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THE ROLE OF ITALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION FOR CHILDREN,  
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
How the Entertainment Programming Changed to Adapt to the New Situation:  
The Case Study of *La Posta di Yoyo*

*Abstract*

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures from 2020 to 2022 posed significant challenges for content creators and producers catering to children. In response, new strategies and content needed to be devised to address the evolving needs of young audiences. Rai, recognizing its original informative role, stepped up to offer diverse learning opportunities during school closures and the rise of distance education. In addition to creating new educational content to support students during the pandemic, Rai also reimagined its existing programming. One such program, *La Posta di Yoyo* on Rai Yoyo, underwent significant changes to meet the evolving demands of its preschool audience. The show's central element, the 'mail moment', where it incorporates children's letters and drawings into the storyline, remained a core feature. However, in response to the audience's desire for more direct communication with beloved characters like Carolina, Lallo and Lorenzo, the show transformed from a pre-recorded 10-minute sitcom into a live 20-minute hybrid show. This format combined traditional comedy with interactive elements, using platforms like WhatsApp messages and Skype video calls to connect children and mitigate feelings of isolation. Leveraging firsthand experience as one of the scriptwriters of *La Posta di Yoyo*, in the following article, I will focus on the strategies adopted by Rai Kids to engage and entertain its young audience during the pandemic. Furthermore, I will explore how Rai Kids managed to maintain its commitment to important values and educational messages, while simultaneously providing entertainment and companionship to its youngest viewers.

*Keywords*

Children's television; public service broadcasting; Italian television; entertainment; Rai Kids.  
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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, *La Posta di Yoyo*, a daily programme broadcast on the Italian children's TV channel Rai Yoyo, has adapted to the changing landscape of children's media.

The show originated in 2012 under the leadership of – at the time – Rai Kids' Director Massimo Liofredi, as an unscripted television segment prioritizing pure entertainment and amusement. In 2017, under the new direction of Luca Milano, it evolved into a scripted sitcom.

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Central to the show's appeal is the interactive format led by Carolina Benvenga and Lallo the Horse, as they receive and showcase letters, emails, and drawings sent in by children, promoting a genuine connection with its young viewers. This interactive element has remained a central part of the show throughout its different versions.

In the fall of 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, *La Posta di Yoyo* underwent another transformation, combining elements from its scripted sitcom format and the former unscripted games. This hybrid approach aimed to create a new level of interaction with children at home, utilizing the latest technologies and responding to their evolving needs in a time of crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted children, affecting them socially, psychologically, and emotionally. Many countries implemented restrictions such as school closures, cancelled events, stay-at-home orders, and travel limitations. These circumstances disrupted the daily lives and learning of children and young people.

Various academic articles have examined the Italian situation, focusing on the joint initiatives of the Ministry of Education and Rai to provide alternative learning media. For instance, Denicolai<sup>1</sup> correlated the programme *La banda dei fuoriclasse*<sup>2</sup> with the influential educational show *Non è mai troppo tardi* by Maestro Manzi, who taught all of Italy to read and write in the 1960s. Research conducted by Ranieri, Gaggioli, Cinotti, and Ercoli<sup>3</sup>, in collaboration with Rai Gulp, the University of Florence, and the University of Palermo, aimed to monitor and evaluate the didactic and communicative quality of *La banda*. Additionally, Carelli and Sfardini<sup>4</sup> explored Rai's pedagogical mission, tracing its origins and examining its revival during the pandemic, encompassing programmes such as *Diario di casa*<sup>5</sup> (also extensively analysed by Di Mele and Della Valle<sup>6</sup>) and *La scuola in tivù*<sup>7</sup>.

Despite the research surrounding children's programming during the Covid-19 pandemic, there's a noticeable void when it comes to preschool-aged children and pre-existing shows tailored to this audience, such as *La Posta di Yoyo*, the flagship programme of Rai Yoyo. This article endeavours to bridge that gap, spotlighting the strategies Rai Kids employed with a show that was already on air. Drawing from my experience as a scriptwriter for the show since 2017, I provide an insider's lens to this exploration.

I will trace the programme's journey from its origins, highlighting its pivotal transition in 2017 to a scripted sitcom format and further evolutions during the pandemic. My analysis aims to highlight how, regardless of its various changes, *La Posta di Yoyo*

<sup>1</sup> L. Denicolai, "Learning by Watching with Televised School: How the Italian Broadcaster Rai Has Supported Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic", *Comunicazioni sociali*, 2 (2021): 238-250.

