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# Beyond algorithmic platformization: pedagogical approaches to post-digital storytelling

**Michele Marangi [1,*] and Matteo Adamoli [1]**

[1] eCampus University; michele.marangi@uniecampus.it; matteo.adamoli@uniecampus.it
* Correspondence: michele.marangi@uniecampus.it

**Abstract:** This paper addresses, from a theoretical and conceptual perspective, the problem of the homogenization of narrative forms in the postdigital ecosystem, accelerated by the proliferation of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). Drawing upon the construct of digitelling, the notion of digital plenitude, and hacker pedagogy, the paper proposes an interpretive framework to distinguish the multiplication of content from the plurality of narrative codes. From this emerges a media-educational framework that integrates four components: the recognition of AI-hybridized narratives; the design of intergenerational environments for situated hybridization; the systematic adoption of media-education practices; and a critical focus on the political dimension of governing narrative infrastructures.

**Keywords:** digitelling; generative artificial intelligence; storytelling; digital plenitude; media education

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## 1. Introduction[1]

The contemporary media ecosystem is characterized by three converging macro-processes: the fragmentation of content, the platformization of communication infrastructures, and the datafication of expressive practices. Critical literature has conceptualized these dynamics through the categories of the platform society (Van Dijck et al., 2018) and surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019). Within this scenario, self-narrative and world-storytelling — long regarded by educational research as a constitutive device for meaning-making (Bruner, 1991; Lambert, 2010) — tend to orient themselves toward performative visibility rather than the shared elaboration of experience. Marangi (2026) designates this shift from a social to an individual narrative approach with the term digitelling.

The pervasive diffusion of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) and Large Language Models (LLMs) adds a specific transformation to this trend, one that cannot be reduced to the mere amplification of already known dynamics. Indeed, generative systems are optimized to yield the most statistically probable output based on patterns learned from training datasets. This results in a tendency toward a centrality, and average standardization, that is not merely algorithmic, but also stylistic, rhetorical,

[1] The paper represents the result of a collaborative effort by the authors; specifically, Matteo Adamoli authored Sections 1 and 2; Michele Marangi authored Sections 3 and 4. The conclusions were written jointly.

and cultural. What is at stake is therefore not simply access to or the availability of stories, which are, on the contrary, proliferating, but rather their capacity to convey situated experiences that contribute to the construction of a plural identity.

Faced with this scenario, educational research runs a dual risk, seemingly irreconcilable, yet in fact complementary. The first is a defensive and restorationist response that erects walls between generations and languages, disqualifying a priori postdigital and AI-hybridized narrative forms in the name of a supposed, and never neutral, superiority of "high" culture over "low" culture. Such a dichotomy has been extensively challenged by research on cultural convergence (Jenkins, 2006) and digital plenitude (Bolter, 2019). The second risk is an uncritical surrender to an indistinct flow dominated by entertainment, self-referential drifts, and purely commercial logics, one that abdicates all critical discernment in the name of a misguided openness to the novel, ultimately accommodating the extractive dynamics typical of digital platforms (Adamoli et al., 2023).

This paper stems from a central research question: how can we conceptualize an educational mediation capable of holding together the recognition of new GenAI-mediated narrative practices and the preservation of symbolic and generational complexity, in an era when generative systems function simultaneously as quantitative content multipliers and as systems that standardize practices and languages? To address this question, the authors bring three theoretical references into dialogue, conceived as the vertices of a single conceptual triangle (digitelling, digital plenitude, and hacker pedagogy), and integrate them within a critical perspective. After clarifying the sense in which generative homogenization gives rise to both narrative and educational challenges, the paper proposes a media-educational theoretical framework and discusses its implications and limitations

## 2. Narrative Flattening in the Postdigital Ecosystem as an Educational Issue

That a system trained to predict the most plausible sequence tends to produce texts close to the mean of its reference corpus is a structural consequence of how these AI models operate; yet, it is also a tendency discussed in the recent literature (Bini & Quattrociocchi, 2026) that initial empirical findings are beginning to document, as shown below. Doshi and Hauser (2024) conducted an online experiment in which short-story authors were provided with ideas generated by an LLM. Access to AI-generated ideas improved the perceived creativity and quality ratings of the stories, particularly for less creative writers, however, the stories produced with AI assistance were significantly more similar to one another than those written without it. The authors describe this outcome as a dilemma: while the individual writer benefits from the tool, the overall diversity of stories shrinks. This case study is particularly relevant in educational contexts, as it demonstrates that homogenization can coexist with a perceived improvement in individual outputs, thereby evading evaluations conducted solely on isolated texts.

