

IT AND MASS MEDIA USE AMONG ITALIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

This article reviews recent research on the diffusion and use of PCs and Internet in Italy, with its distinct "digital divide" in media access and usage by social and economic factors. Media usage in Italy is undergoing an important transition, especially as young people use new media that influences their socialization, leisure time, education, family life and job opportunities. Gender, generation, regional and other social factors affect their mixed usage of media. Through its Multipurpose Surveys, the the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) organization gives a detailed picture of how children and young people make the widest use of IT. Demographic and regional differences still persist and could result in social exclusion for a wide range of people in the future.

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This article reviews recent research on the diffusion and use of PCs and Internet in Italy, with its distinct “digital divide” in media access and usage by social and economic factors. Media usage in Italy is undergoing an important transition, especially as young people use new media that influence their socialization, leisure time, education, family life and job opportunities (Maragliano 1998-1999). Thus, media provide an important means of social inclusion and communication, enhancing youth’s ability to build up a more personal approach to cultural development. The ever-increasing number of households owning a satellite dish provides a wider range of TV channels and programs they can watch.

METHODOLOGY OF THE ISTAT SURVEYS ON IT USAGE AND OWNERSHIP

The five year ISTAT “Multipurpose Statistical Survey on Households” on leisure time reveals inequalities in IT possession and use and consists of seven social surveys: an annual survey dealing with everyday life characteristics, a three-monthly survey about tourism and five thematic surveys. They are conducted every five years with around 24,000 households and 70,000 individuals. Starting from 1997, ISTAT began collecting information on IT ownership by households. PC and Internet usage by individuals, was analyzed systematically for the first time in 2000 through the survey called “Citizens and Leisure Time”, carried by means of face-to-face interviews and self-completed questionnaires.

Beginning in 2001 ISTAT participated in the Eurostat workshop on “Information Society”, whose aim is to produce harmonized statistics across Europe on the availability of, readiness for, usage of and perceived effects of IT in households and for individuals. Starting from the age of 11, children answer the questionnaire without parental monitoring. The reference period has been the previous 12 months in the thematic survey carried out in 2000 and in the annual survey of 2001; beginning from 2002 the reference period has been the last three months to harmonize Italian indicators with the rest of Europe.

Two different sampling plans are used, one for self-representing municipalities (or AR municipalities) of larger demographic size and the other for non-self representative municipalities (or NAR) made up of smaller municipalities. Each municipality is considered as an independent stratum using cluster sampling methods.

The primary sampling units are represented by households registered in the Public Register of the municipality itself; with each registered household included in the sample and with components of the same household extracted. Within NAR municipalities, a two-stage pattern with layering of the primary units is adopted, with the Primary Units (UP) being the municipalities and the secondary Units again being the households located in the Public Registry. The municipalities are selected with probabilities proportional to their demographic

size without replacement, with households selected with equal probabilities. These data collections have an average non-response rate of around 15%.

DIFFERENCES IN IT AND MEDIA OWNERSHIP DISPARITIES

As shown in Figure 1, IT ownership in Italian households in the last six years has grown from 17% of Italian households with a PC in 1997 to 35% in 2001. The percentage of Italian households with Internet access at home increased from 2% in 1997 to 27% in 2001. (It can be seen that mobile phones had the highest increase, from 27% in 1997 to 73% of 2001).

In spite of these increases, PC and Internet are not yet a mass phenomenon like TV, videorecorders or mobile phones -- and their growth rates are decreasing. While households having Internet access increased by 100% from 1999 to 2000, the increase was only 66% from 2000 to 2001. Strong regional inequalities persist in Italy as regards the ownership and the usage of IT. For example, in 2001, in the North of Italy about 38% of households owned a PC and about 28% had Internet access at home, while in the South of Italy the percentages were, respectively, around 25% and 18%.

