



AUTORITÀ PER LE
GARANZIE NELLE
COMUNICAZIONI

NEWS MEDIA CHALLENGED BY YOUNGER MINDS

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND STATISTICS

Year 2020, February



AUTORITÀ PER LE
GARANZIE NELLE
COMUNICAZIONI

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young people encompass the past experience of the society and represent its future. Therefore, researchers are often interested in them. But **what is the present of young generations?**

Since the Seventies, the growing attention paid by social sciences to youth is evidenced by the increase in research on its complex reality and specific issues, which is reflected by the establishment of new Observatories and Institutions dedicated to the study of youth¹.

This report aims at providing a specific contribution to the study of **news consumption by young people** through the use of data collected by the Italian Communications Authority (AGCOM).

How much information do young people require? Most importantly, what kind of information do they opt for and what do they manage to find? Why do young people prefer social media over traditional media? Finally, what satisfies the curiosity of young people?

The report attempts to answer these questions from a new perspective, combining both the demand for information and the current offer in Italy.

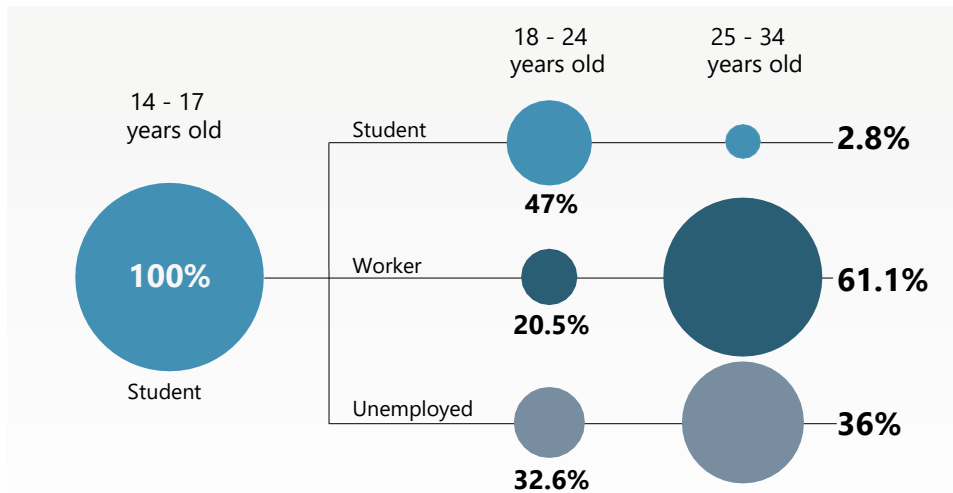
Investigating the reality of young people in a rigorous manner is not easy, as one may run the risk of generalising. Therefore, in Chapter 1, the analysis starts with the definition of the youth world and the acknowledgement of its complexity and diversity.

The study presents an analysis of the relation between youth and information² and identifies **three youth cohorts**, characterised by different life cycles:

- *“Minors”* (14-17 years old);
- *“Young people in training”* (18-24 years old);
- *“Young adults”* (25-34 years old).

1 Since the early 1980s, the IARD Institute, for example, has carried out both national and local research on issues related to youth status. The Giuseppe Toniolo Institute too launched an initiative entailing the monitoring of the youth world in 2012 and, in 2016, it created the first “Youth Report”, providing internationally comparable data; over time, the Institute has broadened the horizon of the initiative, creating a real Observatory. Among the existing Observatories, it is worth mentioning the Territorial Youth Observatory, promoted by the Department of Social Sciences of the Federico II University of Naples and the Municipality and Province of Naples (in collaboration with the IARD as well). Since 2003, the Territorial Youth Observatory has been a permanent monitor on young people, in particular from Naples, with the aim of monitoring and investigating the needs, values, attitudes, projects, deviations of young people, as well as analysing cultural consumption, expressive languages and youth cultures.

2 Some operational problems make very difficult and expensive to acquire information on statistically representative samples of children under the age of 14.



