



Organized Crime in the social media age

October 15, 2025 – 10 a.m.
Conference room 6

*1st Avenue at 46th New York
United Nations Secretariat Building*

INTRODUCTION

Following the 2024 edition of its annual report on cybercrime phenomena, the Magna Grecia Foundation returns to address an issue of growing urgency within the analysis of organized crime: the relationship between criminal networks and the digital sphere. The context surrounding us has changed profoundly, even compared to just a few years ago. Digital transformation has not only revolutionized economic, social, and communicative dynamics, but has also redefined the ways in which power is exercised, represented, and legitimized. Organized crime, historically able to adapt to changing times, has not lagged behind.

It is increasingly evident today that organized crime is learning to operate within the digital space—not only as a realm of economic opportunities (money laundering, fraud, extortion, infiltration), but also as a stage for the symbolic construction of imaginaries, narratives, and forms of consensus. In other words, the digital realm is not merely a tool, but an environment in which criminal organizations can take root, transform themselves, and renew their image.

It is reasonable to assume that in the coming decade, criminal activities will permeate the digital domain even more deeply, developing skills, languages, and strategies intertwined with online culture. This is not an alarmist prediction, but the natural evolution of a system that has always exploited the vulnerabilities of the present to strengthen its grip on society. As in the past—when organized crime was misunderstood, underestimated, or reduced to local folklore—the risk today is to delay the understanding of the phenomenon, particularly in its most ambiguous and culturally pervasive forms.

Digitalization has broken a long-standing communicative paradigm: silence. If the pizzino once symbolized communication hidden from external perception, today we witness a visual and narrative exposure that not only does not fear visibility but actively seeks it. New generations of criminals, or those who adopt their codes and symbols out of imitation or fascination, no longer communicate solely through actions but through content. Videos, sounds, hashtags, styles, gestures: all can become part of an identity narrative rooted in the language of social networks.



Within this scenario, there are many dangerous platforms, where viral narratives are shaped, imaginaries hybridized, and new forms of identity expression tested. Therefore a particularly concerning trend is most evident: the spectacularization of criminal culture and its normalization through virality.

This is precisely the focus of the study “Organized Crime in the Social Media Age” conducted by the Magna Grecia Foundation and led by Professor Marcello Ravveduto of the University of Salerno.

Based on an 18-month qualitative investigation employing an immersive netnographic approach, the research observed and analyzed hundreds of profiles and contents on the platform, mapping the visual codes, symbols, narratives, and hashtags that give shape to what can be defined as a genuine digital ecosystem of organized crime: a cultural and narrative environment in which elements of criminal culture are represented, reinterpreted, disseminated, and at times trivialized or legitimized.

The findings reveal the ability of organized crime to adapt to contemporary digital languages. The figures of the criminal, the influencer, the street hero, and the successful entrepreneur overlap and intermingle, blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality, fascination and glorification. This complexity poses challenges not only for those tasked with countering these phenomena but also for researchers seeking to interpret them critically.

Another significant element concerns the participatory and transnational dimension of these contents. They are no longer closed messages aimed at a specific audience, but open, replicable materials, reinterpreted by a broad, young, and international community, often unaware of the deeper meanings conveyed. Viral circulation thus becomes an unconscious vehicle of normalization of crime—not through ideological alignment, but through aesthetic imitation.

The research also highlights a profound change in communicative strategies: we are no longer confronted with narratives constructed by journalists or screenwriters, but with forms of direct self-narration. Here, protagonists—real or aspiring—portray themselves, constructing a mediatized and visible criminal identity. In this sense, TikTok is not merely a showcase, but a stage where the role of the criminal is performed, often with ironic, captivating, and seductive tones that attract views and consensus.

In this context, the analysis presented by the Magna Grecia Foundation constitutes a valuable tool not only for understanding the cultural logics underpinning these practices but also for fostering a more conscious public debate. Understanding this digital ecosystem of organized crime is the first step toward dismantling its mechanisms of fascination and



building effective counter-narratives—capable of speaking the same language but with opposite objectives: not consensus, but exposure.

For all these reasons, this conference aims to serve as an interdisciplinary forum, a platform for dialogue among scholars, institutions, and law enforcement. Only by pooling expertise and moving beyond traditional approaches will it be possible to develop truly effective tools to interpret and counter the digital transformation of criminal culture.