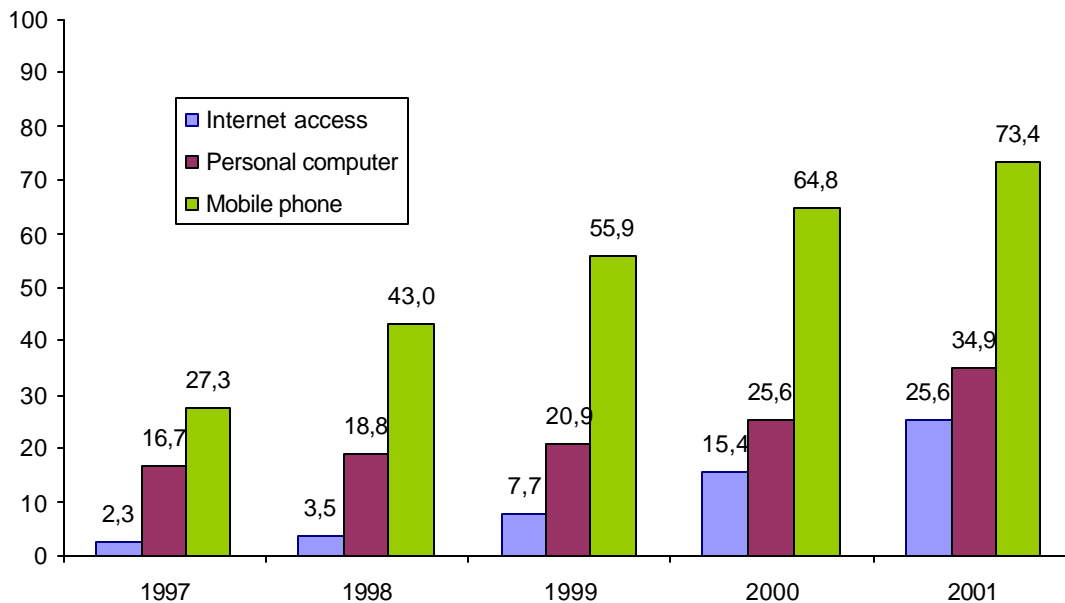
Italian households where minors live have both more old and new media in comparison with households composed only of elderly people, which are characterized more by only ownership of old media. From Figure 2 one can tell that in households with minors the house becomes an environment of multimedia experimentation.

Houses inhabited by minors contain plenty of old media like TV, books and radio, as well as new media, like mobile phones (which are owned by 90% of these households) and video-recorders (88%). More than 50% of all households own a PC, while the Internet and satellite dishes are found in fewer households, but the percentage is higher than the Italian average.

In households made up of only elderly people (Figure 3), the TV set is the most frequent household appliance, followed by radio and books. Mobile phone and video-recorders are present in less than a quarter of the homes of elderly people, and satellite dishes, PCs, Internet access and videogames hardly exist.

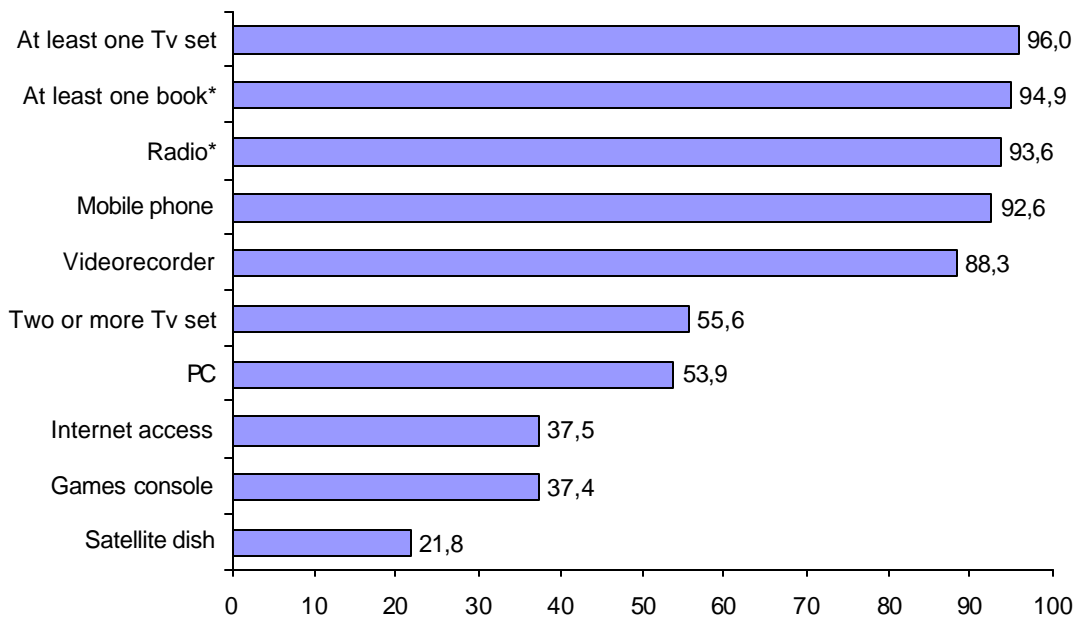
Nevertheless not all minors have equal access to multimedia. Other equipment, like game consoles and mobile phones, do not show large differences between population groups. There is a polarization between children living in households headed by highly educated parents according to an indicator reflecting the highest education level achieved by either parent. In Table 1, it can be seen that 79% of households with a highly educated parent own a PC, but the percentage is only 42% for the households with low educated parents, a difference of 37 percentage points. For Internet access, the rate is only 25% of the households with low educated parents compared to 67% among highly educated parents