<sup>2</sup> A children's programme catering to students aged 6 to 13 years old, broadcast live five days a week. It was launched in mid-April 2020, in accordance with the official school calendar, and was tailored specifically to address the challenges posed by the Covid-19 emergency.

<sup>3</sup> M. Ranieri, C. Gaggioli, A. Cinotti, S. Ercoli, "La scuola va in TV. Una ricerca sulla qualità di un programma didattico al tempo del Covid-19". *Media Education*, 11, 2 (2020): 15-26.

<sup>4</sup> P. Carelli, A. Sfardini, "Educational Television Goes Digital. Children's Television and Italian Public Service Broadcasting during the Covid-19 Pandemic", *Journal of European Television History & Culture*, 11, 21 (2022): 1-9.

<sup>5</sup> A programme aired from April 17, 2020, to March 12, 2021, on Rai Yoyo. It was designed to inform children and families about the coronavirus emergency, attempting to address the most common questions. It was produced in collaboration with the Italian Society of Pediatrics to demonstrate daily practices for managing periods of lockdown and combating the spread of the virus.

<sup>6</sup> L. Di Mele, E. Della Valle, "La TV educativa al tempo del Covid-19. Analisi del programma RAI *Diario di casa*", *Media Education*, 11, 2 (2020): 137-148.

<sup>7</sup> It comprises a series of 30-minute lessons, with the teachers being directly recommended by the Ministry of Education.

remained central in the programming of the channel, emphasizing its commitment to supporting and engaging its young audience.

The pandemic spurred a marked increase in media consumption among children. They turned to digital platforms for various reasons: to alleviate boredom, complete schoolwork, stay connected with peers, access information, and manage their emotions<sup>8</sup>. This shift accentuates the pivotal role children's media played during this period, aiding them in understanding their environment, adopting responsible behaviour, and processing their feelings.

This article delves deep into how *La Posta di Yoyo* epitomized these roles, going beyond mere entertainment or education, and aiming to be a supporting ally for its viewers. A comprehensive examination of the show's evolutions during this crisis can offer insights into best practices for children's media, suggesting ways other programmes might innovate or adjust in potential future upheavals. This study, therefore, wants to underscore the importance of children's television in nurturing, educating, and emotionally guiding its audience, situating itself at the intersection of media studies and education, with a focus on an industry-based approach.

## 2. LA POSTA DI YOYO

### 2.1. Rai Yoyo's place in European children's television

To grasp the context of *La Posta di Yoyo*, it is essential to comprehend the environment from which it emerged: Rai Yoyo, an Italian television channel tailored for preschoolers and early school-age children.

Children's television serves as a fundamental pillar of public service broadcasting, aiming to provide young minds with access to content that promotes both personal and societal development. This commitment reflects the implicit agreement between television networks, determined to deliver appropriate public services, and families<sup>9</sup>. Rai Yoyo, situated within the Rai Kids division<sup>10</sup>, occupies a distinctive position within the landscape of European children's television.

The digital transformation of European television, characterized by the proliferation of platforms, channels, and diverse content, prompted public service broadcasters to adapt their strategies. Generalist programming targeted at children experienced a decline, making way for specialized thematic channels, as exemplified by the UK's CBeebies and CBBC and Italy's Rai Yoyo and Rai Gulp. However, this transition did not absolve these broadcasters of their inherent responsibilities, including the provision of high-quality programming for children, even amidst the fragmentation of the market<sup>11</sup>.

Rai Yoyo's dedication to its young audience is evident in the evolution of its programming. While animated content, both acquired and co-produced, predominates its

<sup>8</sup> "Children, Covid-19 and the Media. A Study on the Challenges Children Are Facing in the 2020 Coronavirus Crisis", *Television*, 33 (2020): 4-9.

<sup>9</sup> P. Aroldi, *Piccolo schermo. Che cos'è e come funziona la Children's Television*, Milano: Guerini e Associati, 2015, 16-19.

<sup>10</sup> Rai's macro-division dedicated to children is known as Rai Kids, which encompasses two channels: Rai Yoyo, primarily designed for preschoolers and early school-age children, and Rai Gulp, with its main target audience falling within the 8 to 12 age range.

