

# The Datafied Habitus: Sociodigital Inequalities and Lived Experiences of Datafication Among Italian Families

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# The research project

# Methods

- Three waves of a **longitudinal mixed-method research**
- 20 families with children aged 0 to 8 in Milan (+ metropolitan area)
- Families with different socioeconomic background, family structure, media habits.
- Observations and qualitative interviews with children and parents
- Constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014)
- Survey data and app-based media diaries

# Methods

Nov-Dec 2021  
1° WAVE

April-June 2022  
2° WAVE

Nov 2022- Jan 2023  
3° WAVE

- Qualitative interviews with parents and children
- Observations and video-tours (Pink & Leder-Macklay, 2012)

- Qualitative interviews with parents and children
- «Home technology maps» (Watson, Lupton & Michael, 2022)
- Media diaries with MeTag (ZeMKI, University of Bremen)

Reflexive maps

# Families



Family 1



Family 2



Family 3



Family 4



Family 5



Family 6



Family 7



Family 8



Family 9



Family 10



Family 11



Family 12



Family 13



Family 14



Family 15



Family 16



Family 17



Family 18



Family 19





Family 20



All families are  
mediatized and aspire  
to conform to the  
“good parenting”  
ideal

# All families are mediatized

	Fam. 1	Fam. 2	Fam. 3	Fam. 4	Fam. 5	Fam. 6	Fam. 7	Fam. 8	Fam. 9	Fam. 10	Fam. 11	Fam. 12	Fam. 13	Fam. 14	Fam. 15	Fam. 16	Fam. 17	Fam. 18	Fam. 19	Fam. 20
	1	1		1		2		(1)		(1)			1	1		1	1	1	1	1
	5	3	2	4	1	3	1	3	3	2	0	3	2	2	3	3	2 (1)	3	4	3
Tot. devices	13	10	10	13	4	13	6	10	10	14	12	17	12	14	12	11	9	21	15	11

# All families conform to the “good parenting” ideal

- Largely informed by a middle-class model of “intensive” parenting (Clark, 2013; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020),

Martina (mother, Family 3): as I told you once, I am not against letting children approach **this [digital] world**, that **represents their future**. So, willingly or not, they will have to deal with it. **We, the parents, do our best to make sure it is a safe and healthy relationship**. Then, we can make mistakes...



# All families engage in restrictive parental mediation

- Both lower and higher SES families use **sport and other outdoor activities** as an antidote to excessive screen time

Malika (mother, Family 11): during the week they go to school, from Monday to Friday. They come back, on Monday and Tuesday they even come home at 7 pm, because they practise sport in the afternoon. So it is really three afternoons, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday that, once they are back from school, they have time to play. On Saturdays and Sundays we try to spend time outdoors, so it's really only three afternoons

Carlo (father, Family 5): I think that if you manage to fill their lives with... not by forcing them but by offering many alternatives. [...], last weekend there were the school's olympic games, and then we went to the park .....

# Parents' main concerns are excessive screen time

Pamela (mother, Family 13): to make you understand his level of addiction, the first thing he does when he wakes up, he has breakfast in the morning in front of the tablet [...] **He wakes up and goes to the tablet**

Ludmilla (mother, Family 4): there was a period when she started using the iPad on a regular basis, I mean, we are used to watch cartoons and we now watch them on TV only, before we alternated TV and iPad. But **we decided to rule out the iPad**, because she watched it for an hour, but **it was never enough**, “Olivia, stop now!”, “no, more”. She watched it for half an hour... “no more, more”, two hours, and then she flipped out, yelling. So, I said, since **the more you watch it the more you get hysterical**, we will erase it altogether. So we have completely ruled it out.

## and inappropriate content

Pierluigi (father, Family 11): there was just one video that, remember? We did not like it, that you blocked, to avoid they could see it again. [...]