A second piece of evidence concerns the level of model training. Shumailov et al. (2024) demonstrated that the indiscriminate use of model-generated content to train subsequent iterations of models leads to defescts in the resulting models (model collapse). Although this phenomenon, originally described for LLMs and other generative models, pertains to the technical stability of systems rather than digital practices, it suggests a compelling hypothesis that warrants further verification: in an algorithmic ecosystem where synthetic content feeds future training corpora, rare,

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minority, or idiosyncratic narrative forms, the very forms that most frequently convey situated experience, are the first to lose statistical visibility. Both studies have limitations: the former (Doshi & Hauser, 2024) focuses on a specific task (micro-narratives), an online sample, and a particular model; the latter (Shumailov et al., 2024) analyzes the training cycle without observing its educational application. For this reason, they should be taken as convergent indicators that lend plausibility to the hypothesis of narrative flattening within the community-based digital narrative practices addressed in this paper.

The thesis of a quantitative multiplication accompanied by a qualitative reduction is better understood by examining the infrastructural conditions of narrative production. Van Dijck et al. (2018) describe the platform society as an arrangement in which datafication, commodification, and selection steer social practices. In turn, Plantin et al. (2018) demonstrate that platform services acquire infrastructural characteristics, while existing infrastructures are reorganized according to platform logics: communication and expression are simultaneously enabled and constrained by digital systems. Applied to storytelling, this reading implies that templates, filters, formats, and generative models are not neutral tools at the author's disposal, but rather conditions that prefigure what is narratable and in what form. Homogenization is thus not merely a stylistic choice by individual users; it is a systemic effect, and as such, it demands responses that go beyond technological selection to involve the collective construction of meaning.

Bolter (2019) interprets the contemporary postdigital ecosystem not as a decline, but as a proliferation of expressive, relational, and hybrid possibilities capable of eroding the hierarchies between high and low culture through remix, remediation, and the contamination of codes. This interpretation aligns with the analysis of convergence culture proposed by Jenkins (2006), in which consumers and producers actively participate in the circulation and transformation of content. Here the notion is reclaimed in a critical rather than celebratory key: plenitude is neither an automatic outcome of technological availability nor of the sheer power of AI models, but rather a horizon of meaning to be constructed. In the absence of mediation, the multiplication of content risks turning into its exact opposite, a superficial abundance that conceals a growing stylistic, rhetorical, and imaginative uniformity.

Finally, hacker pedagogy (Fant & Milani, 2024) offers a middle path between defensive rejection and uncritical surrender. The hacker ethic, which Himanen (2001) described as a passionate, creative, and collaborative relationship with work and tools, translates here into specific dispositions: epistemic curiosity, the critical appropriation of technologies, opening algorithmic "black boxes," collective experimentation, the horizontal sharing of knowledge, and the playful transgression of intended rules of use. Educators, teachers, and learners are called upon to explore the logics of generative tools together, rather than judging them from a distance or passively enduring them. This posture has recognizable antecedents. In conceptual continuity with Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy, which rejects the simple transmission model between those who know and those who learn, it frames the learner as a co-investigator. At the tool level, educational reverse engineering, drawing on the approach that Gehl (2014) applies to social media as a way of understanding from within the systems that organize social life, provides a rich repertoire of practices. It should be added that Plantin et al.'s (2018) approach, though originating in media studies rather than education, provides a useful vocabulary to make the underlying platform infrastructure

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an object of analysis. From this, follows a precise assumption regarding the task of media education. If media education is understood, following Buckingham (2003), as work that unites critical media comprehension with creative production, its goal is not merely to observe or celebrate plenitude, but to actively transform algorithmic multiplication into qualitative, situated, and stratified differentiation. This entails restoring historical and cultural depth to a narrative production otherwise flattened by the computational present (Adamoli, 2021). Bruner (1991) argued that narrative is a fundamental way through which human beings organize experience and construct social reality, and that its conventions are culturally situated. Community storytelling practices, such as those systematized by Lambert (2013), are grounded in the idea that sharing stories from one's own perspective constitutes a way of processing experience and building community. If the repertoire of available narrative forms shrinks within a dominant algorithmic system, the symbolic resources through which individuals and groups assign meaning to their lived experiences shrink along with it (Markham, 2019).

## 3. From Digital Storytelling to Digitelling

The construct of digitelling (Marangi, 2026) allows for a more precise account of the specific narrative mutation described in the previous section, situating it within the broader reflection on the postdigital condition, understood as the overcoming of the dichotomy between analog and digital in favor of their constitutive hybridization in everyday life (Jandrić et al., 2018), in which the onlife dimension has by now superseded the separation between what happens online and what is experienced offline (Floridi, 2014). Within this framework, digital storytelling, grounded in the collaborative and reflective production of short multimodal narratives in educational and community contexts (Lambert, 2013; Marangi & Rondonotti, 2022), has progressively given way to what the literature defines as postdigital storytelling (Jordan, 2019): communicative practices increasingly shaped by the algorithmic architectures of platforms and by the logics of datafication, which tend to promote an instrumental use of narratives at the expense of their interpretive complexity.

