

The impact of the New Digital Technologies on Unaccompanied Minors. Unaccompanied Minors and New Digital Technologies.

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Abstract

Global digital growth shows no sign of slowing: there were more than 4,39 billion users connected to the Internet around the world, in January 2019. This growth is clearly fuelling Social media use. 45% of the world's population are now Social media users: a whopping 3.5 billion people. Among these people, 1,69 billion children (aged from 0 to 12 years) and 1,45 billion youth (from 13 to 24 years) use social networking sites actively¹.

This data shows that more than half of the global population is online every day and that «We are vertiginously falling into an “incessant society”, always active, more and more unable to unplug (ITSO: Inability To Switch Off), constantly typing, twitting, sharing, without making difference between day and night, working day or public holiday, home and office; this society is heading towards a colossal addiction to connected object»².

The issues associated with excessively use of PC and the impact of Internet on the brain have been subjected to a scientific investigation in the 80's of the last century. In the second half of the 90's, research and scientific reflections focused on forms of addiction and on the many effects generated by the use of digital connectivity on the human brain (Cantelmi, 2013).

The first scholar to put forward the hypothesis of the onset of psychopathological disorders following an internet abuse was Kimberly Young (1996), an American psychologist that referred to the form of the internet's dependency – *Internet Addiction Disorder – IAD*³, and she has improved a diagnostic tool - *Internet Addiction Test – IAT* (1998), still widely widespread and used around the world.

In Italy, Tonino Cantelmi was the first to talk about the internet addiction syndrome – *Internet Related Psychopathology - IRP* (Cantelmi e Talli, 1998). He has identified five types of *Cyber Addictions* (Cantelmi, Talli, Del Miglio, 2000) and he has elaborated the psychodiagnostic test *Use Abuse Dependency on the Internet – UADI* (Del Miglio, Gamba, Cantelmi, 2001).

¹ Cf. *Global Digital Report 2019* has been compiled by Kepios, We Are Social and Hootsuite. This Report can be found at the We are Social's website at: <https://wearesocial.com/global-digital-report-2019>.

² Cf. A. Grasso, “Essere continuamente connessi, nuova malattia del nostro tempo”, *Corriere della Sera*, 5 January 2012. The article is available on Internet: https://www.corriere.it/opinioni/12_gennaio_05/grasso-essere-continuamente-connessi_51ee9a88-3787-11e1-8a56-e1065941ff6d.shtml

³ The term *Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD)*, was coined by the psychiatrist Ivan Goldberg in 1995. For further details, see: T. Cantelmi, Talli M., *Internet Addiction Disorder*, in “Psicologia contemporanea” 1998; 150:4-11; and V. Caretti, Barbera D., *Le Nuove Dipendenze: Diagnosi e Clinica*, Carocci, Roma 2009.

Recent studies have shown that the excessive use of new digital technologies may compromise the development of the brain in infants and teenagers, causing sleeping and behaviour disorders, emotional and social problems, also in the relationships. Moreover, whole body is still developing in this age group: a chronic technological hyperstimulation can have harmful effects on cognitive ability, memory, attention and social skills of young people (Mencacci, Migliarese, 2017).

The role of parents and educationalists is very important to identify early signs of addiction to technology and digital environment. However, how can we protect the development and biopsychosocial wellbeing of those young people who have not a parental figure with them? What is the impact of technology on these teenagers who arrive in Italy alone?

A search area, still minimally studied, is the Unaccompanied Minors. Therefore, this contribution intends to address the issue of relation between Unaccompanied Minors and new digital technologies, analyzing the opportunities and risks to which migrant children might be exposed. The results and the patch of this qualitative research will be presented and discussed at the Conference.

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