<sup>11</sup> Aroldi, *Piccolo schermo*, 54-55.

lineup, mirroring the approach of other preschool-focused networks, Rai Yoyo distinguishes itself through unique in-house productions<sup>12</sup>. One such example of Rai Yoyo's dedication to quality children's programming is *La Posta di Yoyo*, which has evolved over the years to cater to its young audience. Other shows such as *L'Albero Azzurro*, *Bumbi* and new addition *Calzino* not only prioritize engaging the audience but also align with the network's educational mission.

## 2.2. *The original format (2012-2017)*

At the outset, *La Posta di Yoyo* began as a show featuring a mix of segments, hosted by Carolina Benvenega, a young actress known for her roles in the Italian TV series *I liceali* and *Anna e i cinque* and Lallo the Horse, a muppet from the children's TV show *Casa Lallo*, animated by Piero Marcelli. The programme featured a colourful and chaotic house where Carolina and Lallo interacted with children, providing both entertainment and educational content. The games played on the show often had a didactic purpose, allowing children to learn English words, improve manual skills, create recipes, and discover the secrets of animals and plants in a fun way. Carolina engaged in activities such as playing and dancing with the children, teaching them kitchen tricks for DIY gifts or plant care.

The show also welcomed popular characters from other TV shows, such as Milo Cotogno, Lupo Lucio, Balia Bea from *Melevisione*<sup>13</sup>, or Gigliola the Snail from *Casa Lallo*. Together with these characters, Carolina read letters sent by children, often accompanied by drawings of their favourite characters. Children frequently requested Carolina to listen to and watch the theme songs of their beloved cartoons broadcast on Rai Kids, and Carolina happily fulfilled their requests.

Each episode concluded with a memorable nursery rhyme and ballet performed to the theme song, which contributed to the show's lasting success. The episodes typically lasted 15 minutes, but special episodes could extend up to 45 minutes.

## 2.3. *The ongoing format (2017-2023)*

Starting from the 2017-2018 season, *La Posta di Yoyo* changed both its format and creative team. The new scriptwriters<sup>14</sup>, guided by Rai Kids' director Luca Milano and vice-director Maria Mussi Bollini, transformed the show into a scripted sitcom lasting 10 minutes. The previous hosts, columns, and games were removed, while Carolina and Lallo the Horse remained as the main characters.

In the 'new' format, Lallo is depicted as funny and messy. He enjoys solving crossword puzzles and is fond of pizza, chips, biscuits, and animal feed, despite Carolina's continuous efforts to offer him a healthier and more varied diet. As a puppet horse, Lallo

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 67-68.

<sup>13</sup> A highly influential children's TV programme, it aired from 1999 to 2015, initially on Rai Tre and later on Rai Yoyo. The show centers around the adventures of captivating characters, including elves, witches, princes, and more.

<sup>14</sup> Giorgia De Cristofaro, Danilo Bertazzi and Eleonora Fornasari (the author of the article). Ilaria Giudici joined the team in 2019.

often gets confused, misspells words, and frequently causes amusing adventures due to distractions and misunderstandings.

Carolina and Lallo engage in pretend play, creating various situations and having fun with each other and the children. Lallo portrays recurring characters such as Chef Lallò, a peculiar French-accented cook known for his unconventional and unpredictable recipes, and Inspector Lallock, who solves eccentric mysteries and puzzles.

Carolina takes on the role of an older sister and friend to both Lallo and the children. In the new project's development phase, the main challenge was maintaining the essence of the two main characters while envisioning a new context allowing them to take on more prominent roles.

Since the show originated in an unscripted format, it initially lacked a series bible. The new authors had to write one, which evolved and expanded as the seasons progressed. To facilitate the transition from unscripted to scripted content, Carolina and Lallo begin and end each episode by directly addressing the children, creating a live show atmosphere. However, during the acting moments, Carolina and Lallo rarely make eye contact with the camera and only occasionally interact with the children. Thus, each episode consists of two parts: a sitcom segment where Carolina and Lallo portray their fictional roles, and a segment where they directly engage with the children, especially by reading their letters, emails, and showcasing their drawings. The shift from the fictional phase to the more direct communication phase occurs through a change in interpretation, as Carolina realizes the presence of the children and begins to address them directly. Throughout the staged fiction/play, Carolina avoids breaking the fourth wall by looking into the camera, instead focusing on her directed actions and interacting with Lallo as in a theatrical scene. In essence, Carolina deviates from the traditional presenter role and adopts a more spontaneous and friendly approach. As a result, she wears colourful and comfortable clothes that facilitate unrestricted and child-friendly movements, distinguishing this season from previous ones.