Digitelling should not be understood as a further narrative format or a stylistic trend, but as a critical and diagnostic framework through which to identify a radical shift in the very concept of narration: from storytelling as a process of shared meaning-making to an act of mere visibility, often mediated by templates, filters, or artificial intelligence systems. The distinction proposed here is not evaluative but structural: in digital storytelling, narrative retains a cohesive function, acting as the organizing principle around which languages, media, and communicative intentions converge; in digitelling, by contrast, the deep narrative dimension is progressively eclipsed by logics of entertainment, engagement, and visibility (Jenkins, 2006), to the point that the narrative component, when present, becomes ancillary to the medial gesture of publishing and sharing.

To codify this phenomenon pedagogically, it is useful to recover the distinction proposed by Hayles (2007) between deep attention and hyper attention. Hyper attention, characterized by rapid shifts between information streams, low tolerance for monotony, and a preference for multimodality, does not constitute a cognitive pathology, but an ecological adaptation to media environments of high semiotic density. The tension between the two attentional modes should not be read in terms of substitution, but of articulation: the concept of cognitive assemblage (Hayles, 2017)

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illuminates how humans and technical systems form assemblages in which narration operates at a conscious level, through perceived narration, and at an unconscious level, mediated by engagement patterns and the micro-decisions of scrolling steered by persuasive design.

Several contemporary phenomena crystallize this transformation with particular clarity. Snack culture (Scolari, 2020) configures an ecosystem of textual and audiovisual micro-formats that fragment discursive continuity in order to facilitate viral circulation; memes, understood following Dawkins (1976) as units of cultural transmission subject to dynamics analogous to natural selection, today assume a minimal narrative function, not telling a complete story but evoking a shared context that users mentally complete through repetition and variation (Shifman, 2014). Enshittification (Doctorow, 2023), the progressive degradation of quality of the platform services as platforms shift their priority from user experience to value extraction, must be understood not only as an economic process but also as a semiotic one: stories are decomposed into clips, sound bites, and recurring templates. A parallel argument applies to brainrot, named 2024 Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionary (Oxford Word of the Year Committee, 2024), which describes the supposed cognitive deterioration resulting from continuous exposure to trivial, repetitive, and high-intensity content; significantly, its negative connotations have been rapidly reappropriated by social media cultures themselves, as shown by the case of Italian Brainrot Memes (Katz, 2025), in which the most problematic aspects of the phenomenon coexist with a divergent creativity capable of transforming memetic overload into a codified language for competent communities, in a hybridization of classical culture and hyper-pop aesthetics.

The advent of GenAI further radicalizes this dynamic: what in digitelling was already entrusted to templates and filters now finds, in generative systems, a device capable of fully automating the medial gesture, shifting the axis even further from authorial singularity to statistical recombination. Digitelling therefore constitutes a particularly apt diagnostic framework for reading this acceleration, not as a degeneration of digital storytelling, but as its immanent evolution, one to be critically interrogated without the alarmist tones with which it is often described.

## 4. Discussion

Recognizing digitelling as a structural mutation, rather than as a sign of decline, imposes on educational research a delicate task: constructing a mediation capable of accompanying new generations within these narrative practices without lapsing into either the defensive stance or the uncritical surrender discussed above, and overcoming the rigid dichotomy between high and low culture that continues to shape adult judgment of memes, brainrot, and shitposting. The first step consists in recognizing the young people who practice digitelling not as passive consumers of algorithmic logics, but as creators, whether fully aware of it or not, capable of navigating postdigital complexity with intelligence. This requires an epistemically open, ethnographically inflected posture, capable of suspending moralistic judgment without relinquishing critical discernment: contemporary expressive multimodality does not entail a loss of semantic complexity, but rather its redistribution across different semiotic resources (Cope & Kalantzis, 2015), to the point that even apparently banal products can convey cognitively sophisticated content, grounded in layered irony and shared cultural references.