Training/ employment experiences of Italian youth

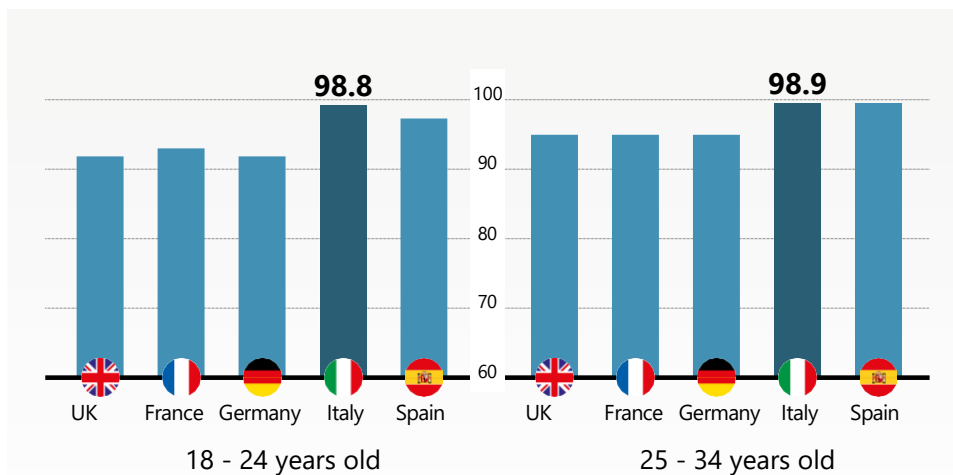
Paths of life for each cohort (percentage values)

Minors have not come of age yet, a step that would give them the full power to act. They are students and live with their original families.

Young people in training start differentiating their training and employment paths, even if they still live with their families.

Lastly, young adults are an "in-between" cohort, composed by adults who do not have however the financial means to achieve full independence.

International data (not referred to minors) shows that the **Italian young people get informed just as much**, if not more, as their **European peers**.



News consumption: differences among Countries

Based on the population that regularly surfs the Net (percentage values)

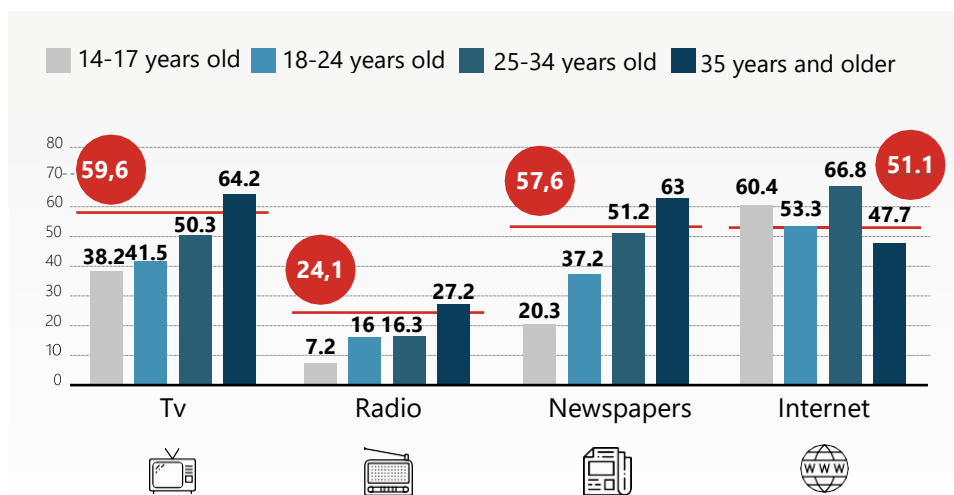
Nevertheless, two effects emerge: on the one hand, the "country-effect", according to which Italian young people experience a digital gap compared to their peers living in other Countries.

On the other hand, in Italy, young people of all ages ("generational effect"), are the demographic group that most uses the Net as a main source of news content (along with other activities, ranging from games to communication).