Malika (mother): yes, the problem with this stuff is that you start watching one thing, and it automatically selects other videos

Filippo (father, Family 4): when we had not yet taken the iPad away, I saw **weird things, violent things** even, that she was shown repeatedly. At some point cartoons were interrupted by adults that crashed toys, they placed them beneath a car's tyres and drove

# and inappropriate content

Camilla (mother, Family 19): then one day we invited one of his classmates  
[...]

Alessandro (5yo son): and we saw together a blue puppet that looked like a real  
monster

Camilla: yes, whose name is **Huggy Wuggy!**

Alessandro: my friend found it

Camilla: Exactly. But I let them watch it and then my husband read on the  
newspaper that this puppet has been reported in the UK because it is dangerous  
and scares children.

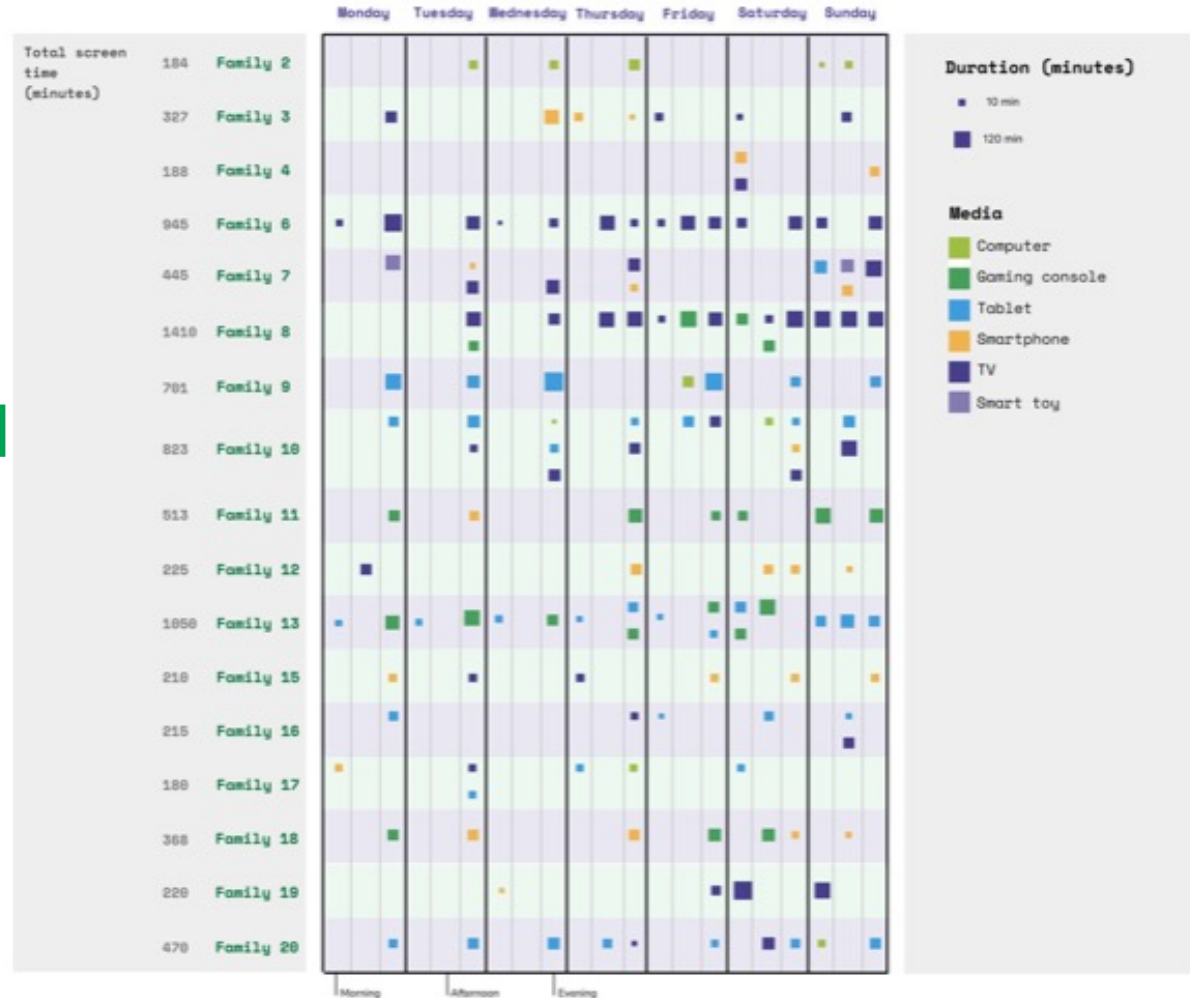
Alessandro: indeed, **I was scared**

Camilla: indeed! And then, given that he asks for YouTube since then, now YouTube  
is no longer allowed on TV

# But..

All families are mediatized but... 1/4

## MeTag media diaries data



01 data(child).futures

# All families are mediatized but.. 2/4

- In higher SES and higher-educated families, children are more likely to benefit from **'autonomy of use'** and **paid content** (apps, subscriptions to SVOD, etc.)

Ludmilla (mother, Family 4): these apps here are **paid apps**, I paid annual subscriptions, so they are not free. They **are more interesting**, Free apps are...

Cristiano (father, Family 1): [On Amazon Prime Music] some songs are free, others are limited so you have to make a subscription to access... **an additional 2 or 3 euros per month** to get all the music you want. So, it is all... one leads to another. It is convenient as you get a single invoice

# All families are mediatized but.. 3/4

- Lower SES families are more likely to buy **second-hand** or lower price **devices** (that break often), heavily rely on **'free' content**, and engage in tech bricolage

Pierluigi (father, Family 11): **the Xbox, we paid it 90 euros instead of 350**

Francesco (son, 8yo): Which one? The one I use, or his...

Malika (mother): yes, because in the meanwhile we got a second Xbox

Pierluigi: yes, for Stefano's seventh birthday

Francesco: now we have two game consoles

Pierluigi: Subito.it. is incredible. People throw away... they receive the PS5, so they sell the rest. There's plenty of stuff on [subito.it](#)



