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# Did Covid-19 infect the news? How journalists, audiences and production processes have changed due to the pandemic

## *¿La Covid-19 ha infectado las noticias? Cómo los periodistas, las audiencias y los procesos de producción son alterados por las pandemias*

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***Abstract***
*This article focuses on journalistic activities in the context of the first wave of Covid-19, in 2020, when a high presence of post-truth and fake news was identified in news production, which is justified in addressing these two conceptual objects. The objective was to understand how problems in the production process, such as job insecurity during the pandemic, allowed information gaps, which were filled by misinformation and infodemics. For this, a quantitative method was used, with the application of an online survey to 365 participants from Ibero-America during 2020, on production processes, work routines, and information generated during the quarantine of journalists, and consumption of information during confinement to journalists and online news receivers. As a result, most journalists have changed their work routine, such as digital data checking and preference for scientific sources. About half of news receivers valued press work positively, even though news consumption has generated negative prospects. As conclusions, there is a need to review certain productive practices in the journalistic field, during exceptional situations such as the pandemic.*

***Keywords***
*Journalism, post-truth, fake news., disinformation, covid-19, production processes, job insecurity, infodemics.*

**Resumen**
Este artículo se enfoca en las actividades periodísticas en el contexto de la primera ola de Covid-19, en 2020, cuando se identificó una alta presencia de la posverdad y las *fake news* en la producción de noticias, lo que se justifica al abordar estos dos objetos conceptuales. El objetivo fue comprender cómo los problemas en el proceso productivo, como la precariedad laboral durante la pandemia, permitieron vacíos de información, que fueron llenados por la desinformación y la infodemia. Para ello se utilizó un método cuantitativo, con la aplicación de una encuesta en línea a 365 participantes de Iberoamérica durante el 2020, sobre procesos de producción, rutinas de trabajo e información generada durante la cuarentena de los periodistas, y el consumo de información durante el confinamiento de periodistas y receptores de noticias en línea. Como resultado, la mayoría de los periodistas cambió su rutina de trabajo, como la verificación de datos digitales y la preferencia por fuentes científicas. Cerca de la mitad de los receptores de noticias valoran positivamente el trabajo de prensa, a pesar de que el consumo de noticias ha generado perspectivas negativas. Como conclusiones, es necesario revisar ciertas prácticas productivas en el ámbito periodístico, durante situaciones excepcionales como la pandemia.

**Palabras clave**
Periodismo, posverdad, *fake news*, desinformación, Covid-19, procesos productivos, inseguridad laboral, infodemia.

# Introduction

An outbreak of acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) was identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. A few weeks later, this virus spread to other countries (Zu *et al.,* 2020). On January 30, 2020, it was named "coronavirus disease 2019" (Covid-19) (Velavan and Meyer, 2020) by the World Health Organization (hereafter WHO), and was declared as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, with "alarming levels of spread and inaction," according to Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of WHO (Lusa, 2020, n.p.). Since then, continuous efforts have been made to eradicate the pandemic.

Therefore, professionals have had to adapt to this situation, applying a set of procedures to avoid contamination by the new coronavirus. We think that one of these professional categories would be journalism, whose labor precariousness during this period of pandemic may have contributed to the increase of misinformation during the public debate in networks and to the spread of the "infodemic" (Zarocostas, 2020). To understand how the productive practices of journalists covering the pandemic of the new coronavirus have changed, as well as the reception of content by the audience, we applied a survey entitled "Perceptions about the information generated during Covid-19",[1] during the first wave of Covid-19, in April 2020.

In this context, in which journalists and the media in general played a leading role, we reflect on the field of journalism (Bourdieu, 1992), relating it to a constructivist notion of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1999). However, we used the notions of post-truth and *fake news* to stand out two of the main current forces driving the media in general, as well as to present a case analysis of institutions such as the WHO and the European Commission. The aim was to address disinformation and "infodemia" (Zarocostas, 2020), which occupy information gaps on the internet. A mixed method was used. In the quantitative dimension, we resorted to the application of an online survey that closed at the end of May 2020, with a sample of 365 participants, among journalists working in the press or in the media in general, on production processes, work routines, information generated during quarantine and news consumption during confinement. In the qualitative dimension, we resorted to the description of cases that demonstrate the presence of the post-truth and *fake news* in times of pandemic and how it affected social behaviors.

Through the notion of professional "ethos" established by Bourdieu (1992), we assume that the journalist should not give up the critique of the media communication paradigm, especially as an agent that contributes to the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1999). However, the forces of contingency, particularly in the era of screens and immediacy, tend

1 Published in: https://bit.ly/3Jd4Ntb

to strip reality and force the contingency "ethos" (Costa, 2020), which in our opinion could be solved by integrating specific production criteria to hypothetically avoid the dissemination of disinformation within their own production.

Added to this momentum are the uncertainties about the technical information on the new coronavirus. Such complexity generates several versions of the disease, sometimes contradictory and reported by organizations that were used as journalistic sources, putting at risk the boundaries between truth, post-truth, error, disinformation and *fake news*. This information ecosystem favors "infodemic" promoted by both spheres - the official information that characterizes journalism as an activity that generically obtains its data from official sources and the disinformation of the networks - threatening the understanding of the facts, both in the mainstream media and in the information channels with less influence. Faced with the urgent need to inform and tell the truth - even if this truth is provisional, since scientists, governments and societies in general were learning how to treat the disease while suffering from Covid-19, how to inform without leaving room for disinformation and "infodemic"?

## Methods

To review the problems mentioned above, we used the survey "Perceptions of information generated during Covid-19" (Capoano and Costa, 2020),[2] whose purpose was to understand how the social constraints caused by the new coronavirus pandemic, such as social distancing, isolation and different forms of quarantine imposed on society around the world, changed the information processes for producers, receivers, and news creation processes during this pandemic. Between May 15 and June 30, in online form format and with an exponential number of invitations through Messenger and FB Message Sender tools, this survey was inspired by studies on journalist profiles (Figaro, 2020; Figaro *et al.,* 2013; Lima, 2013), and by concepts such as "production processes" (Adghirni, 2012; Deuze and Witschge, 2016), "work routines" (Heloani, 2006), and "perceptibility criteria" (Mesquita, 2003; Traquina, 2005; Wolf, 2012). The survey was composed of 21 questions addressed to journalists, some of these focused on knowing the respondent's profile (age, gender); professional data (seniority, means of operation, newsroom

2 Survey available at: https://bit.ly/3BpesuG.

and company); work routine during the pandemic (change in workload, work place, protective equipment, obstacles and limitations at work); production processes (type and number of sources of information, format, gender, notoriety criteria); and contact (or not) with the disease.

This non-probability sample amounted to 365 participants, of whom 33.4 % are journalists producing information during the pandemic, 32.6 % are non-practitioners, and 29.5 % are not journalists but are frequent news consumers.[3] In this study, more than half of the sample (53.2 %) was composed of young journalists between 26 and 40 years old; a quarter of the sample was composed of people between 41 and 55 years old; and the youngest, between the ages of 18 and 25 years old, totaling 12.1 % of the sample. In terms of seniority, 35.8 % of the respondents had worked for a period of 1 to 5 years and 20.9 % for a period of 6 to 10 years (56.7 % of the journalists surveyed were in their first decade of work). In the section applicable to journalists working in the media, 50.8 % of the sample indicated that they worked specifically in news media, in the following formats: web (14.7 %); print (11.7 %); news agencies (7 %); radio (8.8 %); television (5.8 %) and other related (2.9 %). For the analysis, and in order to classify the publishers in which the respondents worked, only the publishers mentioned by the professionals working in the news media were considered. Consequently, 45 valid editorials were identified, of which 11.1 % were associated with economics, 8.8 % with politics, 6.6 % with health and 2.2 % with science.

## Results

Considering the survey applied to journalists during this pandemic and going deeper into the production processes (section 1. "Production processes"), we can conclude that 95.4 % of the respondents affirmed having experienced some degree of change in their work routine (minor, medium, major and complete), the most common being remote work (65.7 % of the respondents). The remaining sample indicates that 8.7 % work in the field and 23.4 % work in a newspaper company. The sample data proves that 64.9 % of the respondents claimed to have received PPE (Personal Protecti-

3 Respectively, 121 press journalists, 119 general journalists and 107 news consumers who are not journalists

ve Equipment), such as masks and disinfectant, although we could not identify whether the number of mobile workers coincides with the number of workers who received the equipment.

Only one-third of respondents experienced no change in their daily workday; 23.3 % said they were working less during the pandemic, and half (51.12 %) began working more hours per day. In addition to the precarious conditions in their routine, almost 20 % of the respondents were prevented from performing their work activity. Half of the participants were denied access to places or documents, and 34 % experienced verbal threats at some point in their activity.

Delving into the format of production (section 2. "Information produced during this pandemic"), 55.9 % of respondents responded text (for web or print versions), 15.5 % produced information for radio broadcasts; 12.3 % consisted of video content, 9.6 % of photos and only 4.3 % addressed graphics or infographics. In the sample, 90 % of the respondents stated that their data was verified mainly through the web.

In terms of information sources, the majority (65 %) used two (35 %) or three (30 %) sources for each content created, on average. As a verification method of the data collected, half of the sample used a combination of official sources (27.5 %) with specialized sources (22.4 %). The main sources considered "official" and "specialized" that were consulted and cited are: WHO, governments, health professionals and scientists.

To understand how frequent consumers of information (among non-practicing journalists in the news market and non-journalists) behaved during the pandemic, we created 13 questions (section 3. "Effects of infodemics on the public") that addressed how they report, whether they encountered *fake news* during the process, and what emotions and moral issues were triggered by news consumption. This section drew on studies on *fake news* (Pennycock and Rand, 2019; Tandoc *et al.,* 2018), sociology (Berger and Luckmann, 1999; Bourdieu, 1989; Elster, 1999;), and narratives on emotions and moral attributes (Becket and Deuze, 2016; Dias, 2012; Orgeret, 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2020), to identify stimuli in news consumption decision-making processes using these questions:

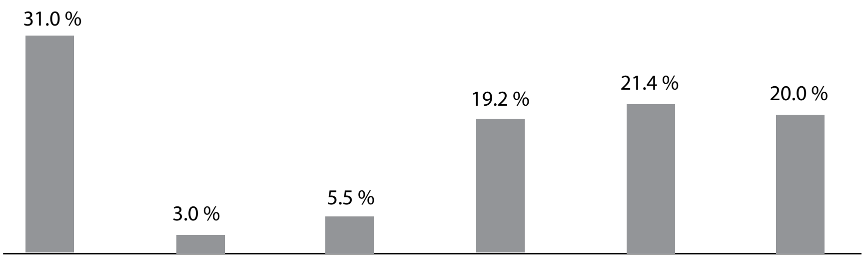
- What media do you normally use to obtain information?
- Do you feel informed about Covid-19?
- Has your news consumption been altered?

- Do you feel overwhelmed by too much information about the pandemic?
- Is/was the subject of the news you consumed related to the pandemic?
- What are the sources/interviews for most of the news you read?
- Is the press doing a good job covering the pandemic in your region?
- Have you identified any fake news about Covid-19 during news consumption?
- What format of fake news did you identify most?
- What method of fake news did you identify most?
- Are the emotions generated by the consumption of Covid-19 related news mostly positive, negative or neutral?
- What is the most common emotion elicited by press coverage of Covid-19 in your country?
- What motivates you most when consuming news about Covid-19?

According to the results obtained, there was a significant increase of 41.4 % in the consumption of information by the respondents (between "often" and "very often").

**Graph 1**

*Increase in news consumption during the crisis (N=365)*

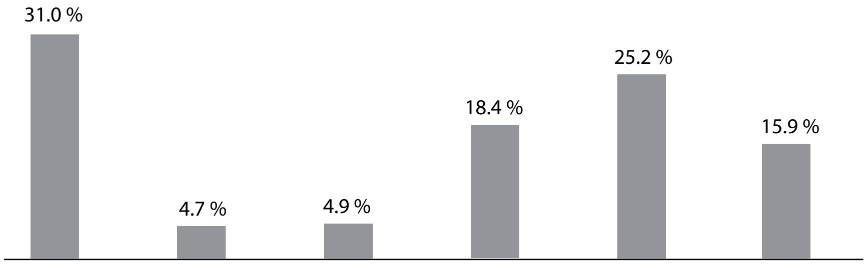



*Note.* The graph refers to the responses "no answer" (left); "never"; "a little"; "more or less"; "a lot"; "completely" (right).

41.1 % of the participants rated the work of the press positively (with responses ranging from often to very often). Only 9.6 % of the participants did not consider its performance to be positive (never or very rarely).

**Graph 2**

*Perception of press coverage of Covid-19 (N=365)*

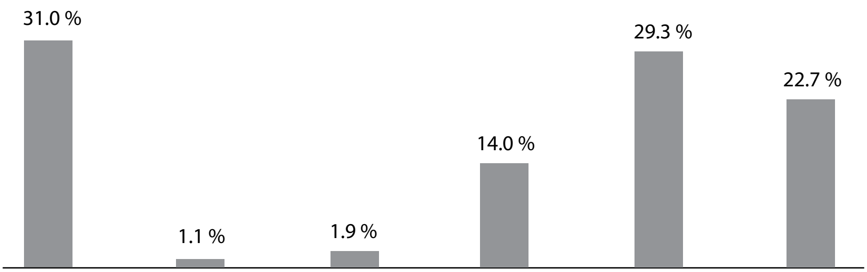



*Note.* The graph refers to the responses "no answer" (left); "never"; "a little"; "more or less"; "a lot"; "completely" (right).

About 52 % of respondents considered to be well informed (with responses ranging from often to very often). Only 3 % admitted that they rarely or never looked for information.

**Graph 3**

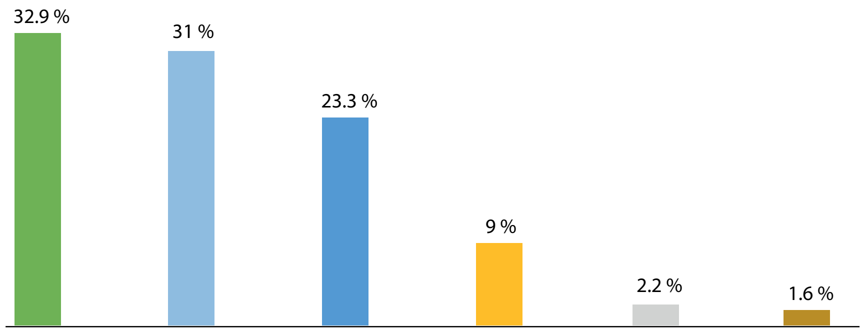
*Perception of being informed about Covid-19 (N=365)*




*Note.* The graph refers to the responses "no answer" (left); "never"; "a little"; "more or less"; "a lot"; "completely" (right).

Regarding the identification of fake news in the information about the new coronavirus, answers were in text (29 %), memes (15.6 %), video (24.3 %), audio (17.2 %) and mixed formats (13.3 %), about 56.2 % of respondents said they had identified fake news when reading about Covid-19 (with responses ranging from often to very often).

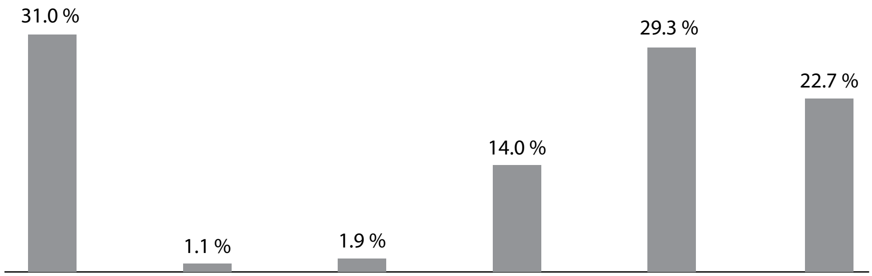
**Graph 4**
*Perception of having identified fake news when reading about Covid-19 (N=365)*




*Note.* The graph refers to the answers "no answer" (light blue); "never" (orange); "a little" (gray); "more or less" (brown); "a lot" (dark blue); "completely" (green).

About 97 % of the participants felt occasionally, often and very often overwhelmed by the excess of information consumed.