The report provides for empirical evidence of two established facts: **young generations run away from traditional media and are increasingly addicted to the Internet.**

News consumption: media used by each age group

Based on total population (percentage values)

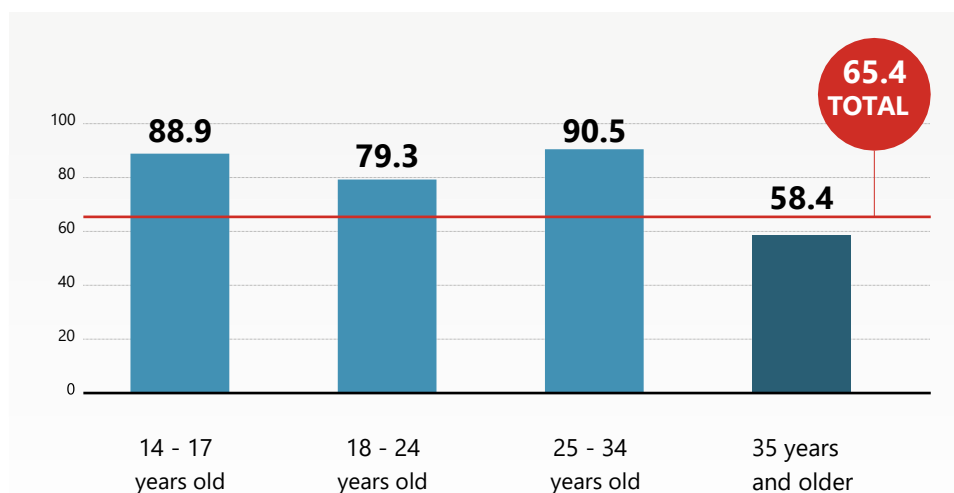


Namely, young people are increasingly using **social media** for getting informed and, particularly, performing daily activities.

The Report (Chapter 3) investigates the usage of social media by frequency and type of activity performed, also in terms of cognitive efforts and differences among generations based on a comparison with the activities performed by adults.

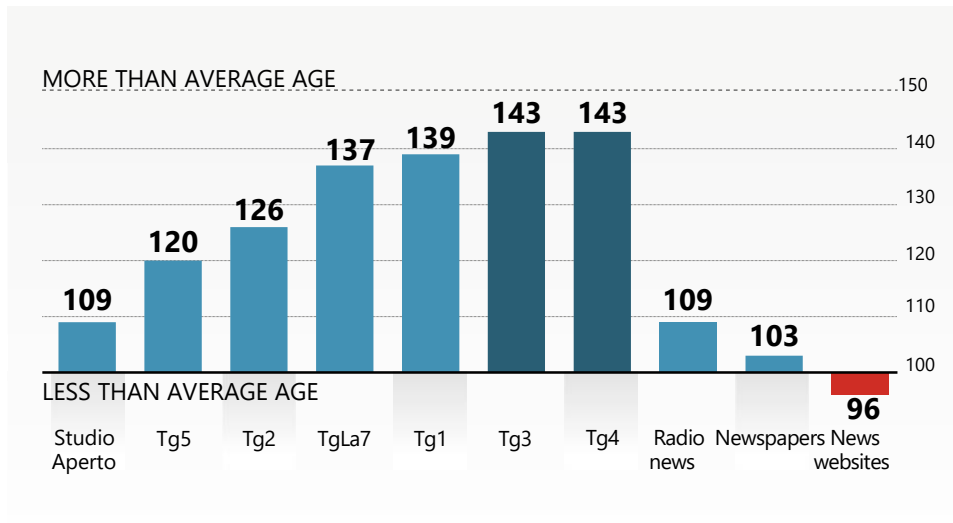
Member of at least one social network

Based on total population (percentage values)



Going back to the focus of this report, interesting data emerged from the analysis of the relation between young people and the news-media system.

The separation of young people from traditional media may be caused by the presence of an **offer that does not meet the needs of new generations**. Data shows that in Italy, as in other Countries, communication styles, points of view and topics **do not meet the needs of young generations**: it is worth noting that the **average age of journalists has remarkably increased** and ranges from 50 years old for TV journalists to 44 years old for online journalists.