### 2.3.1. New characters

The new format introduces new characters, some of whom are physically present, while others are only mentioned. Among the physically present characters is Orazio, a tiger puppet with a passion for space, who dreams of becoming an astronaut. Orazio appears in every episode through video calls to his friends Lallo and Carolina, but he is seen in a separate video clip lasting a maximum of one and a half minutes. He possesses a vivid imagination and shares amusing stories, often recounting his curious exploits or responding to invitations or requests for help from Lallo.

Starting from the season 2018-2019, another character named Lorenzo (played by Lorenzo Branchetti, known for his role as Milo Cotogno in *La Melevisione*) joins Carolina, Lallo, and Orazio. Lorenzo is a new neighbour with a passion for traveling. Orazio and Lorenzo harbour a crush on Carolina, which is not explicitly stated but evident, nonetheless. Lorenzo's importance grows with each season; he currently appears in three out of five episodes each week. In the beginning, instead, he only appeared weekly and had slightly different characteristics. As a traveller working for an agency, his frequent departures justified his limited presence. Lorenzo's travels served as a starting point for discussions about events outside the world of Yoyo. Through his character, young viewers learn about different customs and curiosities worldwide. The objects Lorenzo brought back from his travels became narrative cues for imaginative and fantastical journeys.

Lorenzo lives with Hisako, a small, Japanese plant he cares for but cannot take on his trips. Intriguingly, over time, the silent Hisako has evolved into a recognized ‘character’. Children began acknowledging this evolution by drawing it in their letters, signalling their perception of Hisako as ‘real’.

In the first version, Lorenzo wears typical traveller’s clothes. However, starting from the 2021/2022 season, he opts for more comfortable attire, such as colourful track-suits, abandoning his role of traveller, as the new circumstances implied that people could not travel anymore. Lorenzo’s change in attire due to travel restrictions is a practical illustration of the show’s ability to adapt and respond to societal changes during pandemic.

Several other characters are mentioned in the show, allowing children to imagine them as they please. These include Orazio’s grandmother (whom he pretends is the captain of his space shuttle), Carolina’s mother and grandfather, and teacher Rosa, who lives on the upper floor of the same building as Carolina and Lallo.

Certain ‘special’ episodes feature visits from characters from the channel, such as Bumbi or Laura and Andrea from *L’albero Azzurro*, as well as characters from animated series broadcast on Rai Yoyo, including Giulio Coniglio, Masha from *Masha and the Bear*, PjMasks, and others. In this manner, *La Posta di Yoyo* increasingly serves as an interface between the channel and its audience. Unlike before, these characters are not mere ‘guests’ but are integrated into the episode’s story, which comprises the sitcom segment.

### 2.3.2. The importance of scenography and the ‘mail’ moment

Since 2017/2018 season, the scenography of the show has become relatively straightforward. The studio-house seamlessly integrates tangible objects with designs evoking children’s artwork, creating a minimalist yet organised ambiance. Central to this is a touchscreen used to exhibit children’s emails and drawings. Within this environment, Carolina and Lallo possess a tablet and two mobile phones, facilitating calls from family and the video conversations with Orazio.

Designed to echo a spacious studio flat, the house showcases three identifiable zones: a kitchen replete with essentials; a living area, and a dedicated space for letters. The kitchen, though realistically furnished, does not see Carolina actively cooking. Any cooking activities are relegated to playful pretence, utilising faux food items. The living room features a sofa, serving as Carolina’s relaxation spot, and an adjacent console for Lallo. A trunk, doubling as a storage for props, rests in front of the couch. The touchscreen wall interface stands behind this arrangement. Adjacent to the entrance lies the letters station, marked by a mailbox, a table for letters, and a digital frame cycling through children’s artwork.

Carolina and Lallo now live in this house, where they play and attempt to form a club, creating a social space where young viewers can become co-stars.

Carolina’s decision to become a blogger brings about an exciting change in *La Posta di Yoyo*. She realizes that she wants her blog to reflect the interests of her young spectators, but with so many diverse interests among the children, she struggles to choose a specific theme. Instead of making the decision herself, Carolina decides to involve the children and asks them to provide ideas to help her determine what kind of blogger she should be. Since the children have varied interests, the blog’s theme starts changing frequently, leading to playful banter between Lallo and Carolina about her inability to

settle on a particular style and topic. This dynamic continues for a while, with episodes showcasing different blog themes.