**Graph 5**
*Feeling overwhelmed by the excess information consumed during the pandemic (N=365)*

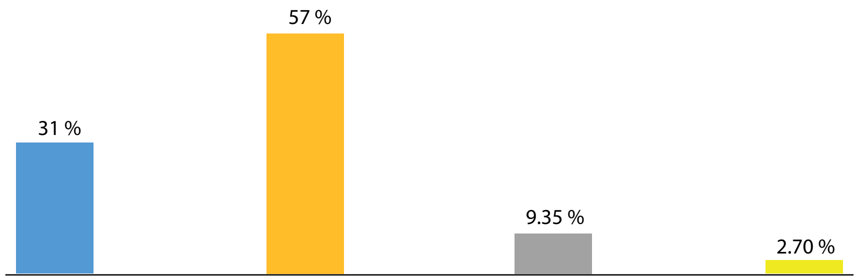



*Note.* The graph refers to the responses "no answer" (left); "never"; "a little"; "more or less"; "a lot"; "completely" (right).

Based on responses about the most frequent emotions triggered by news consumption during the pandemic, approximately 57 % of respondents said they were negative emotions.

**Graph 6**

*Emotions generated by news consumption during the pandemic (N=365)*



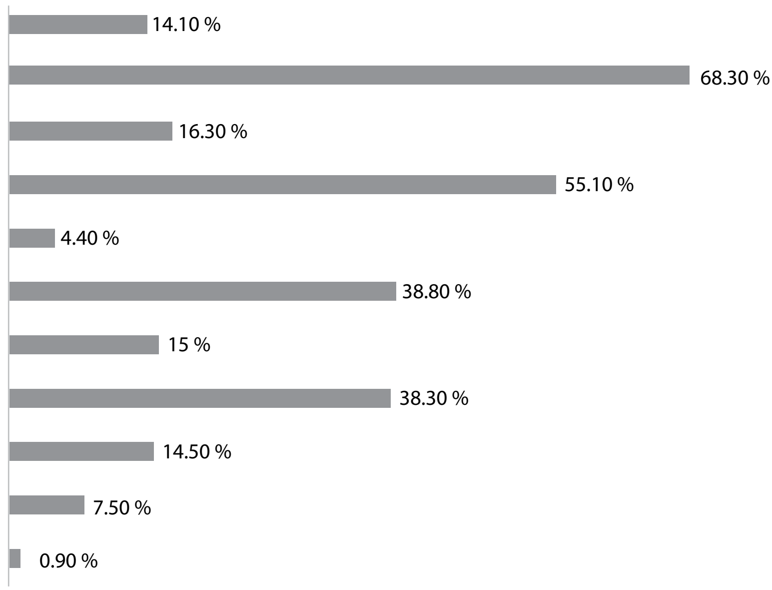

*Note.* The graph refers to "no answer (blue); "negative" (orange); "neutral" (gray); "positive" (yellow).

According to this sample, the most frequent emotion felt by respondents was sadness (68.3 %), followed by fear (55.1 %), indignation and anger (38.8 % and 38.3 %, respectively). The remaining emotions (hope, interest, contempt, disgust, surprise and happiness) are all below 20 %.

Regarding the questions about what led respondents to continue consuming news, derived from the theory of moral foundations (Graham *et al.,* 2013), most of the answers are related to phrases such as "Avoiding damage to health", whose narrative is related to the fundamentals of care or harm, reaching 28.6 % of the answers; "Being aware of the new routine and what life will be like in the future", related to the fundamentals of loyalty or betrayal focusing on the common good, reaching 25.6 % of the answers; "Concern for life on Earth and the environment," related to the fundamentals of sanctity or degradation of nature, reaching 12.3 %; and "Recognize those responsible for managing the crisis and their powers," related to fairness or deceit and authority or subversion, reaching 11.5 % of the responses.

**Graph 7**

*Emotions most frequently felt when consuming pandemic news (N=227)*




*Note.* The graph refers to “hope” (above); “sadness”; “interest”; “fear”; “guilt”; “shame”; “contempt”; “anger”; “disgust”; “surprise”; “joy”.

## Discussion

As observed, most journalists have changed their work routine, and an example of this is the consultation of digital data and the preference for scientific sources. Nearly half of news recipients value the work of the press positively, despite the fact that news consumption has generated negative perspectives. These perceptions of news production, consumption and circulation during the Covid-19 pandemic point to risks, dilemmas and opportunities in journalism. However, it is necessary to contextualize some characteristics of journalism, for example, the professional identity, the ethos in which it operates and some vices of the productive routine that were highlighted when informing about the pandemic.

Starting from the perspective that social reality is a construction, Berger and Luckmann (1999) point out the existence of multiple realities. Among these, there is one that stands out: everyday life, which they call the prevailing reality, because symbolic language goes beyond reality and becomes one of its main components, giving rise to a subjective cutout. Therefore, the legitimacy resulting from the symbolic universe highlights realities other than those of everyday life.

The social field is typified by Bourdieu (1992) as a place of tensions, where those who integrate it are aligned in a differentiated way, in a perspective that moves away from the canonical Marxist concept of "social class". The sociologist situates the subjects in the same social space, although in different and aligned positions, considering shared interests in the different spheres of the social sphere. Thus, he typifies the "journalistic field" where the social position of the agents is determined and the figures of "authority" are revealed. The legitimacy of the media is conferred by the other social fields, which are necessary to circulate their discourses and the journalistic sources considered as spokespersons of the social fields, giving visibility to the fields of discussion.

Bourdieu (1989) has also established concepts that can be related to the media (or to journalism); for example, "capital" (which allows identifying agents in the social field); "habitus" (what is acquired over time by individuals in social experiences) and "symbolic violence" (adherence of those who are dominated by a specific field, naturalizing the rules and generating critical deficit). Therefore, although events are the raw material of news, not all of them make news. The media event, for example, is based on the relationship and intersection between the "journalistic field", the different social fields and journalistic "habitus", which prioritize (limited) time as a criterion. In making the news, a report of significant and interesting facts occurs, conditioned by time, space, freedom of expression, market, technique, self-censorship and editorial line.

According to João Carlos Correia, "facts do not exist in themselves, with evidence and a self-sufficient ontological foundation, of which journalistic formulations would be pure reflections" (2008, p. 4). In this sense, reality is not autonomous, resulting rather from mediations that affect how journalism creates and processes information about reality, as well as from the logic of power and the potential conflicts of interest inherent in the flow of information. Bourdieu draws attention to the existence of categories according to journalists, which derive from their "specific perspectives", through which they "see some things and not others; and they see things in a certain way; they operate a selection and a construction of what is selected". In the case of television, the principle of selection is based on the search for the sensational and the spectacular, i.e., for what has the potential to have an audience, because that is something that surely "sells" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 12).

Additionally, he mentions the fact that contributes to the failure of the diversity expected from the different types of media, due to what is called "circular flow of information". Nobody reads as many newspapers as journalists, pointing at each other (considering that all citizens do the same), justifying themselves in competition (fight for the audience) "to know what they are going to say, they need to know what they said to others. This is one of the mechanisms through which the homogeneity of the proposed products is produced", becoming a kind of "game of mirrors, reflecting each other and creating an incredible effect of completion, a mental enclosure" (Bourdieu, 1997, pp. 18-19). This means that the people who have the mission of informing the public are generally informed by other sources of information, leading to the homogeneity of the hierarchization of news. Therefore, it is not surprising that the information conveyed by the media is almost always the same, transmitted from the same approach, with the same soundbites and the same quotes from the key players.

Starting from the uncertain complexity of the journalistic field as a constructor of realities, it is important to connect journalistic and media phenomena with the way in which the informative fact can be presented. Therefore, we start from the concept of "post-truth".

According to Antoni Bassas (2016), this neologism refers to any situation in which objective facts have less influence than emotions and personal beliefs. After understanding this dynamic, the producer of information, involved in an "information capitalism" and connected to technological production and dissemination tools in the networks (Castells, 2007), ends up being carried away by the number (of visualizations, likes and shares) instead of valuing the objectivity of the facts (Costa *et al.,* 2020). For Bruno Latour (2020, n.p., §11), this post-truth perspective is also a defensive position, since it defends the idea that "there are alternative truths from which the individual can choose". In Latour's perspective, this differs greatly from the construction of a science based on "rational skepticism."

The concept of post-truth is associated with the concept of fake news because these consist of distributing information through information channels whose deliberate purpose is to misinform or spread rumors to mislead and, ultimately, to obtain economic or political benefits. Fake news also appeals to emotions and are accompanied, most of the time, by exaggerated or clearly false titles to get attention (Hunt, 2016). Narratives can alter the decision-making processes of the message receiver by relating to common moral aspects of users (Graham *et al.,* 2013). [4]

The problem of post-truth and fake news is related to the complex and, at the same time, subtle screen era. The screen serves as a stage that "draws attention to the other" (Costa, 2020). However, the attention span on the screen is very short. Living in what Bruno Patino (2019) calls "civilization of red fish" (to refer to the short attention span of young people), characterized by the omnipresence of individuals mediatized by "smartphones", commanded by a digital economy that creates techniques of "captology" (science of capturing attention), where various socio-technical and behavioral psychology means converge (Jenkins, 2009), and where people become hostages of "attention" capturing strategies. Communication companies know that attention is their goal and, in a brief pause capable of attracting attention, they generate a whole economy around it, the "attention economy". Because of this, fake news became the "cannon" of post-truth, raising it exponentially (Patino, 2019). If facts, however vaguely empirical and vaguely correct, are "provided by thousands of fake news creators in Siberia, it is very hard to resist" (Latour, 2020, n.p., §11). Post-truth places sociotechnical contingency under the effect of a mixture of subjective information, rational decisions and affective relations connected with subjects, constantly disarming individuals.

However, recent academic studies show difficulties to precisely define the concept of fake news. Considering references in the field of communication, Tandoc *et al*. (2017) state that fake news "can be humorous content,

4 According to moral foundations theory, narratives may contain foundations that relate to individuals' moral choices, thus eliciting commitment, such as (1) caring / harm (concern for the suffering of others); (2) fairness / deceit (preference for reciprocity and fairness); (3) loyalty / betrayal (concern for the common good and prejudice against outsiders); (4) authority / subversion (reference to domination and hierarchy); (5) holiness / degradation (concern for purity); and (6) freedom / oppression (feelings of restraint and resentment toward those who dominate and restrict their freedom) (Graham *et al.* , 2013).

such as satire or journalistic parody (where irony may not be evident, thus puzzling the majority of the audience, which mixes humorous purpose with traditional news content), advertising in journalistic format (such as branded content), political propaganda, and fabrication of manipulated images and facts". Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) classified misinformation into seven types: satire/parody, false connection (the text does not support what is suggested by the title or images), misleading content (such as fallacies), false context, imposter content (copying from legitimate sources), manipulation (image editing, for example), and fabrication (creating nonexistent information). On the other hand, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017, p. 213), look for a more specific definition of fake news, considering that the current meaning can be characterized by "news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers"

Regarding the manipulation of information for commercial purposes, it is worth mentioning the case of an article in the "Correio da Manhã" (5/6/2020), entitled "English newspaper manipulates data during coronavirus in Portugal to show the risk of traveling on vacation" revealing how the data by country were at the service of interests. The English newspaper "Daily Mail" was caught omitting the truth in a seemingly harmless choice of tourist destinations. In revealing the usual holiday destinations of the English, which were analyzed considering the corresponding epidemiological situation, it was written that "only TWO travel spots have a worse infection rate than the UK": Portugal and the United States (USA). The newspaper "Correio da Manhã" alleged manipulation, stating that the "Daily Mail" deliberately used a comparison of "new daily cases per million people, without taking into account other relevant data, such as the number of tests performed per million people, the total number of cases per million people" in which "Portugal ranked 23rd in the world ranking (after Spain, Ireland, Belgium, United Arab Emirates or Italy)" (Correio da Manhã, 2020, s.p., §4). This is another example of the use of part of the truth in favor of geopolitical interests.

Christofoletti (2018) had already suggested that fake news not only allows certain languages and formats, often journalistic, to attract the attention of the unsuspecting public, but also leads fake news producers to adopt, through copying, "patterns of manipulation" similar to those of conventional media, previously identified and denounced by Abramo (2016). Mistakes and deceptions due to frequent misunderstandings caused by the media destroyed the trust of part of the public, which is now seduced by the siren songs of fake WhatsApp audio recordings, texts without sources on obscure websites or "memes" without authors on Facebook. Even information verifications that refute fake news are often faced with public rejection, precisely due to the lack of trust of the audience, which is disappointed with the continuous deceptions caused by the mainstream media (Costa, 2019). In this sense, we can say that the "failed news" published in haste, incompetence or malice, opened the doors to *fake news*. Today, these face difficulties to counteract the monster they have created.

To avoid doing the same mistakes in a high-risk context, it is necessary to remember that journalism, like science, works with "temporary truths" (Geraldes, 2001, p. 9). It is necessary to be even more careful in an emergency such as this one, where the public's attention looks for answers to complex questions, which even specialists do not dare to answer. Regarding Natércia (2008, n.p.), "in relation to truths that, if they exist, are temporary, transitory and ephemeral, the only thing left is to read science critically". After all, even the specialists consulted continue to work with the available information, presenting more uncertainties than absolute truths. This is the only possible way to avoid being criticized the next day for tragic predictions or miraculous cures that did not happen.

It is important to address one of the biggest controversies in times of pandemic: the continuous dithering of the WHO. According to "Le Monde" (April 14, 2020), quoted by IOL, since the beginning of Covid-19, this institution "has been accused of being an ally of China, of flattering the measures taken by the Beijing authorities against the disease and of being slow to issue a global warning about the danger of the new coronavirus" (IOL, April 14, 2020, n.p., §2). In this case, one of the main initiators of the attacks on the WHO was Donald Trump, "following a tweet by the US president on April 7 "in which he accused the organization of being "completely wrong", as it only acknowledged that the virus was transmissible between humans on "January 22, a month after its appearance in Wuhan, and only considered the disease a threat to the world on February 11. This delay would have contributed to transforming the Chinese epidemic into a pandemic (IOL, April 14, n.p., §5).

Marie-Paule Kieny, former WHO director, stated that "WHO member states want it to remain weak, as health is primarily a political issue and a national prerogative" (UOL, 2020, n.p.). These statements may indicate underlying power games and interests. The controversy surrounding hydroxychloroquine, which allowed some advances and setbacks, exposed the danger of such interests and the remote creation of strategic post-truths. Having based decisions against the development of hydroxychloroquine drugs on articles published in the scientific journals "The Lancet" and "The New England Journal of Medicine", we can assume that WHO could not have imagined the underlying problem. According to an investigation by "The Guardian", there were considerable errors in the databases of these studies. The Australian version of this journal found these errors in a study conducted by "The Lancet", precisely in the database provided by a company called Surgisphere. The study mentioned that the researchers in charge obtained data through this company and that such data had been previously collected in five hospitals, registering 600 patients with Covid-19 and around 73 Australian deaths since April 21.

However, data from Johns Hopkins University, which followed the Australian data, showed that only 67 deaths from Covid-19 were recorded in Australia up to the same date. The number did not increase to 73 until April 23. Surgisphere director Sapan Desai admitted that an Asian hospital had accidentally been included in the Australian figures, leading to an inflation of the number of cases in the country. This event prompted "The Guardian" to explore the issue further. The newspaper contacted five hospitals in Melbourne and two in Sydney, whose cooperation would be crucial in confirming the number of Australian patients in the database provided by Surgisphere. All the hospitals contacted denied any involvement in the database and said they had never heard of Surgisphere. This raised further doubts in The Guardian and prompted a further investigation of the company. This investigation concluded that Surgisphere employees had little scientific training. In addition to the science editor being a science fiction author, the marketing executive is a former model, frequent event host; and the company's LinkedIn page has less than 100 followers. Between May 20 and May 30, 2020, the company had six employees. On June 2, 2020, that number changed to three employees, although Surgisphere claims to have one of the largest and fastest databases in the world, it has almost no online activity. Its Twitter ID has fewer than 170 followers and no posts between October 2017 and March 2020; as of May 31, 2020, the contact button on Surgisphere's official page redirected users to a cryptocurrency website, leading to questions about how hospitals could easily contact the company to become part of its database; Surgisphere's director, Sapan Desai, was involved in three medical malpractice lawsuits (Davey *et al.,* 2020).

The crisis of journalism, which began some time ago, has increased during the pandemic we are still living through and has increased with the intensification of the digitalization of information. However, despite the discussion and criticism of journalism and journalists, their importance for the social construction of reality is not questionable; they report on world events and make them accessible to all, representing one of the pillars of democracy. Journalists help to understand the world, interpreting it for the public that consumes the information. In this way, those who produce news are hindered by the system they are part of and which is part of society, with all the existing power relations.

