

AFFECTIVE FABRICS OF DIGITAL CULTURE: FEELINGS, TECHNOLOGIES, POLITICS  
University of Manchester – Manchester research Institute for  
Cosmopolitan Cultures (RICC)



*Collective tragedy and digital emotions: the  
Earthquake in Abruzzi "lived" on Facebook*



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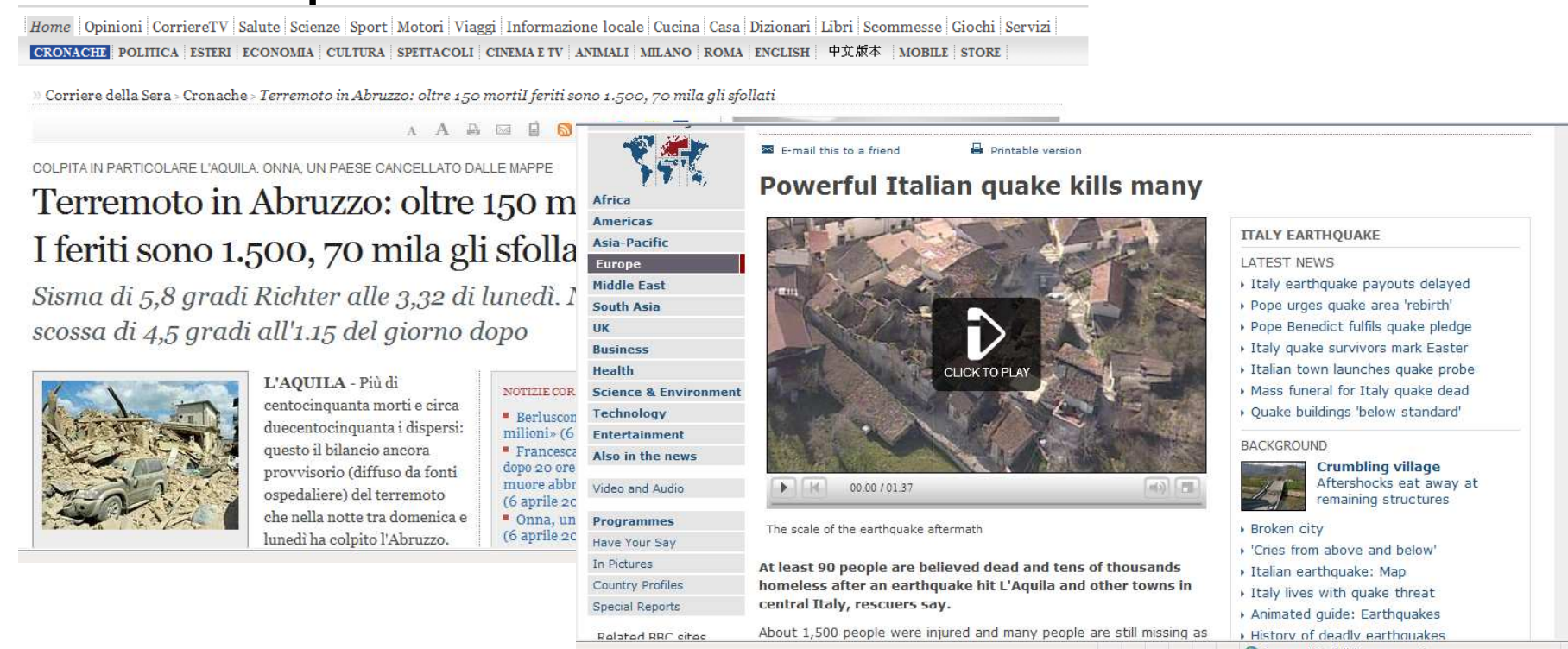
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# Framing the research: the Event



# Framing the research: mediascapes

- [Just to have an idea](#) (italian)
- [BBC world news](#)