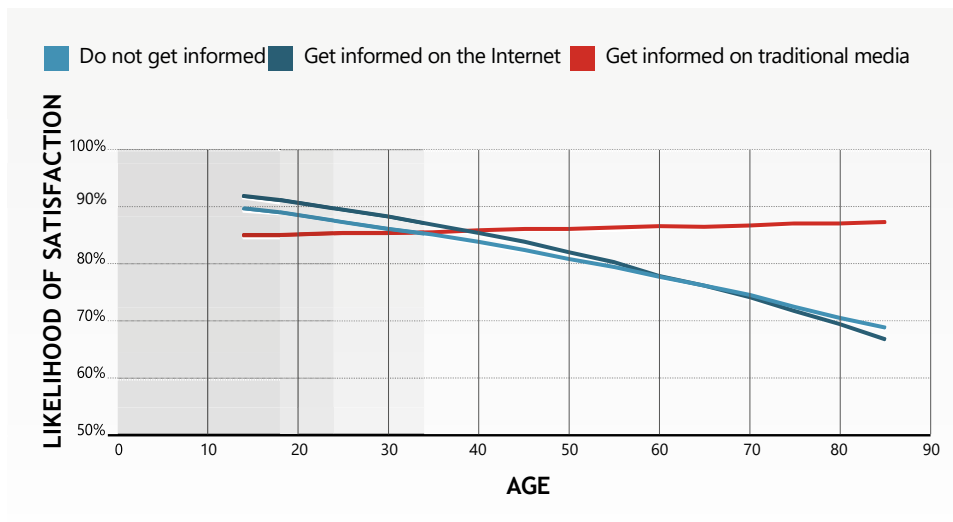
Average age of the audience of different news products

100 represents the average age of the population (Year 2018)

Therefore, the **average age of the audience of all news media is generally higher than the average age of the Italian population**, except for news websites, with an audience average age of 44 years old.

Interestingly, the ages of writers and readers go hand in hand. The lack of new and fresh point of views shifts young people’s attention to new types of storytelling.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy **that news consumption brings happiness to all ages.** The analysis showed that reading, searching for information and getting informed generate satisfaction; they are an **antidepressant for older generations, and a boost for the young cohorts.**



Likelihood of satisfaction: the effects of age and media

The comparison among those who do not get informed, those who use the traditional media and those who use the Internet

Nevertheless, not all types of news content triggers satisfaction; only the one applying different points of view and communication styles does; that is to say traditional media for mature cohorts, and online media for new generations. Conversely, as it is emerging in international qualitative studies³, this report concretely highlighted that **traditional news outlets and broadcasting media risk dispiriting**, rather than stimulating, **new generations**, who do not feel represented by content (young people, for instance, demand more science and technology-based content), points of view and communication styles.

Many traditional news products (newspapers, magazines, news and radio news) have not been significantly innovated. This makes them obsolete and less appealing for new generations, who identify themselves with next-generation products and services linked to the Web. It goes without saying that most of the Internet services used by young people were created by young entrepreneurs to meet their needs and tastes on every level (methods of service provision, content, devices, etc.).

In short, the high demand for information by young people clashes with the multiple constraints of the current offer creating, therefore, **a sort of ghettoization of young people in the Web**, usually the only *medium* to voice their information needs (and not only). The various media combination used to get informed usually highlights the increased addiction of young people to a single source of information, usually the Internet.