Over time, Carolina and Lallo realize that confining the blog to just one theme isn't feasible. Instead, they realize the importance of considering all the interests of the children and encouraging them to write, draw, and communicate in various ways. The blogs, therefore, remain somewhat 'pending' in the new season, waiting for the children to participate and contribute actively. The intention is to bridge the gap between the world of Yoyo and the children's external world, inviting their real-life experiences into Yoyo's house. This approach also encourages children to write about different aspects of their lives, not just their favourite cartoons as in previous seasons. The transition from the initial rigid blog structure to a more fluid, participant-driven format emphasises the interactivity intent. As children become familiar with the characters, they begin to embed these figures into their artwork, even venturing to illustrate characters not explicitly shown, like Orazio's grandmother and teacher Rosa.

Digitally, the blogs are presented as thematic repositories on the official website, with children's artworks catalogued thematically, symbolising a collaborative endeavour between the characters and their young viewers. The nature of children's contributions, which become more diversified over time, shows how this new approach fosters engagement and encourages the viewers to actively participate in the show's community.

In a playful homage to social media culture, after Carolina finishes reading the letters and emails, a rooster named Galletto Postino (already familiar to the audience from the show's theme song) appears to 'like' or use emoticons to express appreciation for the children's submissions, embracing the language and icons of popular social platforms.

However, as the series evolved over seasons, the blogging concept was set aside in favour of more spontaneous contribution from the children.

#### 2.4. *The show during the Covid-19 pandemic*

When the pandemic began, ongoing series faced their first dilemma: whether to integrate the Covid-19 pandemic narrative or completely disregard it. While some Italian shows, like the daily soap-opera *Un Posto al Sole*, chose to maintain a pre-pandemic storyline, others, such as the medical drama series *Doc nelle tue mani*, reflected viewers' realities by adapting to the pandemic context.

Opting for the latter approach, *La Posta di Yoyo* aimed to establish relatability. Characters, like Carolina, adopted pandemic-specific behaviours – for instance, mask-wearing and frequent handwashing – to mirror the new normal. This decision allowed the show to resonate with its young audience by addressing and incorporating the challenges and changes brought about by the pandemic into its storyline.

In the first months of pandemic, the show remained unchanged, as episodes had already been recorded or were still under production<sup>15</sup>. Yet, in October 2020, it

<sup>15</sup> There was indeed a hiatus in the airing of the show from February 17, 2020, to July 13, 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During this period of 'standstill', marked by uncertainties regarding the evolving Covid-19 situation, reruns of previous episodes were broadcast. However, throughout the summer months, the show continued to offer entertainment for children by presenting new episodes until October 9, building anticipation for the forthcoming live broadcasts.

changed format<sup>16</sup>. Instead of studio recording, *La Posta di Yoyo* embraced a daily live broadcast<sup>17</sup>.

According to Aroldi<sup>18</sup>, children's television holds discursive spaces wherein TV quality parameters are debated and promoted. In this regard, the institutional communication activities undertaken by broadcasters play a central role in clarifying objectives, editorial strategies, positioning logic, and the elements of value associated with television products. The official press release for the 2020-2021 season<sup>19</sup> highlights the show's decision to transform into a live programme, aiming to allowing young viewers to directly interact with their favourite characters from the comfort of their homes, fostering an even closer connection with its young audience and families and encouraging them to share insights about their world and interests, incorporating their photographs and videos as part of the show.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the production of live programmes faced significant challenges due to remote working, new protocols, and the risk of positive cases. However, *La Posta di Yoyo* found innovative ways to adapt its format and continued to provide a meaningful connection with its young audience. In response to the social distancing measures, the show integrated video calls, social media, and live broadcasting into its format.

This shift in broadcasting allowed real-time interaction between the children at home and the show's characters. Through video calls, WhatsApp messages, and phone calls, children could play with Lallo, Carolina, and Lorenzo, share their lives and passions, and offer advice to the characters. The show also extended these invitations through Rai Yoyo's social networks, targeting parents as the facilitators of these interactions. By actively involving adults behind the scenes, the programme made children the protagonists again, granting them visibility and a sense of connection during isolation.