In conclusion, this second conference—and the accompanying new research—seek to reaffirm a clear message: organized crime is already embedded in the digital sphere. Ignoring or underestimating this reality means conceding further ground. Understanding the languages, aesthetics, and dynamics of this online criminal cultural ecosystem is not an academic exercise but a strategic necessity. It is time to equip ourselves with the right tools—cultural, analytical, and regulatory—to face a challenge that concerns not only security but also collective imagination and the future of younger generations.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- **Enhanced understanding** of the evolving nexus between organized crime and digital media, with particular attention to emerging forms of online representation and consensus-building.
- **Improved capacity** of scholars, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary to interpret and respond to the social dynamics of organized crime in the digital sphere.
- **Increased awareness** of the hidden risks that online platforms pose to younger generations, fostering a critical and informed public debate.
- **Strengthened research networks** through the creation of an international community dedicated to the study of cybercrime and its cultural dimensions.
- **Encouragement of responsible practices** among social media companies, supporting the adoption of strategic measures to prevent the dissemination and normalization of criminal culture online.
- **Development of effective counter-narratives** capable of dismantling the fascination mechanisms of criminal culture while engaging younger audiences in their own digital language.
- **Promotion of interdisciplinary dialogue**, fostering cooperation among academia, institutions, and law enforcement to move beyond traditional approaches.
- **Recognition of organized crime as a digital phenomenon**, ensuring that policymakers and stakeholders acknowledge its present and future impact rather than underestimating it.



- **Contribution to strategic preparedness**, by emphasizing the need for cultural, analytical, and regulatory tools to address organized crime in the digital sphere.

FONDAZIONE MAGNA GRECIA

The Magna Grecia Foundation (FMG) is an international, non-profit think tank, approved by D.P.R. n.361/2000. Since 1984, the mission of FMG has been to promote cultural and economic growth in the regions of Southern Italy, with the aim of reducing the social gap within these territories and the rest of the country.

FMG began its activity by dedicating itself mainly to relations with communities of Italian origin in the world, organizing international conferences and promoting institutional meetings and activities to promote history, culture, tourism and economy of Southern Italy.

Subsequently, FMG developed a program of specific activities for the South of Italy:

- founded its own research center to analyze and understand the economic and social dynamics of Southern Italy, both internally and in the context of the Mediterranean and Europe;
- has carried out a strong networking activity, from which important partnerships were born with Italian institutions, universities and companies, to spur cultural heritage innovation and valorization, the one with the Italian Red Cross, which deals with digital health, the one with Sapienza University of Rome, for social innovation and the one with University of Salerno, for the issues of birth rate, young generations and family;
- has set up in collaboration with personalities, institutions, experts and companies in the field, the CYBREC (Cybercrime Research Center) research laboratory with the aim of supporting and promoting the culture of cybersecurity in Italy, contributing to educational and informational deepening, and to involve and sensitize political institutions, local authorities, businesses and students on the fundamental theme of cybersecurity and cybercrime, and its implications for the real economy and social security, in particular on sensitive sectors such as cultural heritage, health and, more generally, the digital life of individuals;
- it has held important institutional meetings, such as “Sud&Futuri”, which saw the participation of personalities and stakeholders, and where strategic issues for the South were discussed, such as culture, birth rate, finance, mobility, job and innovation.



Duration: 90 minutes	Date: October 15, 2025 Time: 10:00-11:30 a.m. Location: Conference room 6
5 minutes	Welcome remarks by Gianluca Greco, Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations
7 minutes	Welcome remarks by Nino Foti, President of the Magna Grecia Foundation
15 minutes	Presentation by Marcello Ravveduto, Member of the Scientific Committee of the Magna Grecia Foundation, Associate Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Salerno
10 minutes	Presentation by Chiara Colosimo, President of the Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission
15 minutes	Presentation by Antonio Nicaso, Mafia expert, Queen's University
15 minutes	Presentation by Nicola Gratteri, Chief Procurator of Naples
5 minutes	Presentation by Ronald J. Clark, CEO of Spartan Strategy & Risk Management, Deputy Under Secretary for National Protection at the Department of Homeland Security (Ret)
5 minutes	Presentation by Antonello Colosimo, Regional Audit Chamber President at the Italian Supreme Audit Institution
5 minutes	Francesco Saverio Romano, President of the Parliamentary Commission for Simplification
6 minutes	Q&A
2 minutes	Closing Remarks by Fabrizio Frullani, Vice Director TG2 RAI