FIGURE 1 –HOUSEHOLD IT OWNERSHIP: 1997-2001



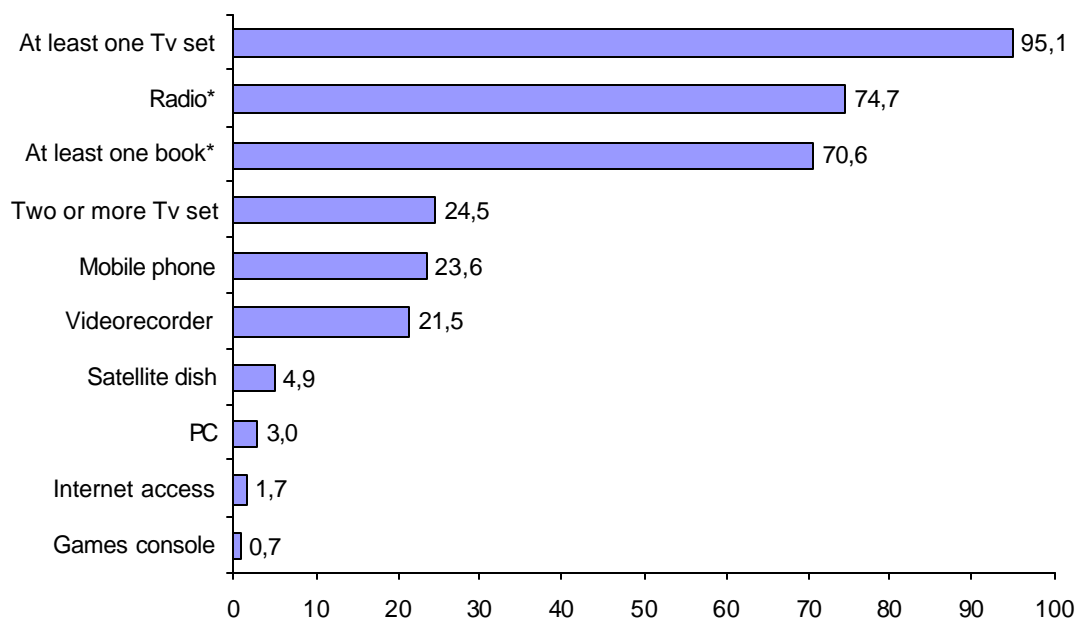
Source: Multipurpose survey on “Everyday life aspects”. Year 1997-2001

FIGURE 2 – MASS MEDIA AND IT OWNED BY HOUSEHOLDS WITH AT LEAST ONE MINOR – YEAR 2001



Source: Multipurpose survey on “Everyday life aspects”. Year 2001

(*) Multipurpose survey on “Citizens and their leisure”. Year 2000

FIGURE 3 – MASS MEDIA AND IT OWNED BY HOUSEHOLDS MADE UP OF ONLY ELDERLY PEOPLE¹ – YEAR 2001

Source: Multipurpose survey on "Everyday life aspects". Year 2001

(* Multipurpose survey on "Citizens and their leisure". Year 2000

TABLE 1: OWNERSHIP OF IT AND MASS MEDIA IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN BY EDUCATION LEVEL OF PARENTS – 2001

	Videorecorder	Games console	PC	Internet	More than one Tv set	Satellite dish	Mobile phone
High education	91,9	35,4	79,2	66,9	94,6	57,2	27,8
Medium education	92,0	39,9	64,4	47,6	96,1	60,5	24,7
Low or non formal education	85,0	36,0	41,5	24,7	96,3	51,9	18,5
All	88,3	37,4	53,9	37,5	96,0	55,6	21,8

Source: Multipurpose survey on "Everyday life aspects". Year 2001

In addition to social inequalities there are also the regional ones, with Central and Northern Italy leading the way in households with at least one minor. Southern Italy and the Islands lag behind. In order to establish which determinant is the strongest, a logistical regression analysis was performed allowing one to evaluate the effect of geographical area, education level and professional status of the parents on the use of Internet of young people aged 11-

17 years. Figure 4 shows that young people living with high educated parents have a probability of using the Internet that is 2.5 times the probability of minors living with parents with a low level of education. This model confirms that the strongest determinants influencing the access to multimedia of children in Italy are the geographical area and the education level of the parents.

