
	Information seeking - Social searching (Q31_1)
	Information seeking - Social browsing (Q31_2; Q31_3)
Scalable social sharing (Speaking)	Information sharing - Dyadic (Q32_1)
	Information sharing - Small groups (Q32_2)
	Information sharing - Social media audience (Q32_3)
	Information sharing - Internet audience (Q32_4)

Data were analyzed using the software SPSS© vers. 25. A factor analysis was carried out in order to reduce the large number of variables representing different kinds of online contacts (Q30) down to a manageable number of factors and to identify any latent dimensions representing both the existence of a statistical association between these variables and their own theoretical coherence. The factor analysis used was a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation. An eigenvalue of greater than one (Kaiser criterion) was used to determine the number of components needed to represent the study data, which was confirmed by the use of a scree test (Cattell 1966).

To answer the second research question, the recoded variable "Users" / "Non users" was inserted into a binary logistic regression, run to estimate which of the selected socio-demographic variables most influenced the likelihood of using social media or messaging applications for specific purposes of information seeking (three variables) and sharing (four variables). The same independent variables were included in seven regressions, while only the dependent variable was modified to compare the impact of the regressors on the frequency of the seven types of social media uses mentioned above. The method used was Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE).

III - RESULTS

3.1. *Social media users and scalable sociality*

Not all internet users are social media users. Summing up, 85.2% of the people using the internet use social media daily or weekly, while those who could be called "social media non users" make up only 14.8%. Three out of four social media users are

daily users, and the average frequency is 6.2 days a week; as a whole, they spend a little less than 2 hours a day on social media (mean = 1.75).

Social media users employ social media to keep in touch with people who are close to them (family, friends and friends of friends), public people (celebrities, musicians, sports stars, politicians), plus NGOs or commercial brands and organizations which they are interested in (Table 1).

TABLE 1 – *Background Listening to Different Networks: Percentages (multiple answers)*

Q30. What kind of people are you connected to or do you follow on social network sites?	Valid percent
Friends	81.9
Family members and relatives	79.1
Acquaintances or friends-of-friends	56.8
Colleagues or former colleagues	51.1
News media	28.0
Celebrities	17.2
Musicians	17.0
Lifestyle or retail brands	16.5
Politicians or political parties	14.3
Entertainment media	14.1
Non-profit organizations grassroots movements	12.5
Sports stars	10.4
Religious or spiritual leaders	3.8
Other	1.7
Don't know / Prefer not to respond	3.4

Users mainly focus their background listening on the network of close relations. Less than one in three is connected to a broader network of celebrities, media and various organizations. News media are followed more than entertainment media. Celebrities and musicians are both followed by less than one in five users; politicians and sport stars even less. Commercial brands are followed more than non-profit organizations. Religious or spiritual leaders are followed the least of all.

Applying a factor analysis to the data collected on these indicators (Table 2), we see the presence of three different kinds of sociality through social media: the first one refers to the realm of para-social interaction with celebrities in the world of entertainment, sports, media and lifestyle; the second one coincides with the most widespread and most frequent connection, that with members of a user's most intimate circle; the last one refers to the field of public affairs, from news media to political and religious leaders, to social movements.

TABLE 2 – *Different Kinds of Social Media Connections: Factor analysis*

Q30. What kinds of people are you connected to or do you follow on social network sites?

	Components		
	1	2	3
Celebrities	**.759**	.051	.075
Musicians	**.749**	.071	.093
Entertainment media	**.630**	.053	.215
Sports stars	**.622**	.010	.095
Lifestyle or retail brands	**.601**	.110	.131
Family members and relatives	.027	**.726**	-.049
Friends	.026	**.704**	.009
Colleagues or former colleagues	.087	**.682**	.129
Acquaintances or friends-of-friends	.106	**.631**	.049
Non-profit organizations or grassroots movements	.196	.103	**.704**
Politicians or political parties	.286	.042	**.648**
Religious or spiritual leaders	-.015	-.049	**.648**
News media	.439	.133	**.469**

Interestingly, the three scales identified by this statistically based analysis correspond very closely with the three areas investigated by question Q31: Friends, family and acquaintances; Entertainment, sports or culture; and Political or economic affairs as topics for "social searching and browsing" (Lampe - Ellison - Steinfield 2006). It's noteworthy, though not surprising, that the group from which respondents get the most frequent updates on social media is friends, family members and acquaintances: one in three get updates once or a few times a day, while about one in four get updates either many times a day or weekly. Social media users do "social browsing" for entertainment, sports or cultural purposes and political or economic affairs less frequently (Table 3).