# All families are mediatized but... 4/4

- Lower-income families are more likely to buy second-hand or **lower price (lower-quality) devices** (that break often), heavily rely on 'free' content, and engage in **tech bricolage**

Francesco (8yo son, Family 11): I had installed **Fortnite** but **the laptop** [bought for remote learning during Covid] **does not support it**. it took it ages to start a match ... you need a very expensive PC with a high resolution video card

Pierluigi (father, Family 11): I have to figure out how to **format the old laptop**, the one with HDMI cable. If I manage to do that, I can **connect it to the second TV upstairs**, because his [younger son's] TV is not connected.

# Restrictions are common but... 1/4

- Parental mediation strategies grounded in different parenting cultures, parents' (and children) digital skills, parents' self-confidence, their technological imaginaries
- Higher SES, higher educated parents **combine rules, technical restrictions and enabling mediation** to ensure a 'safe' and appropriate digital environment

[Alexa in the background talking about "farts"]...

Cristiano (father, Family 1): no! we have blocked, there's a **parental control**...

Claudia (mother): last night, that you were out, she (5yo daughter) was asking things to Alexa and, at some point, Alexa replied: "I don't know that song but you can listen to "fart ..." by x, ask your parents to unblock it"

Cristiano: yes, better not to unlock certain things! On Disney Plus we also created the **child profile**

# Restrictions are common but... 2/4

- Lower SES parents are more likely to be **permissive and/or to juggle** between different strategies

Malika (mother, Family 11): so, **we did not set many rules**, honestly. Then, **gradually, they got used to it**, because there's a novelty effect at first, they are eager to use it [the games console]

Pamela (mother, Family 13) : I am not happy about it, I fear he has developed an addiction. On the other side, if I look back, since he has been using digital media for 3 years already, I must say that **when spring comes we spend a lot of time outdoors**. So I hope it will continue being something he does when he spends more time indoors, during winter

# Restrictions are common but... 3/4

- Lower SES parents are more likely to **feel guilty about the use of ‘digital babysitters’**

Serena (mother, Family 15): compared to my generation, nowadays children are much more into technology. **Perhaps it is also our mistake, that whenever we have something else to do, we place him in front of television.** We have always done it.