The screenshot shows a news website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links like Home, Opinioni, CorriereTV, Salute, Scienze, Sport, Motori, Viaggi, Informazione locale, Cucina, Casa, Dizionari, Libri, Scommesse, Giochi, Servizi. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with categories like CRONACHE, POLITICA, ESTERI, ECONOMIA, CULTURA, SPETTACOLI, CINEMA E TV, ANIMALI, MILANO, ROMA, ENGLISH, 中文版本, MOBILE, STORE. The main headline reads: "Terremoto in Abruzzo: oltre 150 morti I feriti sono 1.500, 70 mila gli sfollati". Below the headline is a sub-headline: "Sisma di 5,8 gradi Richter alle 3,32 di lunedì. 1 scossa di 4,5 gradi all'1.15 del giorno dopo". There is a small image of a destroyed building. To the right of the main text is a sidebar with a world map and a list of regions: Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe (highlighted), Middle East, South Asia, UK, Business, Health, Science & Environment, Technology, Entertainment, Also in the news, Video and Audio, Programmes, Have Your Say, In Pictures, Country Profiles, Special Reports, and Related BBC sites. The main content area features a video player with the title "Powerful Italian quake kills many" and a "CLICK TO PLAY" button. Below the video is a caption: "The scale of the earthquake aftermath". To the right of the video is a section titled "ITALY EARTHQUAKE" with "LATEST NEWS" and "BACKGROUND" sub-sections. The "LATEST NEWS" section lists several items: "Italy earthquake payouts delayed", "Pope urges quake area 'rebirth'", "Pope Benedict fulfils quake pledge", "Italy quake survivors mark Easter", "Italian town launches quake probe", "Mass funeral for Italy quake dead", and "Quake buildings 'below standard'". The "BACKGROUND" section has a sub-section "Crumbling village" with the text "Aftershocks eat away at remaining structures" and a list of items: "Broken city", "'Cries from above and below'", "Italian earthquake: Map", "Italy lives with quake threat", "Animated guide: Earthquakes", and "History of deadly earthquakes". At the bottom of the page, there is a text box that says "At least 90 people are believed dead and tens of thousands homeless after an earthquake hit L'Aquila and other towns in central Italy, rescuers say." and "About 1,500 people were injured and many people are still missing as".

## Framing the research: who are the victims?



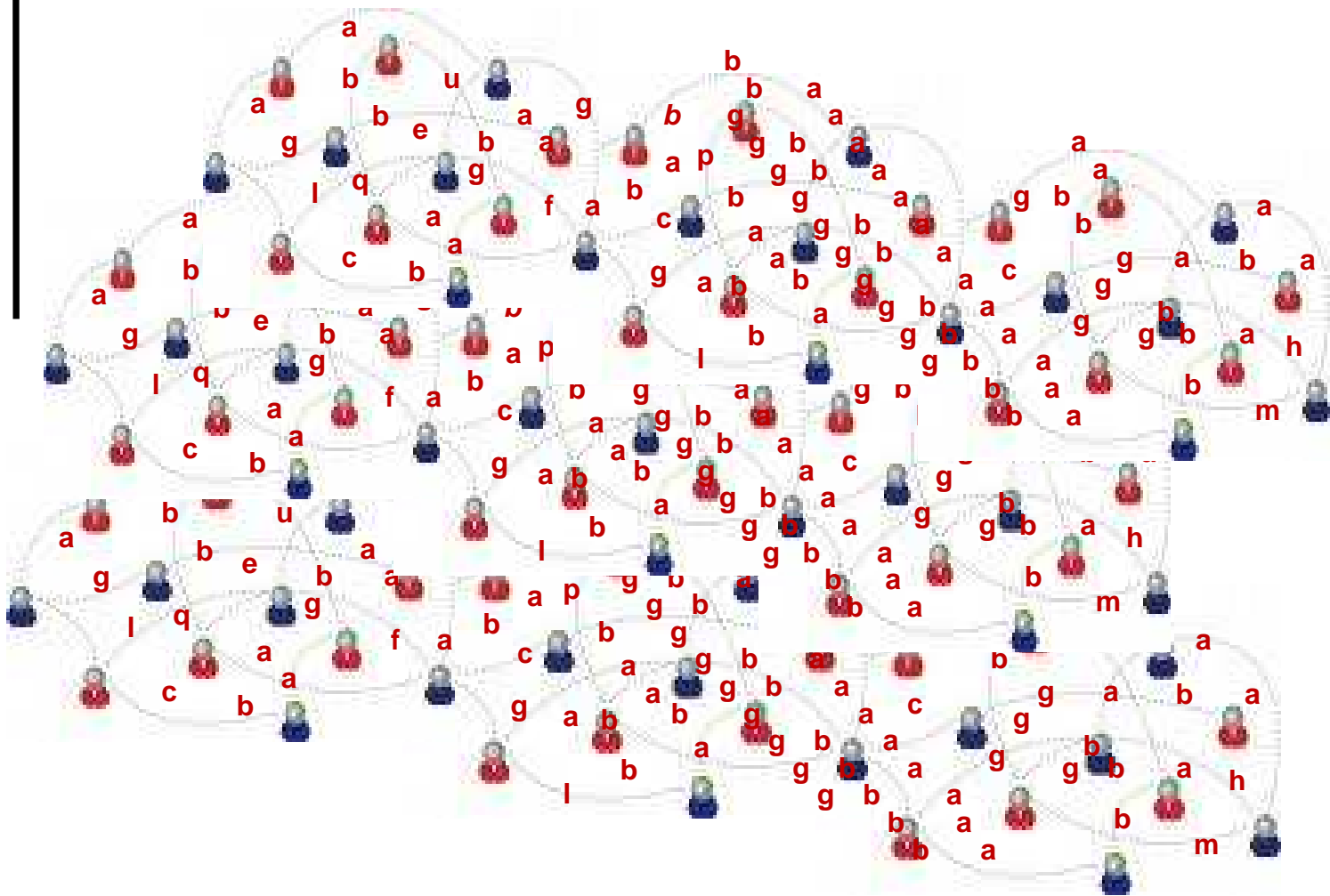
- The persons that are directly involved
- The relatives of that persons
- Experts and help operators that work on the field in case of tragedy (Cusano, 2002)