A field of Media Education is important in this framework for the formation of citizens which, despite not having immediate effects, represents an investment in the future for the critical education of citizens. It is necessary to invest in better journalism, regardless of the inherent limitations of the profession, and bearing in mind that what is at stake is journalism, not any other element coexisting in the media space.

The consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic do not bode well for journalism, with the word "uncertainty" further limiting the future. In this scenario, increasingly crowded with professional information sources, journalism is now more threatened than ever, due to the precariousness of the sector.

However, the problem is worse than that related to the practice of journalism, and it is noticeable in the type of media consumed. More work cannot be done with less manpower and much less with low salaries. Only by changing this scenario will it be possible to survive fake news and all the other threats that loom over the sector, since the journalist, as a mediator, interprets reality for the public.

It is considered that the media should avoid presenting themselves as owners of the monopoly of legitimate discourse and continue to emphasize the limits of scientific studies in a reflexive and rigorous presentation of their partial results.

Because news now reaches various production and distribution platforms, it becomes even more connected to media culture, challenging our standard concepts of how it should work. With this in mind, several questions remain unanswered about journalistic work: What differentiates information produced by journalism from information produced by other mediators of social information, such as influencers and independent publishers?

What happens when information generated by the press becomes as inaccurate as information circulating online? Why not admitting flaws in production processes to the audience? How to create news with temporary truths without giving rise to disinformation? How to get the audience's attention without creating infodemics? How to avoid mistakes that create fake news?

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# López Obrador´s political communication and leadership with his followers through Twitter on COVID-19

## *Comunicación y liderazgo político de López Obrador con sus seguidores a través de Twitter durante el COVID-19*

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***Abstract***
*Leadership and political communication in moments of crisis require an efficient strategy that guides the citizens on how to act correctly. Nowadays, most leaders use digital social networks as political instruments. President López Obrador is one of the politicians with the most followers (almost nine million) on the digital social network Twitter. The sanitary crisis due to COVID-19 keeps having repercussions, reason for which the communication of the Mexican president was studied. The aim of this paper is to analyze the leadership and political communication in the Mexican president's tweets in 2020, in the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The communication constructs of communication, populism, charism, and strategic behavior were used to determine his political communication and leadership style. 631 tweets were analyzed by way of a qualitative methodology and a content analysis out of which 104 were about COVID-19. The results show that president López Obrador mainly uses an informative-communication style about his management with populist features. The paper concluded that the Mexican president did not use Twitter as an informative strategy for the health emergency which is the opposite of effective leadership and political communication during the crisis, either as a correct political instrument. In addition, adapting his style to the circumstances is recommended.*

***Keywords***
*Leadership, communication, COVID-19, pandemic, Twitter, president, AMLO, Mexico.*

**Resumen**
El liderazgo y comunicación política en tiempos de crisis requieren de una eficiente estrategia que guie a los ciudadanos sobre cómo actuar. Actualmente, los líderes utilizan las redes sociales digitales como instrumentos políticos. El presidente López Obrador es uno de los políticos con mayor número de seguidores (casi nueve millones) en Twitter. La crisis sanitaria por COVID-19 sigue generando graves repercusiones por lo que se analizó cómo se comunicó el presidente mexicano durante esta etapa. El objetivo de la investigación fue analizar el liderazgo y comunicación política en sus tuits 2020. Se utilizaron los constructos de comunicación, populismo, carisma y comportamiento estratégico para determinar su estilo. Se analizaron 631 tuits mediante una metodología cualitativa y de análisis de contenido, de los cuales 104 estaban relacionados con el COVID-19. Los resultados muestran que López Obrador tiene principalmente un estilo de comunicación informativo sobre su gestión con características populistas y carismáticas y finalmente poco orientado al comportamiento estratégico. Se concluye que el presidente mexicano no empleó Twitter como estrategia informativa sobre la contingencia sanitaria, lo cual es contrario a un liderazgo y comunicación política eficiente durante una crisis, ni tampoco como instrumento político. Se recomienda adecuar su estilo según las circunstancias.

**Palabras clave**
Liderazgo, comunicación, COVID-19, pandemia, Twitter, presidente, AMLO, México.

# Introduction

In 2020, the world lived one of its greatest challenges, the impact of the crisis was so significant that it caused a change in the European Union policy, generating a more positive integration and dynamics among its members (Schmidt, 2020). The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus spread rapidly, generating a very serious health crisis due to the number of cases of COVID-19 disease. Governments were forced to create strategies to manage the disease due to the consequences in the health, economic and social aspects. This research aims to analyze the leadership and communication of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) in this situation.

The pandemic required full commitment and leadership to care for public health. From the beginning, experts established that management required the following strategies: containment and testing for SARS-CoV-2 virus on a large scale and improvement of the public health system (Guest *et al.,* 2020).

At the beginning of the health contingency, the Mexican government promoted the Ministry of Health's program "Jornada Nacional de Sana Distancia" from May 23-30, 2020 as part of the strategies to manage the COVID-19 pandemic. This program included the promotion of basic prevention measures, temporary suspension of non-essential activities and rescheduling of mass events, and protection of older adults (Secretaría de Salud, 2022). In this sense, the healthy distance was a flexible and voluntary policy of confinement and short duration (Secretaría de Salud, 2020). According to figures from the World Health Organization, Mexico was in sixteenth place in terms of infections with 5.9 million and fifth place in terms of deaths with 326 000, only behind the United States, India, Brazil and Russia, as of June 30, 2022. Regarding the number of official deaths, the figure seems low, as the government of Mexico published an excess of 667 240 deaths until June 28, 2022 (Government of Mexico, 2022). As a result of these data, Mexico ranked fifth in terms of deaths and twenty-first in terms of infections (World Health Organization, 2022).

In this context, President López Obrador's managed the health contingency, and despite the alarming figures, he dismissed its impact and underestimated its scientific aspects, using political interests in defense of the government's image and legitimization before the priority of preserving the health of citizens (Esteinou Madrid, 2020). Currently, leadership and politics are based on various sources of communication with citizens, digital social networks are one of the strategies most used by leaders (González-List, 2022) and are considered political instruments. Globally, the management of leaders' communications during the pandemic has been studied, and Mexico should not be the exception. In this sense, it is worth noting that

AMLO has a strong profile in digital social networks (Manfredi-Sánchez *et al.,* 2021), opening an important line of research.

Therefore, this research aims to investigate the leadership and communication style of the president of Mexico in the management of the pandemic, responding to the following question: what was the communication and leadership style of the president during the COVID-19 health contingency during the year 2020? The study aimed to analyze the leadership and communication through the discursive components of the president's Twitter account @lopezobrador_ regarding the COVID-19 health contingency during 2020 according to political constructs to determine his style.

Throughout his political career, President López Obrador has exercised his leadership and communication strategy on the social network Twitter, in his account @lopezobrador_ which currently has 8,838,565 followers. He is one of the presidents with the largest number of followers and it is important to determine what effects he generated during his administration before the pandemic. This research identified his behavior, political traits, actions, style and configuration as a political leader and discursive components in this social network before the health crisis in Mexico. For this purpose, the content of President AMLO's tweets during 2020 (a total of 631) was analyzed. In this sense, the idea is to study the political communication of López Obrador; Peytibi (2020) mentioned that politicians must have an efficient communication in times of crisis to contribute to a better management of the situation. In addition, the leader must act to face crises adequately (Hahn Utrero, 2020).

This study was based on the leadership, communication and use of Twitter by President López Obrador based on the variables communication, populism, charisma and strategic behavior. Although it has been said that Twitter does not favor the publication of policy proposals or the inclusion of citizens and that it is a unilateral communication, it is also a political tool so the publications made by leaders should be analyzed (Ortiz and Espejel, 2021).

## Theoretical framework

### Political leadership

As mentioned in the previous section, digital social networks are used by political leaders as a political tool and to communicate with citizens. In this sense, it is important to define political leadership: "leading a society along a course, which results in higher levels of well-being, being a positive change, while respecting the framework of democracy" (Méndez, 2013, p. 25). Leading a society implies facing the challenges, as well as knowing the needs of citizens, but also the way they communicate their government policies and strategies. For this reason, political leadership cannot be understood without a communication style. In this sense, the leader depends on his/her personal attributes, language and the impact of his/her communication and the influence of his/her behavior in a political context (Hermann and Milburn, 1977). In other words, the language or the ways a leader uses to communicate can influence his or her performance. This performance of the leader is consolidated as a function of the environment through strategic actions, contributions to the welfare and achievements of the citizenry (Méndez, 2018). For this reason, it is said that the influence and power that a politician can have on another, in this case, the voters are essential to their performance (Meza, 2017, p. 102) and communication can be one of the strategies for that purpose. However, influence can change depending on the context (Rivas Otero, 2018).

## Social networks and political leaders

The study of social networks and how politicians use them to communicate and influence their followers and citizens is not new. For example, in the 2017 federal election campaign in Germany, the positive or negative reactions of Facebook users on populist messages used as a communication strategy to increase the interaction and influence of their messages were studied, finding that populism generates negative reactions and vice versa (Jost *et al.,* 2020). Likewise, it is argued that social networks are an instrument and political leaders use them as a means of communication for their messages and to inform about their management; in addition, politicians use hybrid environments to communicate with citizens (Grassetti, 2020). Olmedo Neri (2021) says social networks such as Facebook or Twitter are ideal for the dissemination of information due to their timeless and virtual capacity in times of crisis. Hybrid environments combine different types of communication channels, face-to-face, virtual, combined, or other.

For this reason, world leaders pay increasing attention to their social networks. In relation to this, Twitter has established as the information and communication network and political leaders know about its impact. Table 1 shows the number of followers that the current heads of state of the G7 countries have on their Twitter accounts, as well as President Nayib Bukele of El Salvador, who is known by his management of social networks; these heads of state have a lot of followers, as well as President Lopez Obrador. This audience is a fertile and attractive field to be used as political tools by political leaders. It can be seen in Table 1 that President López Obrador has almost nine million more followers than most of the G7 heads of state, except President Joe Biden (just over 23 million). This illustrates the impact and influence that AMLO can have by using Twitter as a political communication strategy.

**Table 1**

*Followers of the G7 Heads of State and Andrés Manuel López Obrador*

| Name | Account | Number of followers (millions) |
|---|---|---|
| Joe Biden | @POTUS | 23.4 |
| Andrés Manuel López Obrador | @lopezobrador_ | 8.9 |
| Emmanuel Macron | @EmmanuelMacron | 8.4 |
| Justin Trudeau | @JustinTrudeau | 6.1 |
| Boris Johnson | @BorisJohnson | 4.5 |
| Nayib Bukele | @nayibbukele | 4 |
| Shinzo Abe | @AbeShinzo | 2.3 |
| Giuseppe Conte | @GiuseppeConteIT | 1.1 |
| Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz | @Bundeskanzler | 0.5 |

## Twitter and political leadership

As already mentioned, political activity has moved to social networks, especially Twitter, which is said to have created a "space for constant and always open political discussion that did not exist" (González-List, 2022, p. 47). To this effect, the study of politics on Twitter is quite broad in the literature with diverse perspectives. González-List (2022) provided an extensive classification: public sphere (campaigns, communication, perverse use and citizenship), effects on political participation (analysis, state, women and youth, cultures and others), activism, protests and mobilizations and relationship with journalists and communication (social networks, scanning and contrary content) (González-List, 2022, p. 51). While Jungherr (2016) divided Twitter research on politics into three main aspects: the types of parties and candidates, how the network is used and the measurement of its impact. This study seeks to analyze the effects of political participation, how the president uses the social network and to measure the impact of President López Obrador's communication style on Twitter.

Political leaders build their images on Twitter, mobilize audiences through the digital social network and personalize their political role (Polaino *et al.,* 2020). In fact, digital democracies are a reality, so digital social networks are used as political instruments; hence, the importance of studying the messages that politicians post on them. Through 208 characters on Twitter, videos or images that can be attached, political leaders transmit their speeches to their audience and influence their followers in a digital way that would be difficult to achieve in person. For example, the president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele uses the social network Twitter as a very careful and developed communication strategy to be in touch with his citizens and optponents (Mila-Maldonado *et al.,* 2022). However, this way of interacting with citizens in Mexico has been relatively little studied, and the effects of Twitter communications of Mexican political leaders on the electorate and citizens have not yet been studied.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the interaction of political leaders and digital social networks, and Twitter was not the exception. Although it is a growing field, there are studies on how this social network was used by politicians to communicate the effects and management of the health contingency. For example, Rufai and Bunce (2020) analyzed how the G7 heads of state used Twitter to communicate about the progress of the pandemic, finding that most of the messages were informative with a percentage of links to information pages. Thus, Twitter was a strategy used by these leaders to communicate the management of the contingency to their citizens, except Merkel who did not use it because she does not have a social network, but her spokesman Steffen Seibert does have an active account with one million followers and was the one who informed German citizens (Carbajosa, 2021).

Regarding President AMLO and his communication of the pandemic on Twitter, Manfredi-Sánchez *et al.* (2021) compared the tweets of four presidents, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, Pedro Sánchez of Spain, Alberto Fernández of Argentina and López Obrador during the first months of the pandemic. The results showed that the Mexican and Brazilian presidents displayed a more populist profile. In addition, both paid little attention to public health policy, while the Spanish and Argentinean presidents established a communication strategy for health management through this digital social network. However, their study was limited to a very brief part of the pandemic and did not consider other variables.

Ortiz Espinoza and Espejel Trujillo (2021) analyzed on Twitter the communication strategies of the four presidential candidates in the 2018 campaign, including AMLO, finding that it is a one-sided information channel and that it generates sentimental interaction in followers, data that could be used as political tools. Regarding López Obrador, it was found that he was the only candidate who did not attack his opponents and neither did he use it to inform about his public policy proposals, only about his campaign events, without a clear communication strategy.

## Communication

Twitter is a communication strategy and political tool of political leadership, so it is important to mention what the literature has found on this topic. This type of communication has even been classified as "pop politics" which is based on personalization and spectacle, whose purpose is to build a celebrity politician with social networks as a strategy (Manfredi *et al.,* 2021). In this research, communication is understood as: "influence on the opinions or behaviors of the public and powerful tool to communicate with citizens during public health crises" (Rufai and Bunce, 2020, p. 12).

In this sense, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the use of social networks such as Twitter by world leaders, and it has been detected that citizens reached out to obtain information about the health crisis (Haman, 2020). For this reason, the rhetoric of leaders, their styles, objectives and types of communication in such social network have already been analyzed. On the contrary, the large amount of information that has been generated during the COVID-19 pandemic, both true and false, has been defined as "infomedia" and it has been stated that it has been difficult for citizens to access valid sources of news and where Twitter is a vital means of communication (Pont-Sorribes, 2020, p. 98).

Hence, the need for an adequate and efficient communication strategy on the part of governments and heads of state. In fact, it has been argued that the political discourse has changed due to the pandemic and generated the need to reduce fake news in social networks (Beller Taboada, 2021). Similarly, Homedes and Plaja (2020) stated that communication during the pandemic should not only be through social networks, but also through direct communication with citizens, requiring rapid and constant learning for efficient management, and should also be adapted according to the constantly changing conditions. In addition, Peytibi (2020) established the ideal strategy that political leaders should have in times of crisis: security, solutions, tranquility, speed, trust, constancy, truthfulness, daily appearance, having a good spokesperson, continuous improvement, generating different types of digital content, creating efficient stories, fostering memorable perceptions, and creating progress.

Regarding Twitter, Rufai and Bunce (2020) analyzed how the G7 heads of state, the presidents of the European Council and the European Commission communicated on this social network during the first part of the pandemic. They used three categories to analyze the communication strategy: informational, moral momentum and political (Rufai and Bunce, 2020). That study concluded that world leaders used their tweets as a form of communication and response to the pandemic. While for Hahn Utrero (2020), communication begins with acceptance, especially in the case of COVID-19, the recognition of the crisis by the leader is essential to take the necessary actions to address it. In addition, the discourse used must have four characteristics to be effective: honesty, coherence, control and emotionality.