On this basis, it is possible to identify several directions for educational development. The first concerns the design of environments and practices oriented toward enhancing the reflective and meta-narrative dimension of digitelling: co-creative workshops that make explicit the aesthetic choices, trade-offs, and implications of digital productions transform minimal communicative acts into occasions for semiotic inquiry and reflective agency, in continuity with the traditions of critical pedagogy. A second direction concerns the recovery of authorship and collective participation: narration remains an intrinsically social act, capable of generating belonging and shared meaning; community storytelling projects, framed within community technologies (Rivoltella, 2017; Marangi & Rondonotti, 2022), make it possible to foster the collaborative construction of meaning around civic or local themes, and can find space in alternative digital environments, such as educational blogs or open-source platforms, understood as third spaces of learning (Potter & McDougall, 2017) oriented toward relational depth rather than immediate performance. From this perspective, intergenerational narrative laboratories acquire specific value: the goal is not to teach adults the language of younger generations, nor to correct its outcomes according to aesthetic criteria borrowed from high culture, but to create occasions in which different repertoires and competences, traditional narrative forms and those proper to youth digital cultures, confront and contaminate one another, restoring value to both without subordinating either.

A third direction, specifically connected to the acceleration driven by GenAI, concerns the critical integration of generative systems into educational narrative practices. Such systems can amplify human creativity only if embedded within an intentional and ethically aware pedagogical design: educating for AI use does not imply delegating creative agency, but building forms of human–machine collaboration in which communicative responsibility and critical direction remain central. Co-creative workshops grounded in the analysis and ethical evaluation of outputs foster the development of editorial discernment and critical filtering, reaffirming the profoundly human character of narration even when technologically mediated, while at the same time offering a privileged space for weaving together different cultural and generational repertoires, rather than flattening them into a single dominant stylistic register.

These directions cannot, however, be entrusted to episodic interventions or purely technical responses. The shift from digital storytelling to digitelling represents a structural transformation that demands a profound recalibration of pedagogical perspectives, capable of operating simultaneously on multiple levels: the critical understanding of algorithmic logics; the conscious reconfiguration of narrative spaces and temporalities; the epistemic recognition of youth communicative practices; the ethical integration of emerging technologies, generative ones first and foremost; and teacher training oriented toward postdigital conditions. A pedagogy of digitelling must be grounded in a humanistic vision of education, oriented toward reclaiming creativity, critical thinking, and participatory dynamics not as a rejection of contemporary technology, but as its ethical anchor: the point is not to choose between high culture and low culture, between the generation that narrates and the one that practices digitelling, but to build intergenerational bridges that allow both logics to enrich one another, restoring pedagogical centrality to the narrative and imaginative dimension.

## 5. Conclusions

This paper has outlined, from a theoretical and conceptual standpoint, a framework for interpreting the narrative transformations of the postdigital ecosystem in light of the pervasive diffusion of generative artificial intelligence. Its main contribution is not a finished model but a diagnostic and heuristic apparatus, articulated around digitelling, digital plenitude, and hacker pedagogy, intended to orient future empirical and design-based research. Several research trajectories follow directly from this framework.

A first trajectory concerns the operationalization of narrative flattening as a measurable construct. While the evidence reviewed above remains indicative rather than conclusive, it calls for dedicated instruments (stylistic and semantic diversity indices, longitudinal corpora of learner-generated narratives, and comparative analyses of human-only versus AI-assisted productions); capable of tracking whether, and under what pedagogical conditions, generative tools narrow or enrich the repertoire of narrative forms accessible to a given community of learners. Such measurement work is a precondition for distinguishing genuine homogenization from merely superficial stylistic convergence.

A second trajectory is design-based: the intergenerational narrative laboratories, community storytelling projects, and co-creative AI workshops outlined above require systematic piloting in non-formal and community settings, through iterative cycles of design, implementation, and refinement. This would allow the reasearcher to test hacker-pedagogy practices proposed here not as isolated activities but as a coherent curriculum, assessing their actual capacity to convert algorithmic abundance into shared, situated meaning-making across age groups.

A third, more urgent trajectory concerns teacher education. As generative systems become embedded in everyday educational practice at a pace that outstrips institutional reflection, future research must investigate how media-educational competence can be built into initial and in-service teacher training, rather than left to individual initiative.

Finally, the governance dimension deserves sustained scholarly attention. Because narrative infrastructures are increasingly shaped by commercial and computational logics beyond the reach of individual classrooms, research on digitelling cannot remain confined to pedagogy alone: it calls for interdisciplinary dialogue with platform studies, computational linguistics, and media policy, so that educational responses to generative homogenization are matched by a broader reflection on the collective stewardship of the infrastructures within which the next generation will continue to tell, and be told, stories.

Taken together, these trajectories suggest that the pace of generative AI adoption in education leaves little room for purely reactive scholarship. The theoretical framework proposed here is offered as a starting point precisely because the window for shaping how digitelling is taught, researched, and governed, rather than merely endured, is likely to narrow as generative tools become further naturalized within everyday narrative practice.

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