Camilla (mother, Family 19): **truth is... television is a great babysitter**, so occasionally... [...] when you have to reply to work emails, and stuff, television is helpful... So, I tend to believe that **if he turns out smart he will be smart even if he watches TV, if he is dumb he is dumb anyway, don't you agree?**

# Restrictions are common but... 4/4

- Lower SES parents actively engage in ‘**economic**’ mediation, higher SES parents use parental controls or technical restrictions

Cristiano (father, Family 1): we download the apps for her, she is not able to go on the App Store autonomously, also because you need to be able to read. We did not set her **fingerprint ID**, either, to avoid her over downloading and overspending [...] So, she gets until the process of downloading starts, but then she needs my finger

Pamela (mother, Family 13): and so I started telling him (6yo son) “look, if you want to buy any of these coins, **use your own money!**” So now he uses his own pocket money. I pay with the credit card, and he gives me the money back

# Excessive use and inappropriate content top the list of parental concerns but... 2/2

- Low SES families are more likely to report **feeling inadequate and powerless**

Pamela (mother, Family 13): No, no rules, sometimes we try, when we see that it is really exaggerated, we try to introduce a rule... but, on the other side, **how can you set rules when one has got used to?** It is harder. **So, no, there are no rules**, we did not set any time restrictions ...

# Excessive use and inappropriate content top the list of parental concerns but... 1/2

- Low SES families are more concerned for **media panics**

Malika (mother, Family 11): we had a meeting with one of the teachers, the teacher of our youngest son, who is excellent, always pursuing further training, and she warned us to pay attention because,. Something I did not know about, they talked about **Squid Game**

Pierluigi (father): yes, she warned us that it is dangerous

Malika: my children do not watch it, I assumed they did not even know what it was about, I had to search for information about it

Pierluigi: Neither did I. because it is on an on demand platform, it's on Netflix, colleagues told me, you need to have the pay tv

Malika: but it seems they regularly talk about it in school

# Technological imaginaries 1/4

- In higher SES families, **digital media** are often assumed as a **taken for granted**, and even a desirable, **part of children's lives** and futures

Filippo (father, Family 4): this is the world, the world is digitalised. **This is the age of the digital**, so I believe that – [to his wife] if you disagree, say it, but I am confident we think alike- I believe that **fighting against it is stupid**, it's insane. You risk creating a handicap in the child...

Cristiano (father, Family 1): I have no particular worries,. I believe that what we witnessed in the past 20 years will be taken to the nth degree. I mean, it will replace everything in our lives. I mean, **technology will guide us in every choice**, it will **dispense us from many things and choices...**



# Technological imaginaries 2/4

- Consequently, higher SES families are more likely to embrace **technosolutionism**, resorting to apps and tech for every problem

Ludmilla (mother, Family 4): at school they told me she needs to improve her ability to colour within the margins, so I thought “**let’s download an app** and see”. Indeed, on screen her performance has improved, not as much with the hand drawing

Ludmilla (mother, Family 4): and this is her watch, for when we are in crowded spaces, to avoid losing her

Filippo (father): with **location tracking**

# Technological imaginaries 3/4

- Lower SES families view digital media as **an important investment in children's futures**, an opportunity for social mobility

Martina (mother, Family 3) : I do not want to demonise the digital part of Lucia's life (3yo), because it is something she won't be able to exclude. For example, I would be happy if she started **coding**, not now, a bit later, because nowadays, it will change in 20 years, but my company is desperately looking for app developers. [...] So it something that needs to be cultivated in the right way, so that it turns into **a resource for her future**

# Technological imaginaries 4/4

- Lower SES families view digital media as **symbolic token for the child's participation in their peer group**

Pierluigi (father, Family 11): we said “when will they need the? In lower sec?”