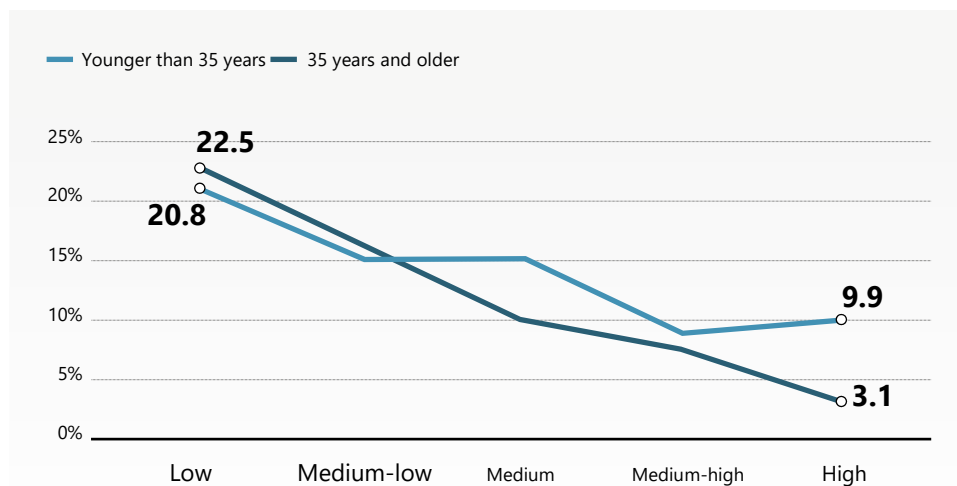
The report analyses some of the **risks** underlying this situation. One might think that the Internet can solve some information issues of young people, thus dissolving *in nuce* any social issues. Nevertheless, given the positive activating role of the Internet, and its related services, some issues arise, and this report is aimed at highlighting them.

First, the above highlights the presence of a **generational fracture** in accessing information. Young cohorts access less to information and use a different type of news compared to older generation. They use numerous devices (mainly smartphones), various sources (sometimes online, sometimes influencers and bloggers), and new media (often social networks). This neglects the social glue deriving from a shared narration of the events of the world.

The second critical aspect concerns exclusion. The report highlighted the existence of an **"information divide"**, namely an intergenerational gap when accessing news, usually related to the family income and social status.

³ In this regard, please refer to the recent study "How Young People Consume News and the Implications for Mainstream Media" <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/our-research/how-young-people-consume-news-and-implications-mainstream-media>

Living in less wealthy environments significantly reduces the possibility to collect information, access information, access news and be informed on world events, both for young people and adults.

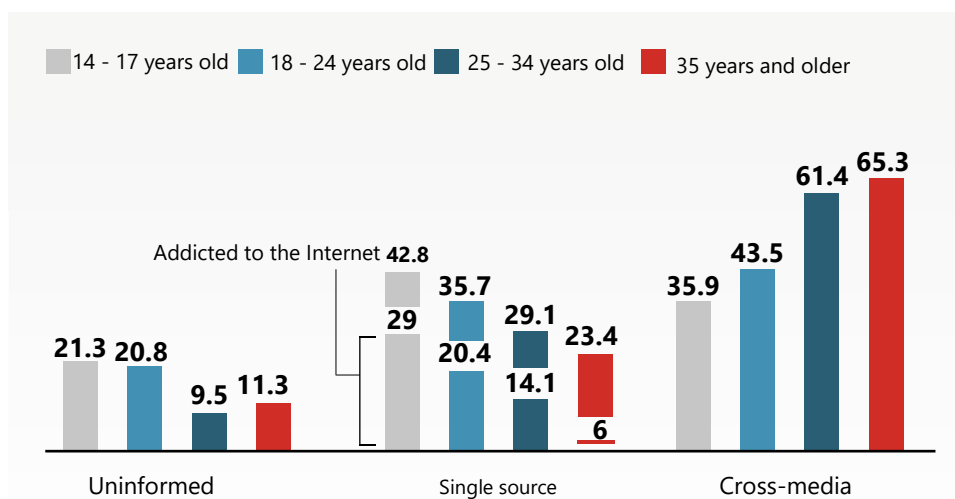


People who do not get informed by age and household income

(percentage values)

Another critical aspect concerns the **addiction to single sources** and **points of view**.