TABLE 3 – *Social Searching and Social Browsing of Different Networks: Percentages*

Q31. Do you ever get updates about …	Many times a day	Once or a few times a day	Weekly (one or more times a week)	Rarely	Never	Don't know / Prefer not to respond	Total
…your friends, family, or acquaintances	24.5	32.2	27.6	9.4	3.7	2.6	100.0
…entertainment, sports. or culture	11.2	21.3	25.6	21.5	17.0	3.5	100.0
…political or economic affairs	10.5	18.8	20.6	24.9	21.8	3.5	100.0

Most social media users, who typically have different levels of frequency according to which audience they are addressing, usually speak through social media and instant messaging. In terms of both diversity and frequency, social media users are more likely to prefer using the media in an individually oriented way rather than a shared or public way; in fact, speaking uses generally become less common as the size of possible audiences increases, and their frequency decreases as users move into a more open or public dimension of conversation (Table 4).

TABLE 4 – *Speaking to Different Audiences: Percentages*

Q32. How frequently do you…	Many times a day	Once or a few times a day	Weekly (one or more times a week)	Rarely	Never	Don't know / Prefer not to respond	Total
send text messages, photos, or videos to other people individually?	14.6	21.0	30.8	24.5	7.1	1.9	100.0
share text messages, photos, or videos to groups of friends, family, or colleagues?	8.8	17.4	28.1	31.3	12.3	2.0	100.0
share text messages, photos or videos so that all your connections can see them?	7.1	14.9	25.1	33.3	17.6	2.0	100.0
post comments that can be seen by anybody on the internet?	6.0	12.5	20.6	32.4	26.5	2.1	100.0

3.2. *Social Media users by world regions and countries*

Use of social media and messaging apps is widespread across all countries. In China, Denmark and Italy, more than 80% of respondents use social media on a daily basis, while the US (27.5%) and Italy (25.8%) use social media the longest (3 hours or more) in an average day.

Background listening uses differ between China and Western countries and between different European countries. In China 95.6% of the respondents have a connection with family members and relatives (in Germany it is 65.5%). In Hungary and Denmark 38.7% and 36.7% of respondents respectively are connected to news media. In Denmark, the UK and the US, connections to lifestyle brands, celebrities, political parties and other public interest groups are more popular compared to other European countries and China.

In every country respondents get social media updates most frequently about friends and relatives. Italy (31.8%) and Hungary (27%) stand out as the countries with the highest number of updates per day and where social browsing for entertainment,

sports, or culture is a daily practice (40.5% and 38.3%, respectively). At the other end of the scale, in Germany over half of the respondents rarely or never (52.2%) connect to social media for entertainment, sports, or culture. Regarding social browsing for political or economic affairs, the Chinese data stands out in that 59.9% of respondents never or rarely connect to these sources, followed by Germany (53.1% never or rarely). In contrast, 41.2% and 39.9% respondents in the US and Hungary respectively get updates from these sources daily.

Speaking practices become less common as the size of possible audiences increases, although this varies if we look more closely at single countries. Italy and Hungary at one extreme (high) and Denmark and Germany at the other (low) show substantial differences in the frequency of speaking practices. China, the UK, and the US all lie between these two extremes and have similar percentages for all the behaviors examined.

In order to measure how far living in different world regions – alongside with the main socio-demographic variables – positively or negatively affect certain uses of social media for information seeking and information sharing, a logistic regression analysis was carried out for some variables (see Table 5 and Table 6).

If one looks at the world regions, could see that this affects information seeking via social media in a less linear way (Table 5). Compared to the US respondents, Chinese respondents are 52% more likely to use social media to get updates about friends, family and acquaintances, and 63% more likely to get updates about entertainment, sports or culture, but they are 31% less likely to get updates about political and economic affairs. Being European, in contrast, is not a statistically significant variable as far as getting updates from respondents' most intimate circle of friends and family is concerned, but it positively affect the likelihood of respondents seeking information about entertainment, sports or culture, and negatively affect the likelihood of them seeking information about political or economic affairs.

Comparing country, significant differences emerge also in regard to information sharing (Table 6); Chinese respondents have a maximum probability (about three times higher than US respondents) of using social media for individual communication, and are more likely to use them for sharing messages with close groups and with all connections, but it is a not significant variable for posting comments openly. On the other hand, European respondents are more likely to use social media for "groups", but less likely for "connections" and "anybody", with the variable not significant for "dyadic".