Likewise, Montiel *et al*. (2021) studied the styles, rhetoric, leadership, and communication strategies of the heads of state of 26 countries (they did not include Mexico) during the first six months of 2020 on government websites. The study found five constructs in the discourses: global unity, common cooperation, national fervor, systematic intervention, and governmental response. As a conclusion of the study, a predominance of a populist discourse was found over Cosmopolitan. In addition, these authors classified the countries according to rhetoric: populism (United Kingdom, United States and Brazil), responsible democracies (Denmark and Canada), universal collaborators (Taiwan and Norway) and institutional implementers (Russia, Spain, and Italy).

This study includes the dimensions of informative, moral impulse, political, global unity and common cooperation for the analysis of communication. The category of moral impulse is based on the search for promotion, and reactivation of morality, while the informative aspect refers to sharing news or updates on government management, including health contingency, while the political theme investigates the approach of a governmental or statesmanship debate (Rufai and Bunce, 2020).

As for the general union, it aims to exhort and support group unity, invoking values of peace and honesty. Common cooperation is based on promoting the "general participation of citizens" (Montiel *et al.,* 2021, p. 9).

President Lopez Obrador communicated the health contingency in Mexico in collaboration with the Ministry of Health through the undersecretary Hugo Lopez Gatell, programming two conferences at the beginning, one in the morning during the usual conferences of the president and another in the evening by the undersecretary. Esteinou Madrid (2021) analyzed the coherence of the messages of the authorities and the number of cases of COVID-19 in Mexico, finding great inconsistencies and lack of clarity and orientation. At the beginning, López Gatell even stated that masks were not necessary or optional, although he later changed his position. In addition, the government strategy of the National Healthy Distance Day was extended to digital social networks, including Twitter, and the *hashtag* #SusanaDistancia was written on Twitter. Olmedo Neri (2021) conducted a study of its effects and detected the nodes (12,776) and links (18,679) generated by this hashtag, considering it to be of low intensity. He also identified the main disseminating actors that promoted this campaign: AMLO, López Gatell (highlighting), Beatriz Gutiérrez Müller (wife of the Mexican president), the Ministry of Health, the Mexican Social Security Institute, the governor of Hidalgo Omar Fayad and the media Moreno Hernández and El Chamuco through their accounts in digital social networks.

## Populism and charisma

Studying the communication of politicians implies determining what style of communication and leadership they exert on the citizenry. In this regard, there is currently a pattern that is present in different heads of state: populism. Kyle and Meyer (2020) found that there are currently five times more populist leaders than at the end of the Cold War, with different types of populism, and that it is not expected to change soon. For Alsina (2020), President López Obrador, Trump and Bolsonaro are leaders qualified as populist by demonstrating patterns such as the "elite as the enemy", the people as victims or the leader as a hero or savior (2020, p. 61). Populism is a style that occurs in both left and right politics and presents polarizing characteristics in a divided society (Mila-Maldonado *et al.,* 2022, p. 25). It is also based on the sense of us and others, occupying the entire political spectrum (Manfredi-Sánchez *et al.,* 2021, p. 80).

In this research, populism contains the dimensions of polarizing rhetoric, confrontation, social indignation, national fervor and minimization.

Regarding polarizing rhetoric, it is defined as an "agonistic public space fighting for meanings and political identities, immersed in a polarization of political adversaries through identifications of an us/them" (Mila-Maldonado *et al.,* 2022, p. 25) or as the tendency to attack or demonize rivals seeking to create conflict (Manfredi-Sánchez *et al.,* 2021).

In relation to confrontation, it is the "constitution of a we as a popular identity that presents heterogeneous needs, known as equivalences, that will create a they, an adversary" (Manfredi-Sánchez *et al.,* 2021, p. 25).

On the other hand, social indignation is the summation and capitalization of society's anger, the angry, used as political capital (Meza, 2017, p. 116) while national fervor refers to enlivening society through "rhetorical applause for the achievements of national efforts" (Montiel *et al.,* 2021, p. 9). Finally, minimization is when political leaders do not take problems seriously such as the pandemic (Meyer, 2020).

In terms of his leadership style, President López Obrador has already been identified as a socioeconomic populist (Kyle and Meyer, 2020) with charisma and populism (Meza, 2017). In addition, he has been described as having a tendency to distrust others (Rivas-Otero, 2019) and that his leadership is "charismatic integrator-pragmatic with great experience in the electoral" (Navarrete and Salas, 2018).

Charisma is undoubtedly an essential element of populism and it is said that the charismatic leader is based on a "contagious dynamism that offers an irresistible attraction" (Mila-Maldonado *et al.,* 2022, p. 8). In addition, the leader has a "special attraction on the masses that follow him/her" and there is also infatuation through seductive campaign promises for followers (Meza, 2017, p. 105).

In this study, charisma is constructed with the elements of empathy, influence, and power. Regarding empathy, it seeks to "show closeness in relation to the fears and concerns of citizens in times of pandemic" (Mila-Maldonado *et al.,* 2022, p. 35), although it can be applied to other aspects; meanwhile, influence and power are characterized by "having the resources to lead social groups, having the ability to influence, convince and persuade them" (Meza, 2017, p. 105).

## Strategic behavior and pandemic

The management of the COVID-19 pandemic contingency requires a strategic behavior of political leaders defined as the conduction of “actions that increase political power, avoid mistakes and are a political leverage” (Méndez, 2013). In other words, failure to act in favor of social welfare put the population at risk.

The following are some examples on the management of the health contingency and the consequences generated by several heads of state. For example, in the case of President Donald Trump, he did not meet expectations and the United States had an undisciplined and disorderly response to COVID-19 (Ladkin, 2020). This situation occurred not only in the U.S. but in many countries that had populist, incompetent, denialist, and autocratic leadership.

It has even been stated that COVID-19 created a leadership crisis and that the populist “denigrates evidence and appeals to fear” and the health contingency required leaders with a sense of vigilance (Tourish, 2020, p. 266). Likewise, management was not oblivious to political currents, partisan influence was detected in Democratic and Republican governors in the United States, finding that party ideology influenced decision making to address the health contingency (Wang *et al.,* 2021). In another gender-related study, a protective feminism of female political leaders was detected while men identified themselves as warriors. Female heads of state such as Merkel, Ardern and Tsai Ing-Wen had better contingency management than their male counterparts Trump, Johnson and XI Jing Ping (Johnson and Williams, 2020; Coscieme *et al.,* 2020). In that view, it has been pointed out how President Trump of the United States and Prime Minister Johnson of the United Kingdom at the beginning of the contingency minimized the seriousness of the situation, or as happened in India where a very strict confinement was made without considering the economic need of the people, worsening the situation (Grint, 2020).

For this reason, the management of the health contingency required strategic actions on the part of the heads of state, otherwise public health would be at risk with consequences that would worsen the situation and could or did cause thousands of deaths. This required global leaders to take decisive action aimed at achieving the welfare of citizens.

In this sense, strategic behavior has been defined as the performance of actions that “increase political power, avoid mistakes and are political leverage” (Méndez, 2018, p. 4). The following components of strategic behavior are included in this research: strategic action to achievement, reinforcement of systematic intervention, assurance of government response, and government actions to face COVID-19.

In terms of strategic action to be achieved, it includes the benefits generated in economic growth, the decrease in poverty levels and the safeguarding of democracy (Méndez, 2013). Regarding contingency, the efficient management of the pandemic should not be overlooked.

Regarding reinforcement of systematic interventions, the measurement, expansion, and utilization of government agencies are used from the highest level of power for benefitting citizens (Montiel *et al.,* 2021). Meanwhile, ensuring governmental response is the role of the bureaucracy to compensate for the needs of citizens during a crisis (Montiel *et al.,* 2021).

Finally, governmental actions during COVID-19 are the political obligations, management, and attention to citizens to face the pandemic (Mila-Maldonado *et al.,* 2022, p. 31).

As for the analysis of the strategic behavior of President López Obrador, Villanueva Ulfgard and Villanueva (2020) considered that he failed to take advantage of his historical juncture due to his vision based on the past. There are already general evaluations of his years as president, for example, because his campaign promises failed, being a politician more charismatic than efficient (Elizondo, 2020); very focused on his personality, which hinders and polarizes the political system and whose decisions and actions that affect several generations of Mexicans (Curzio, 2020). Likewise, it has been argued how he has involved the Mexican State through centralization, aggressive budgetary austerity, and dependence on the military (Sánchez Talnquer, 2020). Without leaving aside the criticism of his bad energy policy (Hernández Ibarzábal and Bonilla, 2020), or how despite his defense of the people he has excluded Mexico's original groups (Solorio *et al.,* 2021). As for his self-analysis of half a six-year term, AMLO defines it benevolently, but emphasizing the pending reduction of violence, but without presenting something to face it, but with a humble behavior, without pretensions and with the "heart" (López Obrador, 2021).

On the other hand, President López Obrador has been criticized by the way he has managed health contingency due to the minimization of its effects and severity (Meyer, 2020). Not only there is a failed reactive strategy managed by the federal government with a poor identification of the problem, instead of applying an efficient prevention method, which became a public health problem. Not only is it considered that it was not controlled, but it continued to grow (Mundo, 2021) even up to the closing of this edition. Esteinou Madrid (2020, p. 150) defined it as "when politics displaced science". In relation to this, it would be important to remember the forecasts made about the number of deaths caused by the pandemic by the Undersecretary of Health; at first it was stated that it would not exceed 6500 deaths, then 8000, 12 000, 25 000, 28 000 and 60 000 (LaPolíticaOnline, 2020), far from the current figure (326 000) and much more than the accumulated figure (667 000 as of June 2022).

The literature review delimited the context and research constructs to analyze the leadership and communication style of President AMLO in the management of the health contingency. This study focuses on communication, populism, charisma and strategic behavior in President López Obrador's Twitter discourse.

# Method

## Procedure

The research uses a digital method of social network analysis (Olmedo Neri, 2021) based on the generation of two types of data: attributes and relationships. These studies focus on the study of social relationships and how they affect the behavior of "subjects, groups, institutions, among others" (Brand and Gómez, 2006, p. 6). Likewise, the method is exploratory qualitative documentary of messages and digital data through content analysis.

The method was based on the content analysis technique that examines the characteristics of leadership, LTA (Leader Trait Assessment), evaluation of the leader's traits that builds his profile, attributes and style through word count (Rivas Otero, 2018) and the following stages were used: selection of material, coding, classification scheme, categorization of messages, coding manual, counting and presentation of results (Rivas Otero, 2018).

Content analysis is based on the study of secondary texts of an individual (Creswell, 2012). In this research, the corpus (tweets) (Mila-Maldonado *et al.,* 2022) was used as the content to be analyzed, in this case the tweets on Twitter of President López Obrador through its discursive components collected from the API (Application Programming Interface).

In this sense, we used the corpus linguistics technique that uses a large collection of unprocessed text data that are organized according to certain dimensions, but with the purpose of "identifying patterns of shared and unique meanings in the text". This corpus linguistics has been related to the interdisciplinary tradition of content analysis criticism that uses the text (in this case the tweets) to build constructs (Montiel *et al.,* 2021, p. 4).

Regarding the data collection technique, the *Orange Python* software version 3.31.1 was used to obtain all the contents of the tweets, which was used to filter, model and design the database of these tweets and mine the data. In this sense, it was necessary to request a Twitter developer account to obtain this information.

As mentioned above regarding the data and content analysis, this research was based on an adaptation of Rivas Otero´s technique (2018). The procedure is described below: first, the selection of the message material (collection and debugging of the tweets); followed by the coding of the messages (identification of the linguistic elements of the tweet); third, classification scheme (definition of the dimensions of the variables communication, populism, charisma and strategic behavior according to the literature); fourth, classification of the tweets (based on the dimensions); fifth, counting of the dimensions and finally elaboration, presentation of results and conclusions.

For this research we analyzed the 631 tweets of President López Obrador during 2020, who, unlike other presidents, tweets very little. Although the idea was to analyze only the tweets referring to COVID-19, they were scarce, about 104, so it was decided to expand the database of all the president's rhetoric during the first year of the pandemic through the corpus of tweets. The data were categorized and analyzed in the program Atlas ti, version 22.0.9.

## Results

There are important indicators in the study and analysis of social networks such as the number of followers, tweets published, number of reactions, number of retweets (most shared by followers), nodes and links that indicate the impact that the issuer is having on his followers. For this reason, the tweets published by the president in 2020 through his official Twitter account were collected and classified into their categories and subcategories to have a complete profile of the communication and political leadership of President López Obrador during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For this reason, Table 2 presents a summary of the tweets with the highest number of *Likes* of President López Obrador in 2020. This indicator is crucial because it indicates the effect on the social network (Brand and Gómez, 2006). Additionally, the classification of these tweets is presented based on the dimensions proposed by this study. In this sense, it is observed that the tweets with the highest number of *likes* are not related to the management of the pandemic but to AMLO's government actions. The most liked is the one referring to a visit he did to Washington and made an offering at the Lincoln Memorial, which could be classified as communicative, two tweets are populist and two others are charismatic.

**Table 2**

*Tweets with the highest number of Likes*

| Date | Content | Likes |
|---|---|---|
| 2020-07-08 | Offering at the Abraham Lincoln Memorial, from Washington, USA. USA. https://t.co/ppVVJc5Vvy (Communication) | 93 091 |
| 2020-06-02 | Normally, journalists, artists or writers hide in their supposed objectivity or independence in order not to commit themselves (which we know is a hypocritical way of taking sides). You, on the other hand, Damián, without ceasing to be free, define yourself in favor of transformation. Thank you https://t.co/p4cLFiGqfu (Populism) | 45 814 |
| 2020-12-06 | Congratulations to Checo Perez for taking first place in Formula 1 Sakhir Grand Prix. Whenever a Mexican wins in a competition, it exalts our country. https://t.co/CTOQZaGF7s (Charisma) | 41 908 |
| 2020-06-21 | Congratulations to all the dads in Mexico, living, dead and always remembered with love. https://t.co/T4X1eQBdEk (Carisma) | 36 958 |
| 2020-01-01 | They even wanted to take away hope and they could not. Now, dreams of justice and freedom are beginning to become a reality. Let's move forward! Happy New Year! https://t.co/A6A6qLqrYx (Populism) | 36 743 |

Table 3 presents the most shared tweets (retweets) and it can be observed that none refers to the pandemic, appearing again the tweet referring to Abraham Lincoln's offering of President AMLO's visit to Washington, which was also found as the one with the highest number of *likes*. In the case of Twitter, it has been observed that retweets are important to measure the acceptance degree of the message (Ortiz and Espejel, 2021). The tweet with the most retweets is communicative as already mentioned; in addition, there is a tweet of strategic behavior, another of communication and one of a populist nature.

**Table 3**
*Most shared tweets*

| Date | Content | Retweets |
|---|---|---|
| 2020-07-08 | Offering at the Abraham Lincoln Memorial, from Washington, USA. USA. https://t.co/ppVVJc5Vvy (Communication) | 19 045 |
| 2020-06-02 | Normally, journalists, artists or writers hide in their supposed objectivity or independence in order not to commit themselves (which we know is a hypocritical way of taking sides). You, on the other hand, Damián, without ceasing to be free, define yourself in favor of transformation. Thank you https://t.co/p4cLFiGqfu (Populism) | 14 069 |
| 2020-07-08 | We as government will do our part, we will continue to set a good example. Morning conference. https://t.co/eDPWKMzplM (Strategic Behavior) | 10 734 |
| 2020-08-24 | We begin the year recalling Mexico's cultural greatness. https://t.co/9c5t1CSX9R (Communication) | 10 692 |
| 2020-01-01 | In this first tour of the year in indigenous villages I am very happy, I feel grateful. It is an honor to serve everyone, but it is a blessing to work for the neediest and receive in return a word, a look or a sincere smile. https://t.co/8gRsTDDH1n https://t.co/OG06G4LU1C (Populism) | 10 520 |

## Data analysis

### Communication

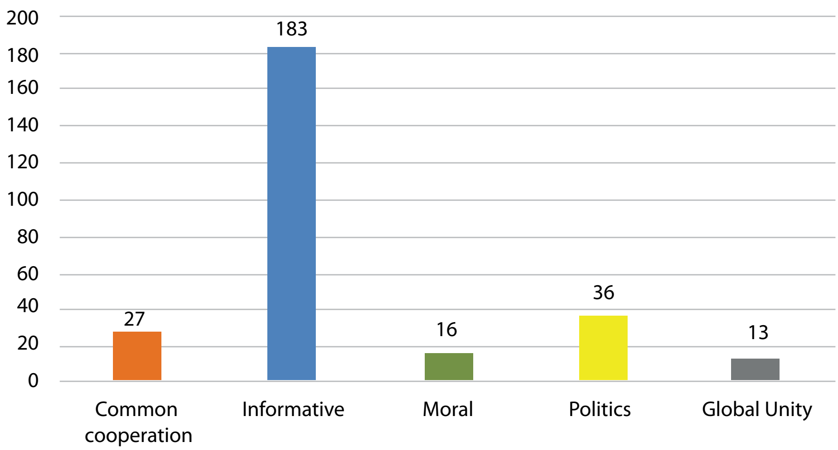
*"Report on #COVID19 from National Palace." https://t.co/IqS34cF9RR https://t.co/M3Z3S8iZov (López Obrador, 2020d).*

In relation to the communication variable, the data show that approximately one third, 275 tweets, were classified as communicative as shown in Graph 1. The president did seek to influence the behavior of citizens and followers.