This approach aligns with Steemers and Gotz's research findings, which revealed that many children's TV producers viewed the pandemic as an opportunity to rethink their strategies and forge a deeper connection with the young audience:

<sup>16</sup> The initial set of episodes was broadcast from October 12 to December 18, 2020. Following the Christmas break, new episodes aired daily from January 11 to March 19, 2021, resulting in a total of 100 episodes. From March 22 to June 11, 2021, the schedule comprised three live episodes and two recorded episodes each week. The second half of the season, spanning from episode 61 to episode 140 (October 18, 2021, to February 25, 2022), was entirely pre-recorded but maintained a 20-minute duration per episode. Subsequently, between April 18, 2022, and June 17, 2022, as well as from September 16, 2022, to December 23, 2022, the show reverted to a sitcom pre-recorded format, featuring episodes lasting 12 minutes, totaling 116 episodes. Since March 20, 2023 (until January 24, 2024), episodes have a duration of 14 minutes.

Initially, the season was under the direction of Cristina Bruno, who had previously served as the show's director in past seasons. However, at a certain point, Andrea Apuzzo assumed the directorial role. The executive producer of the show during that time was Stefania Vergnano, who was later succeeded by Elena Piras in the fall of 2021. Ultimately, Vergnano returned for the current 2023 season.

The programme is produced by Rai Kids, in collaboration with the TV Production Directorate of Rai, Production Centers of Turin and Rome.

<sup>17</sup> As Steemers and Gotz point out: "As companies shift to remote working, the various stages of production have been affected differently, forcing companies to innovate and adapt formats to the new situation. In practical terms, post production, development and writing have been less affected than casting and filming, particularly for studio-based or live-action shows". See J. Steemers, M. Gotz, "Keep the Energy. The Children's Screen Industry in the Time of Lockdown", *Television*, 33 (2020): 42.

<sup>18</sup> Aroldi, *Piccolo schermo*, 77.

<sup>19</sup> As for all the official press releases, it can be accessed online, in its Italian version, at the following link: <https://www.rai.it/ufficiostampa/assets/template/us-articolo.html?ssiPath=/articoli/2020/10/Dal-12-ottobre-torna-La-Posta-di-Yoyo-f2f0d033-f64d-4bd2-908b-b94ac90966cd-ssi.html>. Accessed on August 30, 2023.



Some see the crisis as an opportunity to develop new targeted formats, taking advantage of the extra time to talk to children, get to know them better [...]. The aim behind this strategy is to get a deeper understanding of all types of children, making use of new and fresh perspectives on their current situation [...]. The focus of many producers is to identify the needs of children [...]<sup>20</sup>.

By prioritizing direct contact and understanding the needs of their young viewers, *La Posta di Yoyo* aimed to create a safe and supportive space through television, trying to offer entertainment and security when the outside world felt uncertain.

The new format necessitated a different duration, and episodes were extended to 20 minutes. Normally, the sit-com part remained in the beginning and at the end of the episode. In the middle, there were games, Skype calls, cartoons and other video-contributions, and the reading of children's letters and emails. Each day focused on a different game and Skype contributions. Cartoons varied as well<sup>21</sup>.

Figure 1 delineates a representative episode format.

Figure 1 - A standard 20-minute episode layout of *La Posta di Yoyo*

**LA POSTA DI YOYO live**  
**season 2020-2021**

**TUESDAYS SCHEDULE – Animals and Environment**

BLOCK	STUDIO-RVM	CONTENT	Length	
1	Theme song - opening		35"	
2	COUCH/KITCHEN	OPENING– SIT COM	1'30"	
3	TOUCHSCREEN AREA	SKYPE with children about animals or Skype call with an expert (dog trainer, veterinarian, etc.)	3'00"	
4	COUCH	CARTOON'S LAUNCH	0'15"	
5	RVM	CARTOON	2'00"	
6	KITCHEN	GAME TO PLAY WITH CHILDREN – phonecall	3'00"	
7	KITCHEN	READING OF WHAT'SAPP CHILDREN'S MESSAGES	1'25"	
8	RVM	ORAZIO VIDEO-MESSAGE	1'40"	
9	DESK/TOUCHSCREEN	LETTERS, EMAILS, CHILDREN'S VIDEOS	4'0"	
10	COUCH	END OF SIT COM	1'00"	
11	COUCH	LAUNCH OF THE NEXT DAY'S EPISODE	0'20"	
12	COUCH/KITCHEN	GREETINGS + CHILDREN'S VIDEO MESSAGES ON FINAL CREDITS	1'00"	

**total length 19'45"**

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> The selected cartoons were quite short and simple, aimed at a very young target and belonging to the Rai's archive. Examples are the animated songs from *Zecchino d'Oro*, *Cuocarina*, a 2-minute video recipe featuring a goose named Rina preparing delicious dishes accompanied by a funny song, and *Small Potatoes*, a sweet and funny English-language series that is relatively simple.