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TABLE 5 – *Social Media and Instant Messaging in order to get updates about…:*
Logistic Regression

	…friends, family, or acquaintances		…entertainment, sports. or culture		…political or economic affairs	
	N. 8.874 (82.1%)		N. 8.789 (81.4%)		N. 8.794 (81.4%)	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Gender (**Male**)	0.724**	0.630-0.832	1.375**	1.248-1.515	1.528**	1.389-1.680
Age (**55-74**)	1.000**		1.000**		1.000**	
Age (**18-34**)	1.337**	1.100-1.625	2.268**	1.976-2.603	1.195**	1.045-1.367
Age (**35-54**)	0.970	0.809-1.162	1.347**	1.181-1.535	0.952	0.835-1.085
Education (**High**)	1.000*		1.000**		1.000**	
Education (**Low**)	0.761*	0.615-0.942	0.522**	0.450-0.606	0.512**	0.443-0.592
Education (**Medium**)	0.791**	0.666-0.940	0.796**	0.707-0.897	0.635**	0.566-0.712
Whether people have a partner (**Yes**)	1.137	0.976-1.324	0.949	0.849-1.060	1.112*	0.999-1.239
Whether people have children living with them (**Yes**)	1.275**	1.078-1.508	1.025	0.915-1.148	0.994	0.890-1.109
Income (**High**)	1.000		1.000*		1.000	
Income (**Low**)	0.895	0.735-1.090	0.830**	0.721-0.955	0.855*	0.746-0.981
Income (**Medium**)	0.980	0.822-1.170	0.967	0.855-1.093	0.919	0.817-1.035
Whether people are employed (**Yes**)	1.268**	1.077-1.493	1.197**	1.065-1.346	1.061	0.946-1.191
Country (**US**)	1.000**		1.000**		1.000**	
Country (**China**)	1.519*	1.096-2.107	1.626**	1.307-2.024	0.687**	0.557-0.847
Country (**Europe**)	0.986	0.793-1.226	1.214*	1.041-1.416	0.851*	0.731-0.991
Citizenship (**Global**)	1.000		1.000		1.000	
Citizenship (**Local**)	0.838	0.460-1.528	0.965	0.645-1.444	0.843	0.571-1.246
Citizenship (**Foreign**)	0.704	0.344-1.441	0.840	0.509-1.388	0.833	0.512-1.354
Urbanization (**City**)	1.000		1.000**		1.000**	
Urbanization (**Village**)	0.787	0.597-1.037	0.661**	0.549-0.796	0.667**	0.557-0.800
Urbanization (**Town**)	0.873	0.752-1.013	0.948	0.853-1.053	0.945	0.853-1.046
Belonging to an organisation (**Yes**)	1.090	0.944-1.259	1.355**	1.223-1.502	1.455**	1.317-1.606

3.3. *Influence of socio-demographic variables*

With regard to information seeking (Q31) (Table 5), the most significant socio-demographic variables are gender, age, and education. While male respondents are less

likely than female respondents to use social media in order to get updates about friends, family and acquaintances, males are more likely to use social media for entertainment, sports or culture and, even more so, for political or economic affairs. Comparing age groups, 18 to 34-year-olds are more likely to use social media for all purposes, although mainly to get updates about entertainment, sports or culture. A high level of education positively influences all use groups, but two groups in particular: getting updates about entertainment, sports or culture and getting updates about political and economic affairs. In contrast, respondents with a low level of education are about 50% less likely to use social media for these two purposes, while respondents with a medium level of education are only 20% and 36% less likely to use social media for these two purposes respectively.

Some other variables (income, urbanization and belonging to an organization) appear to be significant more randomly, especially for social media uses focused on entertainment, sports and culture and on political or economic affairs. Respondents with a low income are less likely to use social media for entertainment, sports or culture or for political or economic affairs and respondents living in a village are similarly less likely to seek information on these two groups of topics. On the other hand, respondents who belong to an organization are 35% more likely to use social media for entertainment, sports or culture and 45% more likely to use them for political or economic affairs.

Moving on to analyze the use of social media for information sharing (Q32) (Table 6), we observe a different scenario: the most differentiated uses from the variables in the study were those related to sending text messages, photos, or videos to other people individually, while the other uses appear more and more undifferentiated. The most significant variables with respect to all four forms of information sharing considered are age, having children, income, country, urbanization and belonging to an organization.

The 18-34 age group is more likely to use social media for all types of information sharing; this probability is highest (about three times more than the older group) for "dyadic" communication and decreases as we move towards more public uses. The youngest group is followed by the 35-54 age group, characterized by a less linear probability distribution: maximum (+36%) for "dyadic", almost the same for "groups" and "connections" (about +15%) and somewhat more (+20%) for "anybody".