CHANGES IN PC AND INTERNET USE

Among youth aged 3 to 17 from 2000 to 2001 PC use increased from 42% to 56% and Internet use from 14% to 28%, while PC usage rose from 54% to 71% for those aged 11-13 and from 60% to 77% for those aged 14-17, while Internet use increased from 20% to 35% among younger children, and from 34% to 55% for older youth

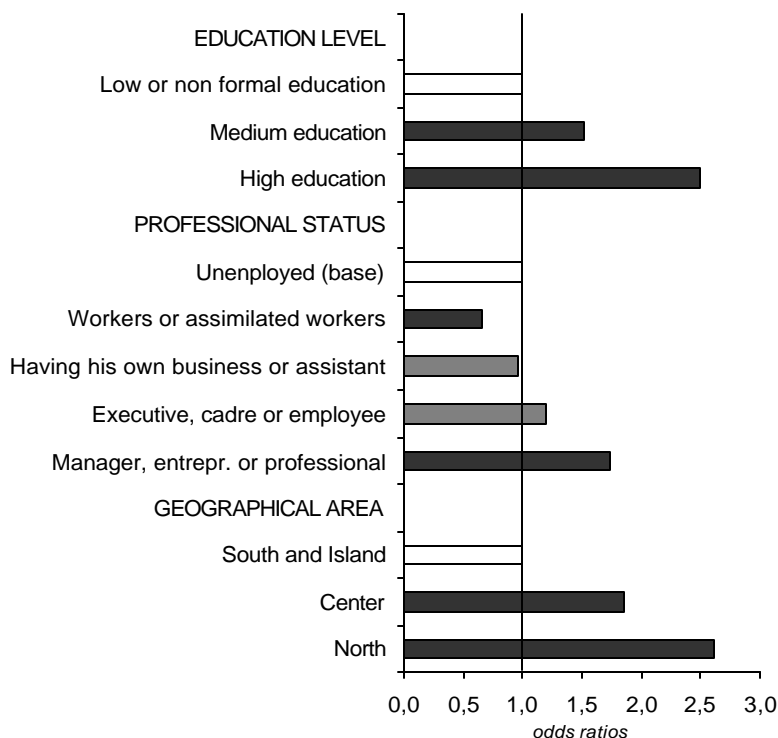
Geographic factors influence almost every social phenomenon, but here involve a decrease of territorial inequality in PC use. Internet use, on the contrary, increased faster in the North of the country, with a consequent increase in inequality. In 2001, 35% of youth aged 3-17 used the Internet, but only the 21% of the youth in the South did.

PC and Internet use are also strongly influenced by the education level of the parents. In 2000 29% of youth aged 3-17 with parents having a low or non-formal education used a PC in comparison with same age children with highly educated parents. In the same way, for the Internet, the user percentage was 22% among the children of highly educated parents in comparison to 11% of children with parents having low or no formal education. Furthermore, the analysis showed that the IT competence of parents is very important for their children's IT literacy. For example the percentage of children making use of PC and living in households where at least one of the parents uses a PC is around 80%, while the percentage of children using a PC if their parents do not is only 14%. In Italy, gender differences are minimal: in 2000 among children aged 6 to 14 years 40% of the boys made use of PC at home compared to 37% of the girls.

IT AND MASS MEDIA IN THE LEISURE TIME OF YOUTH

In the last five years, technological changes have transformed the media world, which, as Castells (2002) underlines, has been giving birth to a new culture that combines different media as a sign of social inclusion or exclusion. Minors become quickly familiar with different media, especially the most traditional ones like video-recorders, radio and TV. For this reason, it is important to analyze the media mix of young people applying two different multivariate analysis to aged 3-10 and to 11-17 year olds, first performing a multiple correspondence analysis considering as active variables the usage of old and new media, and second performing a cluster analysis on the main factors defined by

FIGURE 4 – RESULTS OF A LOGISTIC MODEL SHOWING THE PROBABILITY OF USING INTERNET OF YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 11-17 BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA, EDUCATION LEVEL AND PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF THE PARENTS – YEAR 2000 (ODDS RATIOS²)



a multiple correspondence analysis. In this way, youth was divided into groups based on the type of media they used.

Among children aged 3 to 10, four groups were found.

1) The *mono-media* users, who make use only of one medium (TV) and are interested only in programs for children, represent “a leftover of the past”. This group is mainly composed of 3-5 year-old children (18%), living mainly in the South and coming from households of low social status.

2) An *intermediate* group where one can find the TV, video recorder and videogames consumers, mainly comprised of males from the South (16%). They are not very interested in most TV offerings, and their attention is mainly focused on children programs like cartoons. The time devoted to media is quite high, more than three hours a day in front of TV set.