Of these publications, 183 (66.5 %) were informative and refer to the notification and update of the general situation that was happening in the country. Although almost half of them were of this type, they had a very diverse content, since President López Obrador tended to inform from the economic and health situation of the country to only publish links directed towards his morning conferences.

**Graph 1**

*Number of tweets by communication dimensions*




It shows that President López Obrador disseminated information about his administration and topics related to the country. However, it is shown that in the first year of the pandemic, the number of informative tweets dedicated to the topic was minimal, as will be seen below.

Additionally, the data show that 36 of the tweets were political, equivalent to 13.1 % (graph 1), which are the messages that sought to generate a debate on the part of the president. Likewise, 27 tweets (9.8 %) were dedicated to common cooperation aimed at promoting citizen participation. Followed by 16 publications (5.8 %) categorized in the moral dimension dedicated to encourage and strengthen the mood of the nation. Finally, 13 tweets (4.7 %) were from the global unity category based on the promotion of global values of unity and peace.

## Populism

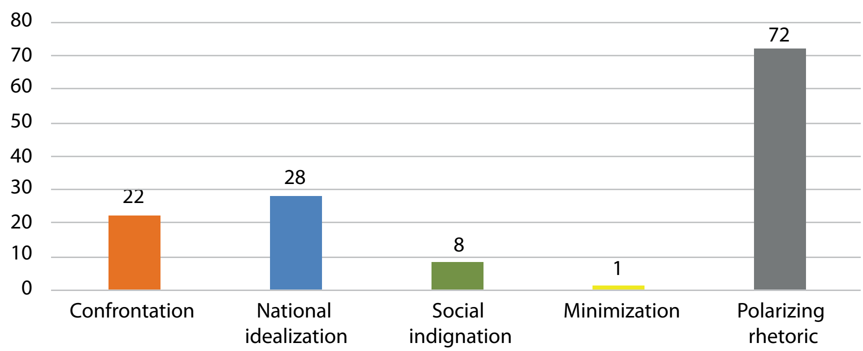
*"If there is collective will to enforce rights, conservatives will not be able to roll them back. Morning conference." https://t.co/hi2WUTOqe4 (López Obrador, 2020a).*

Regarding the populism variable, 131 tweets were classified as populist (Graph 2), i.e., AMLO employed a communication that fostered polarization and gaps, emphasizing an "us" with respect to "them" through his rhetoric.

Out of the 131 tweets categorized as populist, 72 (54.9 %) possess polarizing rhetoric that seeks to attack rivals. Followed by the national fervor dimension with 28 (21.4 %) of the publications are based on national achievements. Next, the confrontation category with 22 tweets (16.8 %) that identify adversaries and the promotion of a national identity. Meanwhile, the social outrage dimension had eight (6.1 %) of the publications that refer to the outraged using them as political capital. Finally, only one tweet (0.7 %) was classified as minimization based on downplaying the importance of the problems (see Graph 2).

As shown, more than half of President López Obrador's publications were polarizing with a focus on fighting against those he considers his detractors, identified as those who have different political ideas from him. It is worth mentioning that, like the other variables, he only dedicated some of his publications to the COVID-19 issue.

**Graphic 2**
*Number of tweets by populism dimensions*

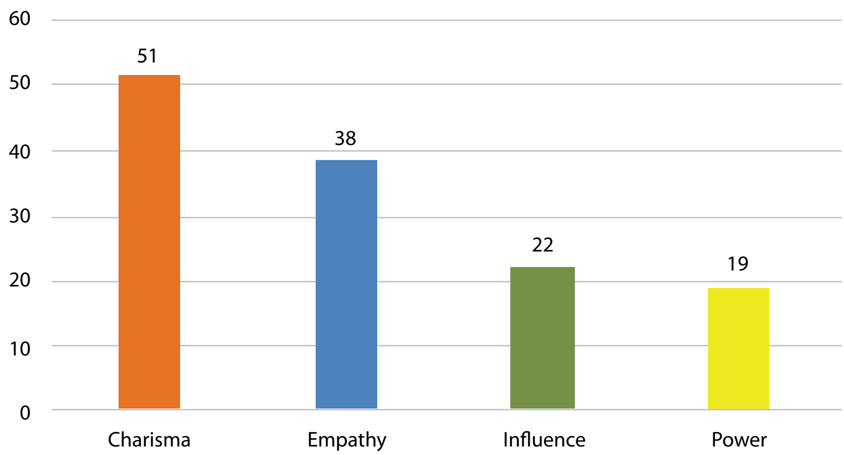


## Charisma

*"I wanted to kiss her, but I can't because of the healthy distance. She's a sweetheart." https://t.co/rmlfj9XA1e (López Obrador, 2020b).*

Regarding the variable of charisma, the results show that 130 (20.6 %) of the tweets were classified as such (Figure 3). These results reflect AMLO´s charismatic characteristics that include communicating a dynamism and attraction for his followers, avoiding as much as possible to talk about difficult issues such as the health crisis by COVID-19 and boosting his personality to the nation.

**Graphic 3**
*Number of tweets by charisma dimensions*




Regarding charisma, 51 tweets (39.2 %) are considered charismatic. This discourse seeks to attract his followers with the purpose of reflecting a more fraternal connection between AMLO and his followers. In addition, there are 38 tweets (29.2 %) that seek to enhance that connection of a benevolent leader. His speech shows the influence and power he wields over the masses, but does so to a lesser extent, being 22 (16.9 %) and 19 (14.6 %) tweets respectively (see Graph 3).

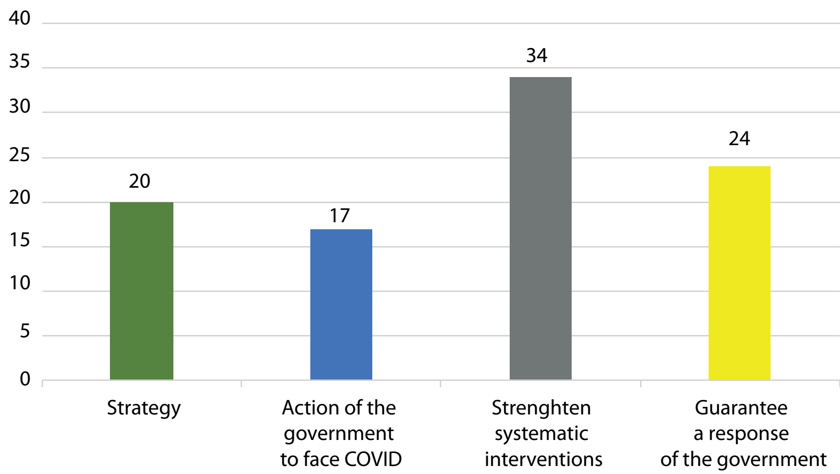
President López Obrador shows a high priority in strengthening a bound with followers, seeking in a charismatic and empathetic way to create a fraternal image of himself, leaving aside the use of messages oriented to influence and power.

## Strategic behavior

*"DN-III-E plan is underway to strengthen the health sector to face #coronavirus." https://t.co/7rjbF7Uzcw (López Obrador, 2020c).*

In relation to the strategic behavior variable, 95 tweets were observed (15.06 %) (see Graph 4). This way of acting of President López Obrador is based on leveraging his political power through his actions and strategies for both the management of the health contingency and the development of the country, avoiding mistakes.

**Graphic 4**
*Number of tweets by dimensions of strategic behavior*



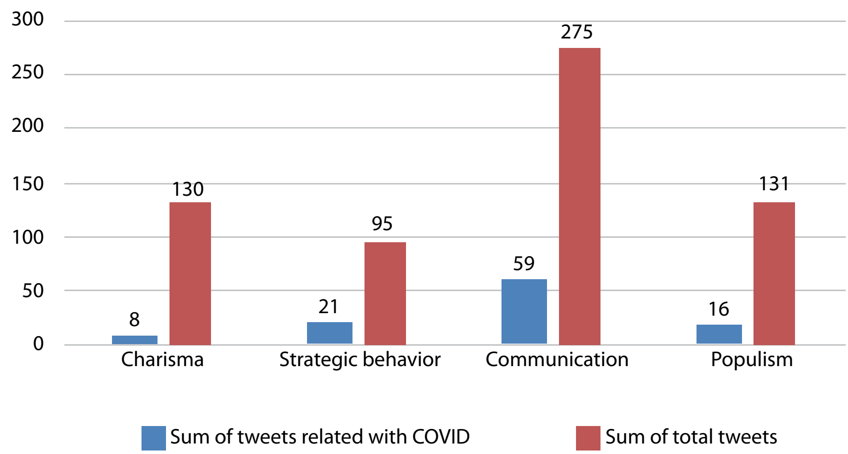

Regarding the strategic behavior of President López Obrador, Figure 4 shows that although there are some differences in the categories, they are not very significant. As can be observed, there is greater emphasis on the reinforcement of systematic interventions with 34 tweets (35.7 %). This aspect is based on the regulation, mobilization or modification of government institutions for the benefit of citizens, followed by the messages to ensure a governmental response with 24 tweets (25.26 %) which are the concrete responses of the government to moments of crisis or needs of the Mexican people. Regarding strategic actions, 20 publications (21.05 %) focused on communicating about activities oriented to the achievement in aspects of economic growth, poverty reduction and strengthening of democracy. Finally, only 17 (17.89 %) of the tweets were about government actions related to the management of governmental and political actions to face the health crisis.

*Tweets dedicated to COVID-19 per variable*

Figure 5 presents the ratio of tweets by general and specific variable of COVID-19. Almost half were informative, followed by populist, charismatic and strategic behavior. Only 104 tweets (16 %) of the total were dedicated to the topic of the health contingency and there was no moral support in the first year of the pandemic.

**Graph 5**

*Total number of tweets and total number of tweets dedicated to Lopez Obrador's COVID*



When comparing tweets dedicated to COVID-19, it stands out that there were very few tweets from President López Obrador focused on this issue during the first year of the health crisis. However, it should be clarified that the crisis began in March 2020, so it is reasonable that at first glance it seems that few tweets were dedicated to the issue in that year. Regarding the communication variable, the one with the most publications (59) highlights that AMLO's discourse on the health crisis was mostly informative. The second place is occupied by strategic behavior with 21 tweets, followed by populist-type publications (16) and finally within the charismatic style tweets, eight are focused on the issue of the COVID-19 sanitary contingency. Finally, charisma, which was the variable that was least used to communicate the topic of the health crisis, maybe because the president used a charismatic strategy that avoids referring to difficult topics in this case, the pandemic.

## Conclusions

This research aimed to determine the leadership and political communication style of President López Obrador on Twitter during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. This social network can be a political tool and be used as an efficient communication strategy for heads of state and have positive consequences in favor of their leadership or the management of a public health crisis.

The results of the study allowed to verify that AMLO used Twitter to inform about his government management without delving into the health contingency. He had an informative style of communication and exhibited a populist, polarizing, charismatic rhetoric and to a lesser extent oriented to strategic behavior.

Regarding communication, it is a fundamental tool to be in contact with citizens, especially during a health contingency. The analysis of the data shows that the president, although he tweets very little in the first year of the pandemic, dedicated almost half of his tweets to inform about his administration. In this sense, he contrasts what other heads of state did during the crisis, reporting on the pandemic through Twitter (Rufai and Bunce, 2020). On the other hand, AMLO also did not take advantage of his tweets to boost citizen morale as other leaders did in the face of the pressing contingency. For the Mexican president, the health crisis was not crucial, rather he relegated it, he did not promote the rhetoric of the common good. In fact, it is the topic that was least communicated on Twitter during that year. Worldwide citizens used the social network to be informed, but in the Mexican case, the president did not inform or guide his followers and citizens with data or news about the management of the pandemic and its risks. It cannot be argued that this error in the communication and information of the contingency generated the catastrophic results of deaths and contagions in Mexico, but it is one of the factors that could have an effect, among many others.

In terms of populism, the results demonstrate a broadly populist rhetoric in the same sense as Manfredi *et al*. (2021). AMLO shared many tweets with highly polarizing content to divide society, i.e., “those who are against me”. Populism is the second most used variable in his tweets. This research contributes to the literature on López Obrador’s populist profile and his confrontational discourse with a patriotic sense. The health crisis required a political communication and leadership oriented towards unity and social responsibility of the population, but there was not even effort in that, neither in the pandemic nor in his general management, rather he shared a discourse to polarize and confront. He does not minimize so much in his speech neither the pandemic nor his adversaries, but the indifference is also ambiguous and does not contribute to positive messages or strategic action.

In relation to the charismatic leader who shows a contagious dynamism and offers an irresistible attraction to his followers, a style that seeks to attract is verified in his speech and this research contributes to evidence it. Although the level found for this variable is very close to the populist, it should be remembered that the charismatic style seeks to attract the followers through the speech. On the other hand, empathy, which is to get close to citizens, is used less frequent in his tweets. The influential and power style are also observed, although to a lesser extent. In the end, the charismatic leader seeks to be protective and his discourse shows it by contributing to López Obrador’s charisma, which has always helped his political career.

Finally, regarding the discourse on strategic behavior that refers to actions that increase political power, avoid mistakes and have achievements, the results show that he dedicated little rhetoric to the subject, both in general terms of his governmental management and in the management of the pandemic. It was observed that he dedicated few words to the reinforcement of systematic interventions and the mobilization of his government’s institutions. As for ensuring the government’s response to meet the needs of citizens, there was no predominant discourse either. Finally, there was no emphasis on government actions in the tweets. The strategic behavior of leaders occurs when there are achievements and mistakes are avoided. In one of the most dramatic years for Mexicans, the president did not concentrate efforts at least in his Twitter speech to face this situation. President AMLO was neither good nor bad in his speech for the health contingency, simply indifferent and at the end of the day, a barrier to face a crisis as serious as the coronavirus. Other presidents such as Trump and Johnson minimized the pandemic with disastrous results of their administrations, at least López Obrador did not contribute so much in that sense with his Twitter rhetoric.

The results of the study allow to conclude that the discursive rhetoric of the Mexican president on his Twitter account with almost nine million followers missed the opportunity to use Twitter as a political tool to communicate and influence the behavior of citizens during the worst health crisis in favor of a better management of the pandemic, unlike what other heads of state did on the same social network.

This research is innovative since it analyzes his general rhetoric on Twitter, a crucial topic in the current context. We found evidence of an informative communication strategy of his administration, perhaps in an empirical way but that contributes to his political and communication capital to strengthen his leadership. As it is known, President López Obrador's communication strategy is managed through his morning conferences, which do not have the same reach as Twitter, where he could maximize his communication and leadership as other politicians do. For example, Macron, as a result of his management of Twitter during the pandemic, doubled his number of followers on this social network.

To conclude, there is no evidence that President López Obrador's communication and leadership style during the first year of the pandemic contributed to inform, moralize, promote global unity and strategic behaviors for the management of COVID-19 but rather was used to inform his management in general, rather with a populist and charismatic rhetoric. It could be argued that the reason was because AMLO delegated that function to Undersecretary López Gatell who was his spokesperson during the health contingency, but regarding efficient communication and political leadership, citizens require the guidance and influence of heads of state in a direct way, but it did not happen in Mexico.

Part of an efficient political communication in times of crisis requires a direct strategy with citizens, offering solutions, security, tranquility, trust, truthfulness, continuous improvement, digital content, good stories, memorable perception, moving forward and a good spokesperson (Homedes and Plaja, 2020; Peytibi, 2020). In our research, the results are conclusive, there was no such approach by President López Obrador's communications on Twitter.