As for the income variable, earning a medium income positively influences the probability of using social media for sending messages individually, sharing messages with all connections, and posting comments openly; in contrast, a low income negatively affects the probability for "dyadic" and "groups", but it is not significant for other uses.

As with information seeking, living in a village is a significant variable associated with a lower probability of using social media for any type of information sharing use (-56% probability for "dyadic" to -40% for "anybody"). Finally, gender deserves mention. While females are more likely to send messages individually, males are more likely to post comments openly on the internet; however, this variable is not significant for the other information sharing uses.

TABLE 6 – *Social Media and Instant Messaging in order to...:*
Logistic Regression

	...send text messages, photos, or videos to other people individually		...share text messages, photos, or videos to groups of friends, family, or colleagues		...share text message, photos, or videos so that all your connections can see them		...post comments that can be seen by anybody on the internet	
	N. 8.937 (82.7%)		N. 8.928 (82.6%)		N. 8.923 (82.6%)		N. 8.917 (82.5%)	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Gender (**Male**)	0.746**	0.673-0.826	0.973	0.886-1.07	1.032	0.940-1.134	1.240**	1.127-1.363
Age (**55-74**)	1.000**		1.000**		1.000**		1.000**	
Age (**18-34**)	3.019**	2.608-3.496	1.931**	1.691-2.206	1.616**	1.417-1.844	1.499**	1.309-1.716
Age (**35-54**)	1.365**	1.196-1.559	1.155*	1.016-1.313	1.162*	1.021-1.322	1.203**	1.052-1.375
Education (**High**)	1.000**		1.000**		1.000		1.000	
Education (**Low**)	0.773**	0.660-0.905	0.761**	0.658-0.881	0.890	0.770-1.029	0.884	0.763-1.025
Education (**Medium**)	0.860*	0.759-0.973	0.934	0.834-1.047	1.026	0.917-1.147	0.989	0.883-1.108
Whether people have a partner (**Yes**)	0.986	0.878-1.107	0.965	0.867-1.075	0.938	0.843-1.043	0.836**	0.75-0.932
Whether people have children living with them (**Yes**)	1.278**	1.131-1.444	1.212**	1.086-1.353	1.351**	1.212-1.504	1.394**	1.250-1.555
Income (**High**)	1.000**		1.000**		1.000**		1.000**	
Income (**Low**)	0.820**	0.710-0.948	0.734**	0.640-0.840	0.875	0.764-1.001	0.901	0.784-1.036
Income (**Medium**)	1.173*	1.032-1.334	1.064	0.945-1.197	1.173**	1.044-1.317	1.193**	1.060-1.342
Whether people are employed (**Yes**)	1.168*	1.034-1.319	1.133	1.011-1.27	1.123*	1.002-1.259	1.067	0.949-1.199
Country (**US**)	1.000**		1.000**		1.000**		1.000**	
Country (**China**)	3.053**	2.367-3.938	2.394**	1.925-2.978	1.797**	1.452-2.223	1.067	0.866-1.314
Country (**Europe**)	1.060	0.903-1.245	1.192*	1.026-1.384	0.785**	0.676-0.910	0.673**	0.58-0.782
Citizenship (**Global**)	1.000*		1.000*		1.000		1.000	
Citizenship (**Local**)	0.610*	0.384-0.970	0.642*	0.431-0.954	1.152	0.794-1.671	0.927	0.635-1.353
Citizenship (**Foreign**)	0.480**	0.276-0.837	0.820	0.501-1.344	1.161	0.728-1.854	0.738	0.459-1.188

	…send text messages, photos, or videos to other people individually		…share text messages, photos, or videos to groups of friends, family, or colleagues		…share text message, photos, or videos so that all your connections can see them		…post comments that can be seen by anybody on the internet	
	N. 8.937 (82.7%)		N. 8.928 (82.6%)		N. 8.923 (82.6%)		N. 8.917 (82.5%)	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Urbanization (**City**)	1.000**		1.000**		1.000**		1.000**	
Urbanization (**Village**)	0.443**	0.358-0.547	0.576**	0.478-0.694	0.546**	0.454-0.657	0.594**	0.494-0.714
Urbanization (**Town**)	0.891*	0.798-0.995	0.981	0.886-1.086	0.940	0.850-1.039	0.905	0.817-1.003
Belonging to an organisation (**Yes**)	1.137*	1.022-1.265	1.262**	1.143-1.394	1.402**	1.271-1.547	1.666**	1.508-1.84

IV - DISCUSSION

The data on social media described in the previous sections warrant further consideration about the articulation of online social spaces afforded by social media platforms. Looking at the uses aimed at both listening and speaking in relation to their respective scalable socialities (see RQ1 *What kind of social media uses are performed by users, thus producing their scalable sociality?*), it would appear that all uses are more widespread and frequent when oriented towards the private rather than the public dimension; the greater the activity required by the user, the smaller tends to be the spread, and the greater the size of audience, the smaller the spread tends to be. The most convincing data concern the greater spread and frequency of uses focused on personal contacts (for listening) and the dyadic mode of communication one-to-one (for speaking). Although there is no evidence that the people they are in contact with are the same people they talk to, most of the social media users confirm that they are mainly focused on the network of intimate relations and personal interactions connected to their offline social space (Raacke - Bonds-Raacke 2008; Joinson 2008; Lampe - Ellison - Steinfield 2006; Papacharissi 2011).

