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DIFFUSION AND USES OF INTERNET IN CATALONIA AND IN SPAIN
A Commented Summary of Available Evidence, as of 2001.

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WORKING PAPER

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Internet, Catalonia, Spain, statistics, diffusion, Internet uses, socio-demographic characteristics.

ABSTRACT

This working paper summarizes and analyzes the statistics provided by available studies on the spread and uses of Internet in Catalonia, in Spain, and in selected Spanish regions circa 2001. A data base was established by collecting and evaluating studies and surveys from various sources. Their methodology is described in the study. Relevant variables are identified, and tables are built for each variable bringing together data from various sources. An analytical commentary highlights the main findings concerning the relationships between Internet and society in Catalonia, in Spain, and in the Spanish Regions. A number of hypotheses on these relationship are suggested.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an analytical summary of the available evidence concerning the spread of Internet, and its uses, in Catalonia, in Spain, and in some specific Regions of Spain, focusing on the data published in 1999, 2000, and 2001. When possible, statistical series are started in 1996/97, at the inception of the use of Internet in Spain beyond academic circles and specialized networks.

To collect the information summarized in this analysis, we have proceeded to an exhaustive search of sources published in the Internet, and then to a systematic data gathering effort from universities, public administrations, and private firms specialized in the area of information technology and information society. While we cannot pretend to have included every existing study in our data base, we would be surprised to see the main results of our summary substantially modified by additional sources. True, we have not spent money in purchasing commercial studies because we did not consider them necessary for the purpose of our effort: to identify and quantify the broad picture of Internet uses in Catalonia and Spain as a preliminary step to our own investigation on the matter. But we did send a letter, followed by additional requests by phone and email, to every Spanish university, asking for any empirical study or data base that they would have collected on the specific topic of Internet diffusion and uses in Spain. The number of positive answers is exactly zero, although in several instances, there was a polite response conveying the absence of such studies in their university. Rather than interpreting this disappointing result as lack of collegiality from the universities, we think that isolated research efforts from many colleagues are not visible enough, and not easily identifiable beyond small networks of collaboration. Particularly, we know that in several business schools important studies on e-commerce and the new economy have been conducted. Yet, since most of these studies are extremely focused on their field of research, we have not considered their contribution indispensable at this stage of our analysis. In short, while our data base cannot pretend to have exhausted all possible sources of information we feel confident that it represents the bulk of what is empirically known on the relationship between Internet and society in Catalonia and Spain.

To build our analysis, we have defined a set of variables on the basis of what has been studied, and we have constructed synthetic tables for each variable bringing together all available information for the variable under study.

We have differentiated the data base for Spain at large, for Catalonia, and for specific Regions of Spain. Because Catalonia is the main field of observation in the broader research project that frames this working paper, we have focused on Catalonia, bringing into the data base not only the studies on Catalonia, but the findings on Catalonia extracted from studies on Spain.

We present an analytical summary of our findings in each section, followed by the presentation of all tables supporting the analysis. Tables are constructed by variables.
We have organized several groups of variables, differentiating on the one hand, variables on the uses of the Internet, and on the other hand socio-demographical variables concerning the users of the Internet.

Any attempt at bringing together data from a wide array of studies and statistical sources faces serious methodological problems in terms of compatibility between sources and statistical representativeness. We have tried to strengthen the quality of data by eliminating a number of sources that were clearly unreliable, by providing specific information on the source for each data in each table, and by giving a detailed explanation of the methodology and scope of each study in our methodological note. Furthermore, we invite those researchers who may know different sources of information to come out of the closet and present their data, which we will dutifully consider in our further research work.

We do not pretend to have solved all the issues of reliability of this data base, and we do not necessarily stand by the data we present in this paper as an accurate description or analysis of the practice of Internet in society. But we do feel confident that this summary presents in an orderly form most of what is known at this point in our field of inquiry in Spain and Catalonia. This, at the very least, will save time to other researchers. At best, it will give some empirical grounding to the tentative hypotheses we suggest in this working paper as the starting point of our research project on Internet in Catalonia.