On the other hand, the Mexican president could improve his communication strategy and leadership on Twitter towards the last part of his government to maintain an efficient, modern and expanding contact with his millions of followers to enhance his political capital, but does not maximize as a political instrument or contribute to the welfare of citizens.

One of the limitations of the study is that it does not analyze the content of the links presented in the tweets, and it only shows a part of the leadership and communication exercised, which are much more complex. As future lines of research, the communication and leadership styles in other social networks of the president and other leaders of Mexican politics during the pandemic should be analyzed. Thus, the analysis of the rhetoric of his spokesperson for the health contingency, Undersecretary López Gatell, the content of President López Obrador's morning conferences and, of course, the impact of his management on the public health crisis remain pending.

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# Technological innovation and hybridizations in the audiovisual language of Peruvian newscasts during the Covid-19 pandemic

## *Innovación tecnológica e hibridaciones en el lenguaje audiovisual de los noticieros peruanos durante la pandemia de la Covid-19*

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***Abstract***
*Covid-19 imposed many difficulties for the execution of television journalism. The widespread health hazard and the social distancing rules applied became defining factors in this situation. In this adverse context, this research aims to study the technological and procedural innovations that journalists applied to continue reporting, and that resulted in the transformation of audiovisual language in newscasts. The objective is to recognize the changes that were applied in the production of images and sounds during this stage, which affected audiovisual creation on a global scale. For this purpose, the qualitative approach was used, it is a basic and descriptive research in which the analytical method was applied, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to Peruvian television journalists. The results allowed us to recognize the reconfiguration of the audiovisual frame where the images of the informative content changed due to the use of a hybrid of television cameras, video calls and cell phones to record them. It was also recognized that the intensive and conjunctural use of live dispatches caused the predominance of the sequence shot during this period, in addition, all this diversity of materials was homogenized through post-production. This allows us to conclude that a new stage of hybridization of audiovisual discourse has occurred due to a phenomenon extrinsic to the television sphere, which was caused by the disruptive appearance of the pandemic.*

***Keywords***
*Journalism, audiovisual language, hybridization, innovation, framing, post-production, television.*

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**Resumen**
La llegada de la Covid-19 impuso muchas dificultades al periodismo televisivo. El peligro sanitario generalizado y las normas de distanciamiento social aplicadas se convirtieron en factores delimitantes en esta situación. En este contexto adverso, esta investigación pretende estudiar las innovaciones tecnológicas y procedimentales que aplicaron los periodistas para seguir informando, y que trajeron como consecuencia la transformación del lenguaje audiovisual en los noticieros. El objetivo es reconocer los cambios que se aplicaron en la producción de imágenes y sonidos durante esta etapa, que afectó la creación audiovisual a escala mundial. Se utilizó el enfoque cualitativo, siendo una investigación básica y descriptiva en la que se aplicó el método analítico y se realizaron entrevistas semiestructuradas a periodistas de la televisión peruana. Los resultados permitieron reconocer la reconfiguración del encuadre audiovisual donde las imágenes de los contenidos informativos cambiaron debido al uso de híbrido de cámaras televisivas, videollamadas y celulares para registrarlas. También se reconoció que el uso intensivo y coyuntural de los despachos en vivo provocó el predominio del plano secuencia durante este período, además toda esta diversidad de materiales se homogenizaba a través de la posproducción. Esto permite concluir que se ha producido un nuevo estadio de hibridación del discurso audiovisual a causa de un fenómeno extrínseco al ámbito televisivo, que fue provocado por la aparición disruptiva de la pandemia.

**Palabras clave**
Periodismo, lenguaje audiovisual, hibridación, innovación, encuadre, posproducción, televisión.

# Introduction

During Covid-19, the public resumed the consumption of traditional media news, because they had more confidence in them (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). That happened despite the drops in advertising revenues due to the economic crisis generated by the pandemic (Lewis, 2020), which, with the confinement, led to the rise of audiovisual narrative and the renewed interest of the public in genres such as entertainment and information (Arana *et al.,* 2020). As for television, it was repositioned and gained social position and the interest of the citizenry (Casero-Ripollés, 2021).

In this context, journalism played an important informative and social role, as had occurred in previous health emergencies (Lázaro and Herrera, 2020). However, journalism has experienced challenges, having to reorganize to continue with the production of information during Covid-19 (González *et al.,* 2021). In some regions of Latin America, the work of journalists has characterized by lack of health protection, labor instability and the absence of regulations or ethical codes that allow them to properly perform their work (Hernández, 2020; De Frutos and Sanjurjo, 2022). They adopted what some authors call *remote journalism*, implementing labor formulas to work remotely using video calls or work in the cloud, which would be lessons to be applied in content production (Túñez *et al.,* 2020). In this sense, television intensified the use of non-televisual technical elements much more than before the pandemic, such as video calls; but also, the use of television devices such as transmission dongles for live dispatches intensified (Blas *et al.,* 2020). It is a process that had already been occurring for some decades, in which the different information and communication technologies were increasingly integrated. In any case, Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the media convergence between different technologies, which allow the production of audiovisual content. Therefore, the object of study of this research will be the Peruvian television newscasts and the transformations that were applied in its audiovisual language from the appearance of Covid-19 to its Omicron variant.

## Hybridization and audiovisual language

*Audiovisual language* is understood as the set of images and sounds used to tell a story (Nicolau, 1982; Jaramillo, 2008; Fernández and Martínez, 2014; Bedoya and León, 2016; Karbaum and Torres, 2020; Karbaum, 2021). The also called *audiovisual discourse* by some authors (Caballero, 2019; Chatman, 1990) is the modal expression of that story being told (Ortiz, 2018). Other authors call it *audiovisual text codes* (Tamayo and Chaume, 2016). Despite its evolution for more than a century, there are still those who accept and others who argue about whether it is a language or not, with its own characteristics and functionalities (Martín, 2002).

Audiovisual language is structured based on two processes operationalized by the mind of the audiovisual creator: the selection and combination of images and sounds (Apareci, 2009; Fernández and Martínez, 2014; Bedoya and León, 2016). At the operational level, the selection occurs through the creation of the frame, while the combination takes place in the editing or post-production (Bedoya and León, 2016), being the framing and editing the most important components of a film or audiovisual work (García, 2003).

Therefore, both will be the analysis dimensions of the audiovisual language category that guides this research.

Narrative forms in the postmodern era go through a hybridization process, in which the substance and form of stories intermingle among the various genres and give rise to hybrid texts that are manifestations of historical, cultural and economic forces that emerge at the local, national and regional levels (Kraidy, 2005). These hybridizations materialize in different areas of audiovisual creation and are manifested from the creation of the stories, through their recording and post-production. In this regard, Gómez (2010) suggests that these mixtures occur in audiovisual aspects through the combination of discourses, formats (analog versus digital), storylines, representation forms and stylistic features. This is understood if it is contextualized in a global phenomenon, in which television genres merge giving rise to new discursive species -such as *reality shows*- that are integrated in a new genre: the docudramatic (Gordillo, 2009). These formats are mixed within a panorama of transformation propitiated by the convergence of disciplines and technologies that respond to the need of audiovisual production to generate new content (Saló, 2019). This hybridization also results from the convergence of media such as television, internet, social networks and cell phone technologies (Arana *et al.,* 2020) which is inserted within a context prior to the pandemic, where a hybrid media system was already posed and a balance was established between the traditional media logics of production broadcast and consumption, with other more current ones that determine circulation, recirculation and negotiation (Chadwick, 2017). It should be noted that this is in addition to several factors that had been influencing the supply of television information and conditioning its quality, affecting television channels, since they must face situations such as: intense competition, the type of ownership of television stations and dependence on advertising (Esser *et al.,* 2012).

Currently, the pandemic has led to the implementation of mixed audiovisual production systems that were based on a hybridization of media; part of this hybridization was manifested in the incorporation of domestic areas within the audiovisual production, such as when interviews or broadcasts of drivers were made from their homes (Túñez *et al.,* 2020). The above is a sample of all the changes in the audiovisual narrative that also influenced the number of cameras used, lighting and scenography that ended up responding to the specific quality of what was imposed by the crisis (Blas *et al.,* 2020).

Regarding citizenship, the pandemic led to the reconnection of audiences with traditional media news, especially young people who are more connected to the Internet and social networks (Casero-Ripolles, 2021; Montaña *et al.,* 2020). With respect to this public, the pandemic encouraged them to participate collaboratively with the media to produce content, which in the future could become a linking strategy for these segments (Túñez *et al.,* 2020). In this context, citizens had very specific concerns regarding the creation of a cure or vaccine, symptoms, contagions, medication to counteract the effects of the pandemic, among others; these concerns tried to be solved by consulting traditional media (Mullo *et al.,* 2021). In this sense, Apuke and Omar (2020) state that news coverage also responded to issues such as cases and mortality rate, public panic and fear, preventive measures, treatment and costs, policies, and social impacts, among others.

The reporting of these issues demanded the reformulation of production processes, which also implied a hybridization in the audiovisual discourse that, in this case, is analyzed around Peruvian television news programs.

## Framing and audiovisual post-production

The television frame is the result of the selection process of a portion of reality, which will be recorded with the camera under certain square or rectangular limits (Tamayo, 2000). This delimitation is defined by the format of the medium, where the production is taking place and, therefore, how it will influence the aesthetic variations presented (Fernández and Martínez, 2014). At the same time, it entails a spatial dimension with a determined duration (it may or may not have movement), in addition to possessing a sound dimension and manifesting a narrative point of view (Bedoya and León, 2016). In this regard, it is important to mention that the frame is built through composition, which is the process of ordering the elements that will appear in the shot, and which, by its nature, is classified into composition by selection, by arrangement and by design (Fernández and Martínez, 2014).

Post-production is the stage in which the recorded image and sound are transformed into the final product that the viewer will see (Bestard, 2001). In this process, editing is carried out, whereby the different recorded materials are arranged, the story is structured and spatial-temporal continuity is given (Estremadoyro, 2004; Francés, 2003). Then, image and sound post-production is carried out, which improve the original conditions and help to highlight very specific aspects that are to be emphasized in the journalistic report (Sifuentes, 2018).

Post-production helps to highlight some audiovisual elements by providing visual and/or sound legibility, in addition to the application of ethical-legal protection; this process also encourages audiovisual enrichment when there are not enough supporting shots (Karbaum, 2021). Finally, it is important to mention the contributions of digital post-production to non-fiction stories, especially to documentaries, which were classified by Vidal (2014) according to the following modalities: hyper production, pictorialism, animation and collage. These formal trends that have transformed the audiovisual discourse in the documentary genre have also been applied in television journalism since television channels were migrating towards digital technology, which has allowed the enrichment and discursive hybridization of news content (Karbaum, 2021). This should be understood through a global process in which the computer becomes a meta device that allows the coexistence and mixing of different creative supports that are the product of design, typography, animation, painting, and cinematography. These languages are mixed in post-production thanks to the quality that now they all have in common, they are digitally created (Manovich, 2012).

## Methodology

This research is basic and descriptive because it analyzes the transformations that were applied in the audiovisual narrative of Peruvian television news programs during the Covid-19 pandemic. For this purpose, the analytical method was used, since the audiovisual language was studied from its dimensions, which are framing and post-production, each one from its constitutive elements. The qualitative approach was applied for conducting this work, because it admits the study of human representations and social imaginaries (Katayama, 2014). This approach allows collecting the views, perceptions, or opinions of the participants in the object of study (Krause, 1995; Creswell, 2013), for which the following research questions were posed:

## General question

How was the audiovisual language of Peruvian newscasts transformed during the Covid-19 pandemic?

## Specific questions

What changes were applied in the creation of frames and images in Peruvian newscasts during the Covid-19 pandemic? What were the innovations in journalistic post-production in Peruvian newscasts during the Covid-19 pandemic?

To obtain the information, the semi-structured interview technique was applied, because, according to Corbetta (2007), it is important for people to respond to the demands of the topic under a strategic research plan. In relation to this, a purposive sample was delimited which, following Vasilachis (2006), responds to the specific topics and interests demanded by the object of study, for which a questionnaire validated by experts was elaborated and applied. The choice of interviewees was made by applying the snowball technique, with which interviewees recommend other participants so that they can be called to the study by virtue of their characteristics (Creswell, 2013). Journalists who met these criteria were selected for this study:

- All of them worked in one of the three Peruvian channels with the largest national broadcast: Latina, América Televisión and TV Perú (the first two commercial channels with the highest ratings; the last one, a state-owned channel with the largest number of stations in the country).
- The interviewees were chosen for their specific positions, in order to collect information about the audiovisual television narrative applied during the Covid-19 period.
- With these selection criteria, the sample was composed of 12 interviewees, and the following journalists were consulted:
- Rosario Sumarriva, general executive producer of Noticias en Latina (RS/Latina), with 29 years of experience.
- Fernando Velásquez, producer of América Noticias Edición Central (FV/América), with 40 years of experience.
- Guillermo Noriega, producer of TV Perú Noticias (GN/TV Perú), with 18 years of experience.

- Lourdes Túpac Yupanqui, reporter and host of Latina (LT/Latina), with 13 years of experience.
- Roberto Wong, reporter and host of TV Perú (RW/TV Perú), with 20 years of experience.
- Fernando Llanos, reporter and host of América Noticias Edición Central (FL/América), with 27 years of experience.
- Javier Manrique, cameraman for América Noticias Edición Central (JM/América), with 11 years of experience.
- Luis García, cameraman and camera director at TV Perú (LG/TV Perú), with 22 years of experience.
- Miguel Albites, cameraman for Latina (MA/Latina), with 22 years of experience.
- Samuel Sifuentes, chief editor of América TV- Canal N (SS/América), with 31 years of experience.
- Jorge Ipanaqué, post-producer of the newscast 90 Segundos de Latina (JI/Latina), with seven years of experience.
- Renato Romero, post-producer of TV Perú (RR/TV Perú), with 22 years of experience.

All interviews were conducted with the Zoom application between January and May 2022. After transcription, the data were analyzed and interpreted, and then coded to organize them on the basis of categories and dimensions shown in Tables 1 and 2, thus answering the research questions (Strauss and Corbin, 2002).

**Table 1**
*Variables for the Framing dimension*

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Components (Fernández and Martínez, 2014, Bedoya and León, 2016).</td><td>Spatial dimension: planes, angles, space in and off, movements</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sound dimension: voice, ambient sounds, music</td></tr>
<tr><td>Narrative point of view: objective, subjective, interpellative (Casetti and Di Chio, 1991).</td></tr>
<tr><td>Composition (Fernández and Martínez, 2014)</td><td>Composition by: selection, arrangement and by design</td></tr>
<tr><td>Media format (Tamayo, 2000; Fernández and Martínez2014).</td><td>Horizontal, vertical, square, television format, or other recording devices</td></tr>
</table>

**Table 2**
*Variables for the Post-production dimension*

| | |
|---|---|
| Functions of the edition (Karbaum, 2021) | Creation of rhythm, creation of continuity, creation of narrative time. |
| Spatio-temporal edition (Soler, 1998) | Linear, parallel, discontinuous, ideological |
| Video post-production (Sifuentes, 2018) | Colorization, titling, color correction, effects and transitions, graphics, and animations |
| Sound post-production (Sifuentes, 2018) | Audio correction, leveling, music, mixing |
| Influencing trends from assembly (Vidal, 2014) | Hyper-production, animation, pictorialism, collage |
| Journalistic post-production functions (Karbaum, 2021) | Visual legibility, audio legibility, audiovisual enrichment, legal-ethical protection |

# Results

## The sequence shot and live broadcast

If any news content stood out during the first months of the pandemic on television news, it was live broadcast. All interviewees agree on this aspect and state that LiveU backpacks were of utmost importance for its conduction, due to their lightness and ease of use compared to other systems. Regarding the audiovisual language, the predominant element in this type of content was the sequence shot, but unlike what was usual in the pre-pandemic era, these lasted much longer on the air. Since the events were shown at the same moment they happened -and because they had a greater permanence on screen-, it gave the impression of being narrated as a *reality show* (GN/TV Perú). The reporters' discursive capacity was demanded to the maximum; it is not the same to make a broadcast that lasts three minutes in normal times, than to make another one in the context of a pandemic, with a duration of ten minutes or more. For this, the reporters developed their narrative skills (LT/Latina, RW/TV Peru, FL/America).