In contrast, the lower diversity and frequency of listening to people and institutions in the media sphere, especially those connected to economic and public affairs, parallels the lower diversity and frequency of speaking in a one-to-many mode; both indicators gradually decrease as the public dimension of communication increases, to a minimum level for direct speaking to an undifferentiated audience.

If one looks at the data by country (see RQ2, *What are the main differences in social media uses across World regions and national contexts ?*), the regression analysis highlights some differences between China, the US and Europe. Although private uses predominate both in China and in Western countries, there is a distinct scale that goes from a strong orientation toward person-to-person connections and inter-

actions and entertainment outlets in China to more public uses (both in terms of listening and speaking practices) in the US. The Chinese data clearly indicate that social media and messaging apps are being used as a way to respond to both recreational and social interaction needs (Cheng - Liang - Leung 2015), in a country characterized in recent years by rapidly increasing globalization, industrialization and internal migration (Miller et al. 2016). However, the increased private use in China may be related not only to personal communicative needs, but also to more political and structural factors (Kalogeropoulos et al. 2017) that shape the Chinese distinctive type of internet governance.

Against the background of this general evidence, several socio-demographic variables can be seen to significantly differentiate between social media users (see RQ3 *What socio-demographic variables affect the orientation towards more public or more private uses of social media?*); not only do some variables predict a higher probability of being a user of social media, they also seem to influence whether a user is oriented towards the private dimension and individual communication or towards the opposite extreme. Here, the most significant socio-demographic features are age and gender.

Being young (18-34) positively affects both the likelihood of being a social media user and of using social media on a daily basis. While 18-34 years old are more likely to be focused mainly on the public realm of celebrities and entertainment, they are more likely to use social media for communicating individually than for addressing larger audiences, probably because of their wider use of instant messaging apps. As far as variable gender is concerned, data show that women have an increased propensity to use social media and instant messaging as compared to men, which is consistent with the literature (Hargittai 2008). This also confirms the greater tendency of women to use social media to feed the network of intimate family and friendship relationships, compared to the more public-oriented use by men. While female users prefer to engage in person-to-person dialogic communication online, males are more likely to address a wider and more open audience (Pew Internet and American Life Project 2000). While this distinction follows more traditional forms of inequality (giving women a social role characterized by the private and family dimension, and men a more public role), it is also possible to interpret the data on the basis of a principle of delegation. As the qualitative data collected during this research project also confirm (Zeng et al. 2019), women often take on the "emotional labour" associated with maintaining family and friendship ties (Bourdieu 1998) through social media interactions. This could also be seen as a form of "emotional capital", a variant of social capital, characteristic of the private, rather than the public sphere (Reay 2004; Nowotny 1981).

Apart from the variables age and gender, the most significant variables are those related to the main forms of economic and cultural capital; both low income and low levels of education negatively affect the probability of using social media for all purposes. Even more clearly, "living in a village" also is associated with low levels of social media use for both listening and speaking. These variables seem to be particularly strong in predicting how far respondents use social media not only to cultivate private relations, but also to gather information on the more public areas of cultural, economic

and political life. At the same time, there is no significant evidence that low levels of income or education are negatively associated with the use of social media to speak to a broad or undifferentiated audience.

V - LIMITATION AND FURTHER ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data has highlighted the significance of some variables that deserve further investigation. For example, the data relating to having a child suggest that the composition of a household may impact on social media uses.

Further data analysis would also provide more insight into how social media users act along the scales of different online social spaces. In particular, it would be interesting to relate the listening uses with the speaking uses in order to understand how the respective spaces interact; to what extent, for example, is the focus on the public dimension in social browsing accompanied by the same focus in information sharing.

The differences detected in the use of social media at country level could be further explained by considering the relationship between these uses and the actual digital systems employed by the different countries. In particular, the different affordances offered by the most heavily used social media and instant messaging platforms in the US, Europe and China could provide further insight into the different scalability of social listening and sociality at country level.

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