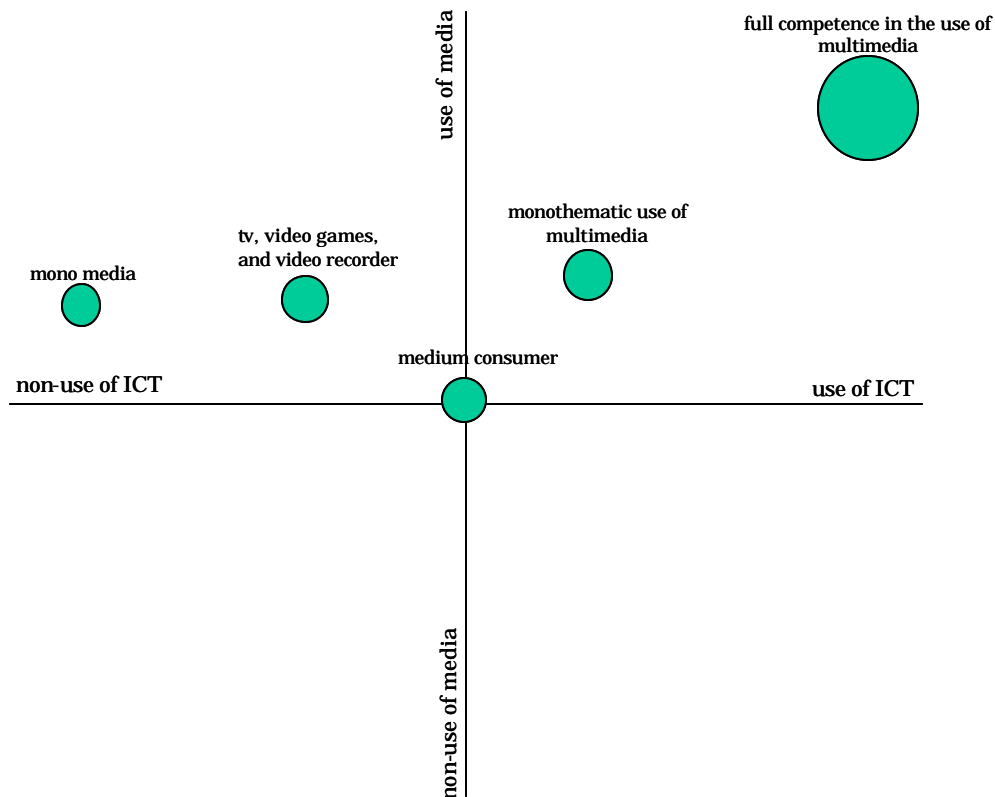
3) The *medium consumers* show a certain degree of confidence towards the growing number of media, except for electronic ones: this group is made mainly of 6-10 year old girls, coming from low and medium social status (14%). The media mix of this group is radio, TV, video-recorder, videogames, books and cinema.

4) The fourth category is comprised of two *multimedia groups*, the first composed of 6-10 years old girls (19%) mainly living in the Northeast from medium and medium-high social households: these girls tend to be "media sponges", ready to absorb what happens and to select in a choosy way in the mass of the growing offerings of different media. Their media mix is composed of radio, TV, cinema, videorecorders, videogames, books and PCs. They are very curious about the most traditional media but they can also manage PCs very well for playing, writing and also for graphics. A second multimedia group is made up mainly of 6-10 year-old males (15%), living in the Northwest and also coming from medium and medium-high households. The difference with the former group is that they read less and make use of TV and radio mainly to watch sports programs -- although this group is able to manage PCs much like the previous group.

Figure 5 represents the four groups built with the cluster analysis technique, using a two-dimensional space defined by the axis of use/nonuse of media and axis of use/nonuse of IT.

CONCLUSIONS

These analyses show that geographical region and the education level of parents are the strongest determinants of access to multimedia among children in Italy. The emergent cadre of multimedia youth is found mainly in the North of Italy and is being raised by highly educated parents. More than 50% of 11-17 children make use of a harmonic mixture of old and new media. In the future one can foresee a decrease in the digital divide at least in this age group. While the divide in the possession of a PC between North and South is decreasing, other Italian regional differences in Internet access tend to widen.

FIGURE 5 – TYPOLOGIES OF USE OF MASS MEDIA AND IT AMONG YOUTH AGED 11-17 2000**REFERENCES**

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¹ People aged 65 years and more.

² The odds are calculated as the ratio of the probability to use Internet and the probability not to use Internet. The odds ratio is calculated as the ratio between the odds of one modality and the odds relative to the reference modality that is equal to 1. In Figure 4 the bars in grey indicate that the odds ratio is not statistically significant ($p > 0,05$); the bars in white are the reference modalities that reflect 1.