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- Audience-surfers?

people who "live" the events through the media,  
but has a great affective and emotional  
involvement

# Framing the research: for a definition of Internet

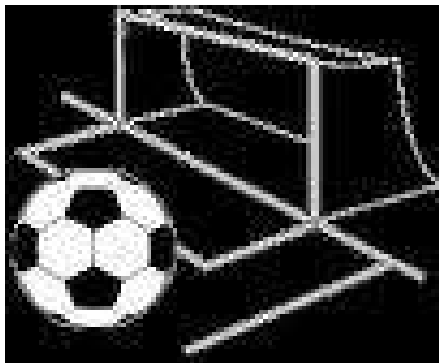


# The goals of the research



What is the role of the Net in the specific circumstance of a collective tragedy?

- What are the characteristics of the narratives?
- What the motivations (of *Facebookers*)?
- What the expectations?
- What the collective representation of the earthquake?
- What the functions of the Net?



## Methods and sample



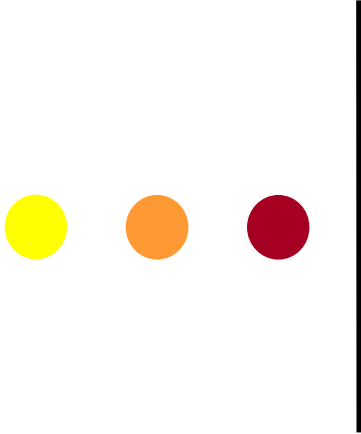
- Narrative qualitative content analysis of 21.000 posts of the first 5 groups about the earthquake;
- E-mail interviews with authors of the posts (25 on 100 contacts);
- Visual analysis of 500 photos, chosen in order to represent the first 500 groups

## The results



- describing the different typologies of narratives
- Individuating motivations and expectations
- Defining the functions of the Net

## The schedule for narrative analysis

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- *Subject: What is the focus of the narratives?*  
I ↔ event
  - *The object: what kind of the theme is proposed on the post?*  
Anecdote – Experience – Emotion - Needs
  - *The referent: who is the addressee of the post?*  
All the facebookers ↔ Specific referents
  - *The aim: what is the implicit or explicit motivation contained in the message?*  
To express - To share - To describe

# Typologies of narratives



Typologies	Subject	Object	Referent	aims
Help request	Event-f	Needs	everyone	express
Empathetic solidarity	I-focused	Emotions	Specific others	Share
Pragmatic Solidarity	I-focused	Needs	Specific others	share
Witness	Event-f.	Anecdote	everyone	Express
Denunciation	Event-f.	Anecdote	everyone	Describe
Pray	Event-f	Emotion	Specific others	Share
Memory	I-focused	Experience	Specific others	Describe
Searching	I-focused	Experience	everyone	Describe
Delayed mourning	I-focused	Emotions	Specific others	express

# Motivations and expectations



- Why they arrive to the group:
  - Invitation forwarded by a friend
  - Personal search on Facebook
  - By chance
  
- In any case, they have a link with the Abruzzi (or the event):
  - Sense of belonging
  - Relatives
  - Previous experience of earthquake
  - Direct experience (especially of help)

# Motivations and expectations



- Why they wrote on the wall:
  - To share feelings of solidarity, a pray for the victims, memories about previous experience
  - To express emotions (above all anger, pain and suffer) or the sense of belonging
  - To promote initiatives
  - To inform about incorrect actions

## Motivations and expectations



- More in depth, they underline the importance of writing on the Net in order to:
  - give and to leave a memory
  - give a sign of their presence
- Some respondents don't remember to have wrote on the wall (generally people less engaged)
- Some interviewees – more involved –used the interview to tell again what happened on 6 April 2009 in their life

# Motivations and expectations



- With which expectations:
  - no expectations
  - to move to an action
  - to create a memory (not to forget)
  - To enhance the sense of belonging to Abruzzi (not of being Italians)

# Final model