**Figure 1**

*Cameraman broadcasting live stand up with LiveU backpack*

*Note*. *Obtained from* https://bit.ly/3zKIDvq

The cameraman's compositional skills were put into practice in these broadcasts, since he had to apply a variety of shots, from the most open to other closed shots that had to be mediated by pauses or smooth movements when passing from one shot to another (RR/TV Peru), but without cuts, because they are all constituents of the same sequence shot that was being transmitted.

## The interview and the hybridization of framings

One of the main journalistic genres that underwent transformations in the formal aspect was the interview. The use of video calls was massively implemented to conduct them. According to all interviewees, this became a technical resource to bridge the distances imposed by the pandemic. Various applications were used for this purpose, such as Meet and WhatsApp, but the use of Zoom predominated. It should be considered that the video call is a technical resource of the Internet, not a television methodology; therefore, it offers frontal shots and does not provide greater compositional possibilities, as the interview conducted by the channel's cameraman. In other words, the audiovisual language was impoverished (JM/America). In addition, the interviewees did not compose their shots well because they did not have the knowledge to do so, so they appeared off-center, with their faces cut off or poorly positioned, which made it impossible to place informative *banners*, since it would cover their faces (LG/TV Peru).

Another disadvantage is that it lacked the benefit provided by the normal interview of allowing more information to be obtained from the interviewee by the same face-to-face interaction between the interviewee and the journalist (FL/América), and the low quality of the image and sound, which caused rejection by some cameramen (JM/América). Even so, little by little, the value of the content was recognized more than that of the form (RS/Latina, SS/América): "now the information was prioritized and, finally, it was the only way to have the interviewees. Since the pandemic, this license was opened because the content is what matters" (RS/Latina).

In addition, there was a progressive process of audiovisual literacy through which reporters or cameramen instructed interviewees to correctly compose their frames. Among the recommendations taught, the most recurrent were the horizontal placement of the camera, lighting, and the centered location of the interviewee (SS/America, RS/Latina, LG/TV Peru, MA/Latina).

Facing the limitation of not being able to take support shots of the interviews, little by little we began to innovate and started to use other resources to generate them, thus overcoming the initial poverty of video-call images. The types of support shots are detailed below:

**Parallel supports.** In face-to-face, this was done with the channel's camera: the interviewee was recorded giving his or her statements in rapid succession and, afterwards, the reporter repeated the questions or pretended to listen to the interviewee. In the pandemic era, the same thing was done, but the interviewee was not on location.

**Double framing supports.** It resulted from recording the reporter making the video call in the same frame. In addition, the interviewee was projected on a PC or *laptop* screen. Then, both appeared at the same time in the shot (JI/Latina, MA/Latina), each in a respective third of the frame.

**Figure 2**

*Videocall interview with dual-frame support*


*Note: Obtained from Benji Espinoza Abogados, January 25, 2021.*

**Counterplane supports.** This was done with the recording of three different shots, in order to combine them and generate a sequence of counterplans. In the first, the reporter conducted the interview in a foreshortened shot, composing the frame with the *laptop*, in which the interviewee could be seen in a video call; the second showed the reporter's face; and the third was the recording of the video call from the same computer or with the channel's camera.

Another quality that is relevant to note is the use of video calls; on the one hand, they were used to extract fragments -*bites*- that were incorporated as part of informative notes, special reports or reports. Another modality was the video call as a resource to carry out the complete interview, which was then broadcasted on the air. In this last modality, the video call was broadcast in full frame or shared the location with other subframes from the *set* where the journalist was and another one with support shots.

**Figure 3**

*Counter plane incorporating video call*

*Note.* Obtained from America News, March 23, 2020.

In any case, video calls enable to incorporate a non-televised spatiality within television broadcasts, i.e., the environments from which the interviewee communicated (such as his home, his car, his work, among others) were shown, which implies a hybridization in the way in which the composition of television frames was understood.

**Figure 4**

*Interview conducted by video call as part of a briefing note.*


*Note.* Obtained from Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, August 13, 2020.

**Figure 5**

*Interview via video call live broadcast*


*Note.* Obtained from Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, May 5, 2020.

## Composing from distance

Once the health emergency was declared, the order was to cover news maintaining the necessary distance for both reporters and cameramen (RS/Latina, FV/América, GN/TV Perú, MA/Latina, JM/América). This order implied that distance became a production reference for two important visual elements in the construction of journalistic content: support shots and on-location interviews. Hence, it can be established that this was a time of mainly descriptive shots over narrative ones, since very open frames were recorded in large numbers; in addition, it was complemented using devices that allowed the recording of aerial panoramic shots, such as drones.

The difficulty of the coverage also made it necessary for reporters to take back-up shots, who were trained to record a variety of horizontal shots with their cell phones, replacing the cameramen when they were absent due to illness (LG/TV Peru). Other stations began to implement cell phone coverage (FV/América, SS/América, RS/Latina), which is a first step towards the application of mobile journalism or MOJO, for its acronym in English. Likewise, citizens also contributed with their records, which were also used as supporting footage (MA/Latina, SS/America, RR/TV Peru).

In these circumstances, the use of the optical *zoom* to zoom in on objects in the frame was essential, especially in locations where there were crowds of people, or in those where the commission was dealing with the dead or sickness, which could pose a risk of contagion for journalists (LG/TV Peru, JM/America, MA/Latina).

An audiovisual feature of the application of *zoom* was in the on-location interviews. As the cameraman and reporters were farther away from the interviewees, the shot had to be closed using the *zoom* and refocusing on the interviewee, which caused the background surrounding the character to appear out of focus (JM/America, LG/TV Peru). Although it may be considered unimportant, most of the interviewees mentioned the set of protective elements that had to be worn during the most acute period of the pandemic; among them, a prominent element was the rod they used to place the microphone and distance themselves from the interviewees: "In interviews you *zoom* in and, by adjusting the focus, the background was out of focus, it was more cinematographic [...], and you got used to composing with the rod" (JM/América).

The cameramen agree that the regulations established by state institutions for conferences or interviews favored the composition of frames. The negative side of this regulation is that cameramen can no longer enter restricted places, such as the Congress chamber. In previous times, many journalistic scandals arose from recordings in which cameramen recorded congressmen in questionable actions, such as watching inappropriate content on their cell phones or sleeping during congressional debates, among others (JM/América): "We lost the coverage on the chamber, the revelations of what the congressmen were doing; gestures are essential in politics, and they cannot be recorded" (JM/América).

It should be noted that, depending on the possibilities of coverage, content will be generated with different recordings, including cell phone recordings, shots taken with the channel's camera and images obtained with the drone, as well as a diversity of horizontal and vertical framing (FL/America, FV/America).

**Figure 6**
*Reporter with spacing rod*

*Note.* Obtained from https://bit.ly/3vq8Fl4

## Post-production as an integrating process

One of the functions of post-producers is to improve the conditions of the recorded material to provide quality and optimize its legibility. In this regard, post-producers agree that, although video calls were a resource that made it possible to continue conducting interviews, they also had technical issues.

Occasionally, the image would freeze or the interviewee's frame would appear in black; as for the audio, it could be recorded choppy or not recorded in parts. If the interviewee was wearing a mask, the bad fragment was replaced by another where the character was better seen, since the mask allowed this replacement as the lips were not synced with what was being said. Regarding the audio, effects were applied and, in case it could not be solved and the statement was very important, it was subtitled.

On the other hand, Video calls are characterized by low screen resolution, which does not compare with the image quality provided by the channel cameras. To reduce this condition somewhat, post-producers resorted to these options:

Placing the video call with the frames of its protagonists -interviewee and interviewer-, where both were observed.

Combine the video call with reference images, since they placed the video call in a frame and, next to it, another frame with supporting shots of the narrated subject.

Replace the shot of the video call with supporting shots of the topic discussed in the whole frame, while the interviewee's statement continued to be heard in voice-over.

In the innovations for the generation of support shots explained above —parallel supports and counter-plane supports— the post-producer played a fundamental role, since he was in charge of combining this variety of images into a coherent edit.

Video calls were not the only ones that were difficult in terms of support shots. This was also the case with political news stories because cameramen were limited in their ability to take supporting shots. There were also news stories that relied on Zoom's recordings of political meetings. To complement this lack of audiovisual material, images were obtained from the channels' archives, which were inserted by the post-producers (JI/Latina, RR/TV Perú): "It was a challenge to creativity to cover up stories that had no support; the archive was fundamental, but we had to make sure that the images were not so old" (RR/TV Perú).

To solve this deficiency, fragments of shots extracted from live dispatch recordings were also used. To do this, the editor had to observe and execute the cuts in fragments where the shot had a pause that allowed the process to be done with solvency, allowing to reuse this record in the new content being edited (RR/TV Peru). Another option applied was to extract support shots from Sunday programs, which already had post-production because they usually have more time to perform these applications (JI/Latina).

**Figure 7**

*Homogenized vertical register with animated background for horizontal ratio*


*Note.* Obtained from Latina Noticias, June 10, 2022.

It has already been detailed that newscasts can produce news content with the television station's own cameras plus recordings from other devices such as cell phones. This condition increased during the pandemic; in this sense, the post-producers state that they conduct an adaptation process of these recordings, because most of citizens make them using the cell phone vertically. For this, they must adapt these shots to fit the horizontal set to broadcast their newscasts. To avoid the generation of black stripes in the frame, animated backgrounds with elements identifying the newscast are added, as shown below:

Finally, there is the role played by editors in the creation of news content, applying different journalistic criteria that, in such a critical period as the pandemic, did not increase fear, panic or morbidity among the population. In this regard, there were precise indications from the producers for the selection of the shots to be used. To this end, we also worked with open shots generated by the cameramen, or with subtle non-explicit shots of COVID, always respecting the viewer's sensitivity first (RR/TV Peru). And, to continue with the editing of contents, if there were doubts about a controversial or shocking material for public sensitivity, the producer of the newscast was consulted (JI/Latina), or it was contrasted with what was established in the style manual of the channel's news service (SS/América).

## Conclusions and discussion

The audiovisual language of Peruvian newscasts during the Covid-19 pandemic was transformed, demonstrating a series of discursive hybridization. Regarding audiovisual hybridization, mixtures were already occurring before Covid-19, in discourses, formats, styles and representation (Gómez, 2010). However, this is not a generalized process. Nevertheless, hybridization processes have been taking place in television for some decades, especially in the mix of genres that manifested itself with the arrival of neo-television since the 1980s (Gordillo, 2009). The pandemic led to the hybridization of non-television technologies with television to continue producing content (Blas *et al.,* 2020), which, in turn, has hybridized the audiovisual languages that were broadcast at this stage, including the one used in television news programs where images and sounds from different sources were mixed and postproduction allowed the appropriate combination of these records from various audiovisual devices that were used to continue to produce.

Regarding framing, it allows to select the reality to be recorded with the camera (Tamayo, 2000; Bedoya and León, 2016; Fernández and Martínez, 2014) and different composition modalities are applied in its creation: selection, arrangement and design, which will have more or less presence according to the content that is being produced (Fernández and Martínez, 2014).

These modalities were combined and reformulated during the pandemic, because distance was established in the composition by selection as a configurative criterion of the framing, using zoom and panoramic recordings with drones. In addition, many more live broadcasts with extended sequence shots were added to the news programs. As for the composition by layout, it always took place in locations where the producers controlled the elements of the staging, such as the sets from which the newscasts were broadcast. This situation was maintained with some sanitary protocol measures and that, in some way, was also achieved in the video calls, when the interviewees applied audiovisual literacy to compose their frames, or when the cameramen planned the support shots to enrich the editing of the video calls. Finally, composition by design had its maximum application in the backgrounds, graphics and other elements used in post-production that allowed the homogenization of images from different audiovisual sources.

Túñez *et al*. (2020) argue that the pandemic forced social distancing and it affected the media. To overcome this, journalists practiced *remote journalism*, using tools and processes such as video calls or work in the cloud to follow their work remotely. In television, distancing was also operationalized in the construction of the frames used in news coverage, determining the composition of the image, in which the use of *zoom* and the reconfiguration of the use of focal length were essential. In addition, we also resorted to devices that allow wide descriptive shots, such as drones.

Post-production fulfills the homogenization function of different audiovisual materials (Karbaum, 2021). The homogenization in this hybridization period was intensive, because it was necessary to combine images and sounds from different sources, which can be classified as instrumental (ENG cameras, drones, cell phones, among others), of different authorial origin (channel cameramen, prosumers, policemen, among others) and of different formal constitution of frames (horizontal, vertical or square). Based on this, the application of some modalities of Vidal's (2014) typology increased, and it is concluded that one of the most used forms was that of hyper production, because it was used to combine the video calls with other subframes. Thus, it ended up composing the general framing that was broadcasted in the contents or informative programs such as newscasts. The other modality applied was collage, because records of different origin, time and author were mixed. All these mixtures are possible thanks to digitalization, and in a theoretical way this hybridization and operationalization of different formats -audiovisual, graphic or photographic, among others- fits with what Manovich (2012) called *the software culture*.

It is necessary to say that these transformations enable to continue informing, which allowed the population to reconnect with the informative contents of this media, making television important again (Casero-Ripollés, 2021), confirming that journalism plays a relevant social role as in other previous health emergencies (Lázaro and Herrera, 2020) trying to respond to the different issues that concerned the citizenship at that time (Apuke and Omar, 2020; Mullo *et al.,* 2021). These modifications in the audiovisual language correspond to a specific context, thus, in the future, it is important to be attentive to which manifestations will remain in the journalistic television discursivity and which will become circumstantial. From the above, it can also be concluded that the audiovisual hybridization went more through the formal discursive aspect, which includes the creation and treatment of images and sounds.

Despite the work carried out in this research, there were some limitations, especially those related to interviews with journalists from other channels; however, based on what was studied, other lines of research are proposed that can address the transformations and hybridization of audiovisual language in other television genres, such as entertainment and fiction, or in other journalistic formats, such as news magazines. In addition, studies could be carried out on the same subject, but using other techniques, such as discourse analysis.

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# Chatbot: digital communication and religion after the pandemic in Latin America

## *Chatbot: comunicación digital y religiosidad tras la pandemia en Latinoamérica*

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### *Abstract*

The intensified social isolation after March 2020, Covid-19, showed the need to think about a new agenda of activities in which digital communication technologies are used to support the shortening of distances and revisit new possibilities of interaction. In this sense, this qualitative article presents a study carried out on the use of Chatbots for communication continuity between a specific community: the religious one. This audience was chosen to exemplify the relevance of the theme on how to overcome, at present, paradigms that praise the face-to-face as the only interactional source. The methodological design was structured in two phases (i) bibliographic review and (ii) application of a questionnaire to participants who are in geographic areas of eight countries Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador. The results showed that the use of Chatbots took place through - communication technology for emotional support, the Chatbot in community contexts, such as the one explained here, gave the security of "belonging" to "being" and, despite the isolation, not be alone; and - use of communication technology that can enable individuals from all walks of life to request support in relation to current affairs, local issues, and personal circumstances. These bases highlighted the following categories of discussion to think about a new agenda about digital in times of humanitarian crisis.



### *Keywords*

Communication, online interaction, religiosity, perspectives, pandemic times, digital culture, access, Latin America.



### Resumen

El aislamiento social que se agravó después de marzo de 2020, por Covid-19, puso en evidencia la necesidad de pensar en una nueva agenda que utilice las tecnologías digitales de la comunicación para apoyar el acortamiento de distancias para tener nuevas posibilidades de interacción. En este sentido, este artículo cualitativo presenta un estudio realizado sobre el uso de chatbots para la continuidad de la comunicación entre una comunidad específica: la comunidad religiosa. Este público fue elegido para ejemplificar la relevancia del tema sobre cómo superar, en la actualidad, paradigmas que permitan estar presente como único método interaccional. El diseño metodológico se estructuró en dos fases (i) revisión bibliográfica y (ii) aplicación de un cuestionario a participantes ubicados en áreas geográficas de ocho países Brasil, Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Perú, Bolivia y Ecuador. Los resultados muestran que el uso de los chatbots se dio a través de tecnologías digitales como soporte de pertenencia para una nueva agenda de comunicación y que, en contextos comunitarios, enfatiza la seguridad de "pertenecer" y, a pesar del aislamiento, no estar solo, permitiendo que personas de todos los ámbitos soliciten apoyo en relación con asuntos de actualidad, problemas locales y circunstancias personales. Estas bases destacaron las siguientes categorías de discusión para pensar sobre lo digital en tiempos de crisis humanitaria.