Malika (mother): yes, lower secondary school, we had planned to leave without [internet connection at home] as long as possible

Pierluigi: it would have been better to wait . But now we have it.

Malika: yes, under a a certain respect yes [it would have been better to wait], but on the other side I realise that they talk about it, so at some point they would have felt isolated from their peers...

# Little concern for datafication and the harms of algorithmic classifications

- Consistently with the optimistic technological imaginary, an unconditional acceptance of datafication (**surveillance realism**) and the **ideology of the inevitability** prevail in higher SES families

Filippo (father, Family 4): unless we talk about frauds, but that's a different story, that's a crime, but **data...** I mean, if I stop to watch a photo on Instagram for 4 seconds, the algorithm immediately communicates that I am four times more interested in that photo than the one I have watched for only one second. ... do you want to play and trick life? I mean, stop looking at everything that interests you? **It is impossible, you cannot help but accept it**

# Little concern for datafication and the harms of algorithmic classifications

- Consistently with the optimistic technological imaginary, an unconditional acceptance of datafication (**surveillance realism**) and the **ideology of the inevitability** prevail in higher SES families

Camilla (mother:, Family 19): if I am bother by Alexa listening to us? Let them tell us [laughs]. **My husband and I have nothing to...** it listens to our arguments, my screams, and that's it [laughs]. I mean, if someone enjoys listening to **the ordinary life of another family**, then alright [laughs]... I don't bother.

# Little concern for datafication and the harms of algorithmic classifications

- The ideology of inevitability is sometimes coupled with a belief in the economic rationality of data colonialisms, whereby **children's data are framed as valueless**

Ludmilla (mother, Family 4): after all, **she a four year old girl, it is general data**. The photos is a different story, there you may say that...

# with some exceptions

- Occasionally, awareness of our pervasive reliance on **data relations** leads to **technological asceticism**

Carlo (father, Family 5): **Apple, Google, Facebook...** It's under our eyes, and even topicalised at times. It is obvious that all these systems, their goal is to create a continuous, if not perpetual, interaction between users and the services they provide, even if it is **disguised beneath free content and services**, [...] because, then one say: "Fantastic, on Facebook I can see what my friends are doing, that's terrific! [...] it's all things that **make our life simple** but... this **is not for free!** At least, not free in its broader sense. I mean, there's **something that is taken from you**, in some form or another

# Awareness of monetization but..

- Lower SES families are seemingly aware of the **monetization strategies of the social media logic** in relation to influencers, but this is not accompanied by an equivalent awareness of the monetization of their own data.

Francesco (8 year old, Family 11): they start paying you when you reach, like, 1000 likes. Then you start making money.

Pierluigi (father): also the number of subscribers, remember? The number of subscribers to their channel

Francesco: Then the subscribers, the tags, the diamond tag is the highest

Pierluigi: But do you know what they are paid for?

Francesco: No, I don't, for the content I guess

Pierluigi: the advertising, that you see regularly.



# Concerned by dataveillance but...

- When lower SES parents express concerns for constant surveillance, they do so within a **conspiratorial framework** that is not accompanied by privacy practices. rather, they stick with a sense of inefficacy and inevitability

Pamela (mother, Family 13): Yes, I had already told you that sometimes I worry for privacy, for, all your searches are recorded, or what you look for in maps, that then you get notifications on your phone and think “who has activated this stuff? **How do they know I went grocery shopping in that place?**” So, occasionally I log out. Then, God knows how, you are logged in again

Grandmother: Because **we are all under surveillance**, Everyone. Everyone.

Pamela: So, yes, , basically, often I notice this and I log out: but then you need to log in again to do so many things that...

# Preliminary conclusions

# Preliminary conclusions

- Each family configuration develops a distinctive datafied habitus depending on their practices, their culture (including technological imaginaries), their media ensemble
- Next steps: can we identify patterns across family configurations?

# THANKS!

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