Lorenzo, during the inaugural live episode, explains that being on live TV is a beautiful experience, emphasising the intimacy of real-time broadcasts. The show maintained a daily afternoon schedule, and a calendar was displayed in the house, allowing children to read the day of the week and the month. While the show became an entertainment escape, it simultaneously endorsed pandemic-safe behaviours and granted viewers daily interactive opportunities. The live broadcasts exemplified audience engagement via technology. Tablets, touchscreens, and mobile devices were integrated into the narrative, promoting audience participation, particularly among young viewers. Parents, as online intermediaries, facilitated their children's interaction with the show. Video calls offered insights into the lives of children and their families. These interactions ranged from sharing photos to engaging in playful banter with the characters. Moreover, children were encouraged to relay video messages to distant friends or family, often aired during episode credits.

By marrying cross-media and trans-media strategies, *La Posta di Yoyo* tapped into technology's potential, ensuring a more immersive and responsive viewer experience, reflecting the changing circumstances of children and families during the pandemic.

### 2.5. *La Posta di Yoyo as the 'front-office' programme of Rai Yoyo*

*La Posta di Yoyo* has consistently served as Rai Yoyo's primary interface, bridging the channel with its young viewers. Initially, this was through the 'mail moment', where characters Carolina and Lallo would receive and discuss children's letters, emails, and artwork, thus celebrating their creativity and facilitating interaction.

With its transition into a sitcom format, the programme's horizons expanded. Episodes now offer comprehensive stories reflecting children's daily experiences and introduce various topics. Notably, the programme incorporates the 17 sustainable development global goals, which seek to improve our world, with Carolina endorsing the campaign<sup>22</sup>.

Nevertheless, six key areas of emphasis can be discerned:

1) *Environment*: Topics like recycling, climate change, and sustainability are addressed (an *ad hoc* episode was produced for the World Earth Day on April 22). Furthermore, the character Orazio, an astronomy enthusiast, brings insights about the universe through his videos.

2) *Social*: Some episodes address social issues, particularly on children's rights on the International Day for the Rights of the Child and Adolescent on November 20. The show also promotes awareness of intergenerational support and the value of older people helped by and helping younger ones.

3) *Cultural Heritage*: Through the stories told by Lorenzo, the show introduces children to different cultures and countries, such as India, Mexico, the Philippines, and Morocco. World Book Day on April 23 is also celebrated with a dedicated episode to promote reading among children.

4) *Socio-Economic Education*: The show addresses the topic of expenses and savings, aligning with its target audience of preschool children.

5) *Engagement*: While the 'mail moment' remains integral, the show's new segments

<sup>22</sup> See <https://asvis.it/global-goals-kids-show-italia/>. Accessed on June 16, 2023.

incorporate modern communication methods. Moreover, characters from the channel appear, making the programme a Yoyo universe hub.

6) *Emotional Education*: Episodes help children navigate emotions like jealousy and sadness, and celebrate positivity, friendship, and affection.

Overall, *La Posta di Yoyo* serves as an interactive platform for children to express themselves, learn, and engage with various topics, aiming to foster a sense of connection. The hosts, Carolina and Lallo, play an important role in facilitating this connection by actively engaging with the children's contributions and thus creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.

Beyond the 'mail moment', post-October 2020 adaptations introduced interactive games, quizzes, and challenges. Live connections furthered its reach, with special episodes sometimes featuring experts. One notable series involved the Italian Railway Police (Polfer), blending entertainment with critical safety information. The collaboration between Rai for Social Issues and Rai Kids, along with the Railway Police, led to the creation of an original format where informative content on railway safety, presented in a child-friendly manner with specially produced images and sounds, was delivered through the qualified intervention of friendly and lively policemen. The policemen shared their work experiences and satisfied children's curiosity, making the educational message more accessible. The sitcom always served as a starting point for each episode, presenting scenarios where Lallo, for instance, is playing as a train conductor with a toy-train or – in the final episode of the 'Polfer series' –, is studying to obtain the railway safety expert license. The collaboration aimed to foster closeness with citizens and alleviate feelings of isolation.