Young people, indeed, do not have the tools, the experiences and the knowledge needed to open to multiple sources and, consequently, to different points of view and cultural orientations. The addiction to a **single source of information** – mostly **the Internet** – is stronger amongst young people, in particular **minors**.



How population is open to various sources

Media used to get informed and age groups (percentage values)

These figures pave the way to regulatory concerns about media pluralism in the age of the Internet and social media, the so-called **Pluralism 3.0**.

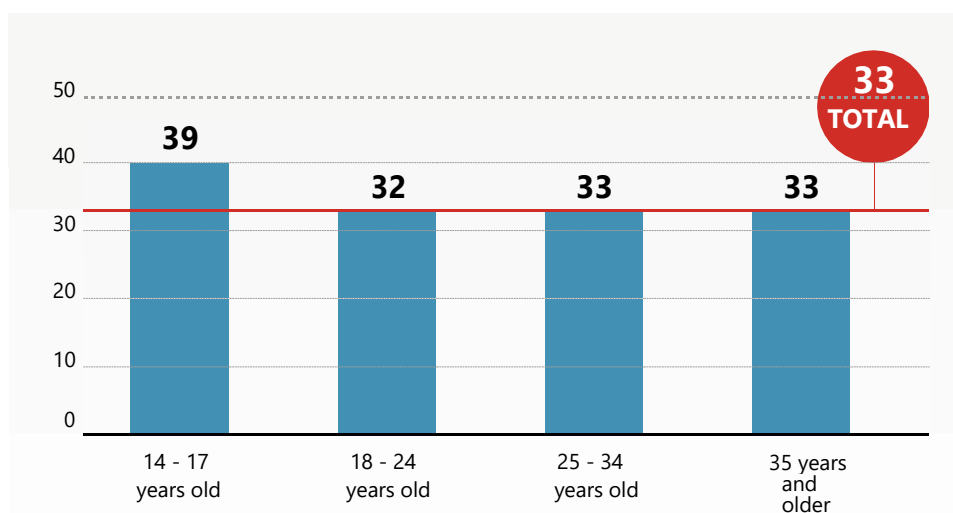
On the one hand, the Internet carries a **broad set** of different information sources and **points of view**. On the other hand, the numerous studies performed by AGCOM⁴ and other Institutions in recent years have shown that such a diversity clashes with some **issues** that limit its **capacity**. Basically, it is a **paradox**: the Internet can potentially ensure media pluralism, based on its capability to spread and gather ideas/different views as well as to stimulate debates and openness; on the other hand, some forces tend to limit people within confined spaces, often filled with doctored, false, low-quality information.

In this context, along with professional and qualified sources, unprofessional and unqualified sources are spreading in the Web, creating and promoting disinformation.

The report highlighted that **minors**, who are still building the cognitive skills needed for a critical approach, are the most vulnerable, **as they are not able to distinguish “real” and “fake” news**.

Likelihood of not distinguishing real and fake news

People who believe fake news (percentage values)



Given the strong addiction to the Internet and social networks among young people, the role of online platforms (and the related algorithms) emerges to guide young generations towards new points of view and new sources that confirm their beliefs. It has been demonstrated by a solid scientific literature that the use of social media is often linked to the creation of *eco-chambers*, namely closed groups that, by a repetitive transmission (using posts, etc.), boost information, ideas and beliefs that are more or less true, and where different points of view and interpretations are not accepted. Moreover, this cultural and social isolation frequently leads to *hate speech* targeting people with different ideas, values and cultures.

⁴ AGCOM has been conducting intense surveillance and monitoring activities involving the information system for years. Moreover, it regularly carries out specific analyses, reports and fact-finding investigations concerning the various components of the information system. See, for instance, the AGCOM sector inquiries “[Settore dei servizi internet e sulla pubblicità online](#)”, “[Informazione e Internet in Italia. Modelli di business, consumi, professioni](#)”, and the one currently in progress “[Piattaforme digitali e sistema dell’informazione](#)”, as well as the reports “[Online disinformation strategies and the fake content supply chain](#)” and “[News vs. fake in the information system](#)”.