In essence, throughout the pandemic, *La Posta di Yoyo* maintained and even strengthened its status as Rai Yoyo's representative show, championing children's empowerment and participation. By blending interactivity, children's contributions, and educational themes, *La Posta di Yoyo* underscores its commitment to delivering a rich and engaging experience to its audience.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The unprecedented challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated rapid adaptation and innovation across various sectors, and public television, specifically in the realm of children's programming, was no exception. According to Luca Milano<sup>23</sup>, the pandemic ushered in substantial and enduring transformations in the content offered by Rai Kids. Beyond its traditional roles of entertainment and education, there emerged an augmented responsibility to convey information to children in a comprehensible manner. Public television was tasked with enhancing its educational offerings while concurrently assuming a therapeutic function by fostering self-assurance and social unity. The psychological effects of isolation and loneliness experienced by children necessitated intervention, and, in collaboration with experts, Rai Kids took steps to support children and their families. Live programmes were further developed to combat feelings of isolation, which partially contributed to the temporary format change of *La Posta di Yoyo*.

<sup>23</sup> In M. Scaglioni, *La televisione nella pandemia. Intrattenimento, fiction, informazione e sport nell'anno del Covid-19. Annuario 2021*, Roma: Carocci, 2021, 73.

Despite *La Posta di Yoyo* returning to a sitcom format with shorter and pre-recorded episodes after the end of the pandemic emergency, the evolutions experienced during that period have left their traces. In the 2023 season, for example, once a week, a different pair of children visit Carolina, Lallo, and Lorenzo. This allows the world of children to enter Yoyo's world, and the young viewers become protagonists, reading the letters themselves and sharing their own experiences.

We live in a constantly changing media landscape but knowing how to navigate into difficult times can be helpful for the future. Therefore, the strategies adopted by *La Posta di Yoyo* can be useful for other existing programmes of the same type. We can summarize these various strategies into some key points:

- 1) *Adaptability and Flexibility*: *La Posta di Yoyo* adjusted its format in response to audience needs during the pandemic.
- 2) *Educational Responsiveness*: The show's commitment to age-appropriate information during the pandemic highlights the importance of educational responsiveness.
- 3) *Emotional Support and Engagement*: The show fostered familiarity and emotional support, aiming to serve as a valuable model for young viewers.
- 4) *Promoting Responsible Behaviour*: *La Posta di Yoyo* emphasised the promotion of responsible behaviour, such as hygiene practices and social distancing. It showcases how programmes can actively reinforce essential societal norms and behaviours, particularly during crises.
- 5) *Interactive and Inclusive Content*: With its interactive nature and child-inclusive narrative, the show emphasized powerful audience involvement.
- 6) *Transparency and Honesty*: *La Posta di Yoyo* underscored the need for honest communication with children, even on challenging topics. This approach builds trust and ensures that children receive accurate information to understand and cope with crises effectively.
- 7) *Monitoring and Evaluation*: Consistent positive ratings of Rai programmes<sup>24</sup> emphasize the value of monitoring and evaluating during crises.

In today's rapidly evolving technological landscape, television continues to play a significant role as a socializing agent in the lives of children<sup>25</sup>, especially preschoolers: "in particular, children read themselves, amplify their experiences, and open themselves to the possible, through the stories that the media offer"<sup>26</sup>.

To conclude, the case of *La Posta di Yoyo* can serve as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Italian public service television when confronted with global challenges. Its successful integration of these principles can serve as an example for other programmes when navigating moments of crisis, demonstrating that television can persist in fulfilling its role as a reliable and supportive resource for its young audience, even amidst periods of uncertainty.

<sup>24</sup> For both 2020 and 2021, the approval rating of Rai programmes dedicated to minors, including the transformed version of *La Posta di Yoyo*, has been positive. See the different reports per year, available at <https://www.rai.it/trasparenza/Gradimento-e-qualita-dellofferta-946fd70f-f5d6-43a0-95ad-508f619660e5.html>. Accessed on June 20, 2023.

<sup>25</sup> D. Lemish, *Children and television. A Global Perspective*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, 101.

<sup>26</sup> A. Antoniazzi, "Masha and the Bear. A New Educational Paradigm", *Journal of Theories and Research in Education*, 11, 3 (2016): 68.