### Palabras clave

Comunicación, interacción en línea, religiosidad, perspectivas, tiempos de pandemia, cultura digital, acceso, América Latina.

## Introduction

The first cases of people infected by the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) appeared in December 2019 in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, and spread rapidly worldwide, initiating the Covid-19 pandemic in Latin America and the United States with great impact on the lifestyles of the population in March 2020. Due to the high risk of contagion, the overload of health systems and the high number of deaths, the population had to reorganize routines, keep their social well-being at a distance, use protective masks, among other strategies to face and survive the pandemic (PAHO, 2020; Scorsolini-Comin *et al.,* 2020)

In Brazil, for example, the high rate of infections and deaths made the country as the epicenter of the pandemic (Hallal, 2021) and data from the Ministry of Health (Brazil, 2022) suggested that by June 2022, some 31 445 137 cases of coronavirus infection and some 668 000 deaths caused by the disease had already been reported. The Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), along with the World Health Organization (WHO), reported that there were about 14.9 million deaths directly or indirectly associated with the pandemic (PAHO, 2022a). As a result, many families around the world lost loved ones, got unemployed, and suffered from overcrowded health systems.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the ongoing economic crisis worsened, causing recession in some countries (OECD, 2020), citizens had to deal with a lack of healthcare and hospitalization vacancies, there was a collapse in the health system (Orellana *et al.,* 2020; Hallal, 2021, 2020; Hallal, 2021), showing that in vulnerable regions, compared to regions of greater purchasing power, "Covid-19 pandemic is exposing and intensifying health inequities, especially in the poorest regions" (Orellana *et al.,* 2021, p. 12).

Faced with such a complex and uncertain scenario, people started looking for alternatives and efficient responses to face the pandemic and, to some extent, alleviate suffering emotional and mental health aspects not to mention both, the physical consequences of coronavirus infection such as: fever, cough, hypoxia, conditions of social isolation can also cause other symptoms such as: fear, anxiety, loneliness, anger, depression, insomnia, and the side effects of ingested drugs (Scorsolini-Comin *et al.,* 2020; PAHO, 2022b).

Health professionals were more sensitive to physical and mental health problems caused by Covid-19, due to overwork, exposure to the virus and the risk of transmitting the disease to friends and family, and the experience of coping with the pandemic, treating patients with Covid-19 and caring for patients' families also led to come under mental health problems, such as anxiety, stress, depression, among others (Kang, 2020; Humerez *et al.,* 2020).

Consequently, there was a significant increase in searches for spiritual support and religion; according to data from Google's trending search site, the search term spirituality increased during the pandemic, especially in March 2020 when it started, which can be justified by the stressors already mentioned, which intensified due to the pandemic.

Note the data in Figure 1:

**Figure 1**

*Google trends search data for the terms: spirituality and coronavirus site google trends*


*Note.*https://trends.google.com.br, 2022

Some reports also noted how the search for spiritual guidance and religion grew dramatically during the pandemic, pointing out to the relevance of spirituality in helping people cope with the health crisis (Madureira, 2021; Monteiro, 2020). Thus, religions have had to reinvent themselves with services, masses and meditations broadcast on the internet and shared through social networks, facilitating citizen access and the dissemination of spiritual messages to a greater number of viewers and listeners (Yano, 2020).

Hence, the aim of this research is to investigate alternatives of digital communication as well as the use of tools that enhance the relationship considered so traditional in Latin American society; religion-communication.

Considering the array of technological resources, this study is in accordance with Nißen *et al*. (2022) when saying that chatbots are considered social actors, and since time is an essential component of social interactions, it draws attention to the temporal aspects of relationships. In the near future, according to Liebrecht *et al.* (2021) examining the contingency of a chatbot's design choices will be of great benefit.

## Materials and methods

The researchers defined qualitatively two methodological phases for this study: (i) literature review involving the topic: education and spirituality; post Covid-19 pandemic religiosity; (ii) collection and analysis of empirical data on how the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) community is using digital communication and information technologies.

The institution was chosen for using chatbots to keep in contact with its members, in a period of pandemic having been consolidated as a constant activity.

The SAD is organized through four levels from the individual member to the worldwide organization, namely: the Local Church, Association or Mission, Union, General Conference, a section of which is the Division. In the case of South America, eight countries (Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador) are part of the South American Division.

Thus, there is a department of digital strategies in South America for the upkeep of social networks and for the production and dissemination of content for its members through the internet and applications (e.g., https://feliz-7play.com/es), finding documentaries, series, movies for members of all ages.

The "Novo Tempo" television and radio channels are directly linked to the South American Division, with programming in Portuguese and Spanish, twenty-four/seven. The radio operates 19 stations with a listening potential of almost 90 million tuners. The television channel is available on all subscription operators at no additional charge and also on YouTube.

Through these resources, tools to learn more about the Bible are made available to the programming on the channel and the radio studios.

The SAD uses communication and interaction technologies to seek content for its community. During the pandemic period, having a structure for this was essential to meet the needs and maintain the relationship with the church.

For that purpose, a questionnaire was prepared with questions involving the "religion-communication-technology" relationship, with the participation of 12 executive members, chosen because they were located in different countries belonging to Latin America: Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador.

The guiding questions, prior to their application, were validated by three specialists: one from Communication and Expression and two members of SAD, being structured on the following basis: How did SAD members search for ways to maintain their spiritual practices during the pandemic?

## Results

Albeit religion and spirituality tend to be associated, it is no trifling to understand that the concepts for both are different. According to Curcio (2018), spirituality refers to the human essence, relating to their beliefs, emotions, subjectivity, and relationships of individuals with something considered divine and sacred.

This research is then aligned with Adikari *et al*. (2021) when stating that it is necessary to analyze artificial intelligence as a source of help to contribute in the web to encompass expressions reflecting an infinity of personalities and behaviors, focusing on the emotions of those seeking this activity, to overcome the human-machine relationship, providing more solid foundations to not be alone, despite the social distance.

## Religion and spirituality

According to Koenig (2012), spirituality is defined, felt or based on the human being's pursuit of answers about the meaning of life, and this term admits different interpretations, hindering its understanding, and emphasizing that "the meaning of the term spirituality has recently expanded to include positive psychological concepts such as meaning and purpose, connection, mindfulness, personal wellbeing and happiness" (Koenig, 2012, p. 10). This author also claims that the language of spirituality is not usually associated with religion or religiosity, but is more connected to the subjectivity of the individual and his or her pursuit of self-realization, influencing his or her health and quality of life. For Frankl (1991; 1994), spirituality is also related to the pursuit of the meaning of life and its scope does not depend on religions, religiosity or specific denominations, but both contribute to the achievement of these aims. It is worth adding that in this context, Silva and Silva (2014) also include values such as:

> Love, hope, joy, forgiveness and compassion being the core of spirituality. It dwells in us, our lives, our world and our sense of humanity, friendship and family. Spirituality can be found in any human social action; it is inherent to humankind and it is rooted in it since humanity began. (Silva and Silva, 2014, p. 212)

Religiosity and religion are both a social construction, set up by the man and mainly involve practices, rituals and beliefs related to a denomination or religious group, being many times represented by the image or ideologies of a superior being, a God or gods and nourished by a religion, with manuals, convictions and specific rules of behavior, forming social groups, with periodic meetings like cults, sessions, masses, meditations (Silva and Silva, 2014).

For Koenig (2012), religiosity is usually lived through worship, and seeks representations of idols or of a God, a superior being. It is also frequently associated with specific beliefs about life, death and norms of behavior in social groups. In fact, although it is not the main objective, spirituality can also be present in these practices, liturgies, worship rituals and in the religious experiences of man (Silva and Silva, 2014), since, for Curcio and Almeida (2019), both, spirituality and religiosity would have faith as a fundamental element, and further states that in:

> The query of what gives meaning to life, love, faith, God, family, friends, work, culture or health were the elements mentioned. It was noted that many participants used the word faith; according to a model proposed by Newman (2004), spirituality and religion are a function of faith, requiring faith as a foundation, and being the guiding principle because individuals would be religious or spiritualized. (Curcio and Almeida, 2019, p. 290)

Thus, faith would be an essential element contributing to an alignment between religiosity and spirituality, complementing them and being essential for individuals to find meaning in their lives and have hope, even in the midst of difficulties and be unconditional, to strengthen people and their spirituality (Silva and Silva, 2014).

Yet, emphasizing the possible benefits of religiosity and spirituality, the study conducted by Forti *et al*. (2018) highlights spirituality promotes a better quality of life, being relevant as an alternative strategy in the treatment and prevention of diseases, associated with conventional treatments. Melo *et al.* (2015) conducted a study with the aim of identifying a correlation among spirituality, religiosity and quality of life, resulting that it was possible to detect a positive correlation through a systematic review among these terms in most of the selected articles, as well as:

> Religiosity/spirituality appears as one of the strategies used to cope with adverse situations, such as physical illness, mental disorders or bereavement; therefore, it appears as an aid for coping, comfort and well-being, a defense mechanism, or even resignation. Moreover, it is a great tool of social support for these individuals. From a broader phenomenon view, spirituality appears with very significant results in the studies, as a way for individuals to resignify their misfortunes and rearrange their experiences. Even in individuals who do not adhere to any religion, spirituality plays an important role, linked to significant existential issues. (Melo *et al.,* 2015, p. 459)

The study also highlights that only two selected articles showed a negative correlation between the terms, emphasizing religiosity and religious behavior as harmful, since individuals are guided to follow certain religions, using faith as a means to achieve goals, specifically wealth ones, and when they do not achieve them, they feel frustrated.

Another factor presented concerns negative feelings arising from excessive rules or inhibition to manage feelings, and probably contributing to deteriorate the quality of life (Melo *et al.,* 2015). It is worth mentioning that other studies demonstrate that spirituality is related to quality of life, promoting positive results in the treatment and prevention of depression as well as other diseases, and in coping with stressful situations (Forti *et al.,* 2018; Panzini *et al.,* 2010; Koenig *et al.,* 1998; Koenig *et al.,* 2001).

## Chatbot and Church: support in pandemic times

For Misischia *et al*. (2022), the functions related to chatbots are interaction, entertainment, problem solving, fashion, and personalization. Their influence might be considered positive in-service quality, constituting the functional objective of chatbots, as well as the potential in customer service.

Zhou *et al.* (2022) claim that interactions between humans and chatbots are gradually becoming part of our daily social life. Thus, seeing how human-chatbot interactions occur, compared to human-human interactions and how they influence individual morality is necessary.

Since religiosity could be considered as a support in adverse situations, it is necessary to consider what resources may be needed for this. The use of chatbots is highlighted, which according to Adamopoulou and Moussiades (2020) are tools evolving rapidly in several fields in recent years, including marketing, support systems, education, health, cultural heritage and entertainment.

From this evolution, it has been seen the motivations driving its use and its impact on different social interactions, including in churches, as will be seen in this study.

As for Dahiya (2017), a chatbot is a communication robot, using intelligence to mimic human conversation and assisting the user by answering questions, with the benefits being driven to its wide adoption to provide virtual assistance.

Chatbots use methods and algorithms from two domains of artificial intelligence: natural language, processing and machine learning (Caldarini *et al.,* 2022).

Analyzing the aforementioned institution and based on chatbot and artificial intelligence, a digital communication tool called "Hope" was developed to maintain and facilitate communication with the faithful and stakeholders, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This tool was developed by the Novo Tempo television channel, belonging to SAD, and is one of the resources adopted by the denomination mentioned to help students of the Digital Bible School, being a vehicle for religious instruction and spiritual support, where those interested can access Bible studies, receive guidance and personalized attention, resolve doubts about the Bible or chat with a member of the team.

The database is hosted on MONGODB, the template was hosted on Amazon and currently migrated to its own platform, with these features: platforms: WhatsApp, Telegram, Messenger, with 96 % through WhatsApp, remarking that when started, in 2017, Messenger was stronger.

The purpose of the chatbot is to facilitate access to educational content and biblical lessons, support, active listening, spiritual guidance, and also make SAD members and managers aware of the importance of the internet and digital resources to teach and disseminate relevant content.

The aims of the digital Bible school and the chatbot "Esperança" are: to study the Bible through the internet, promote the spiritual growth of students, disseminate educational content, based on biblical principles with the support of digital resources, offer spiritual support and messages of hope in a receptive, empathetic and non-judgmental way (Tonetti, 2021).

This chatbot uses artificial intelligence technology and can be accessed through a link available on websites of the aforementioned denomination and on the "Novo Tempo" network, directing to messaging applications and interacting with the user, offering spiritual guidance, counseling and Bible studies, being a kind of virtual instructor or teacher. According to Fernandes (2019), there are three basic access links, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*"Esperança" chatbot access links and features*

| | |
|---|---|
| **link 1: adv.st/ queroestudar** | This is a link for those wanting to study the Bible individually. By accessing this link, the interested user will be directed to the conversation in the application or in the web version of WhatsApp. From then on, you just have to follow the steps the robot indicates. |
| **link 2: adv.st/ darestudobiblico** | This is a link for anyone wanting to study the Bible with an interested person. By accessing this link, you will be addressed to the conversation in the app or the web version of WhatsApp. As with the previous link, just follow the steps as directed by the bot, which will guide you to create a group with the other person. |
| **link 3: adv.st/ queroconversar** | This is a link for those wanting to receive service, asking questions or talking to the Digital Bible School team. By accessing the link and sending a "Hello", the chatbot queue the interested to be served. In this mode, the service is provided by a person not by the robot. |

*Note.* Fernandes (2019, n.p.)

When accessing the link, the chatbot interacts with the user, through objective questions and answers, leading the user to the desired content. About eleven studies in Portuguese and eight in Spanish are offered, dealing with relevant topics such as: family, physical and emotional health, coping with grief, adolescence, sexuality, biblical archeology, among others.

Technology has now been improved and provides content related to the topic under study to broaden the student's understanding, making available video and text materials, based on a search in the collection of the official websites of the SAD and Novo Tempo. Communication network.

It is also worth mentioning in this context that the Chatbot "Esperança" has the support of a team of professionals to provide interested users personalized and humanized attention in the aforementioned digital resource.

It is an artificial but not necessarily non-humanized system because apart from the team responding messages and offering personalized advice, the technology itself is also intended to be a tool for missionary engagement (Tonetti, 2021, n. p.).

Furthermore, there was a 271 % increase in the number of digital Bible school students in 2020 when the pandemic began in Brazil, generating greater searches by individuals generally for religions and spirituality.

According to Castro (2020), it was programmed to interact in two languages: Portuguese and Spanish, and by November of that year it had already served more than 100,000 students, in more than 70 countries, who studied the Bible and sought counseling and spiritual guidance, with an average of 140,000 messages sent daily. The aforementioned author states that hope is a technology:

> To simultaneously study the Bible with thousands of people and groups. Basically, the work between our team and "Esperança" is divided as follows: she takes care of mechanical and systematized issues, while our assistants are responsible for what is human and requires special care, being all quite simple and natural; while the person studies the Bible with "Esperança", he or she can be advised and ask questions with our team - and all within the same chat, without having to connect to several channels of care. (Castro, 2020, n.p.)

Consequently, the perception about the use of this tool in times of pandemic was sought, as shown in Figures 2 to 5, which are with captions in Portuguese/Spanish, as the original sent by the language of the participants.

The first aspect addressed to the search for members to maintain their spiritual practices during the period of social isolation, as shown in Figure 2:

**Figure 2**
*Maintenance of spiritual practices during the pandemic*

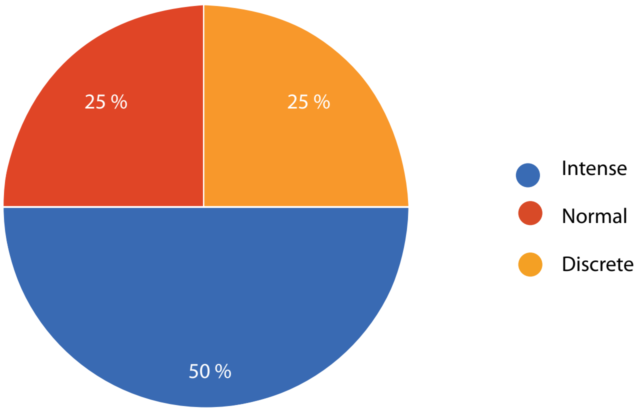



Figure 2 shows that half of the participants understand the search has intensified and no one considers it to be null.

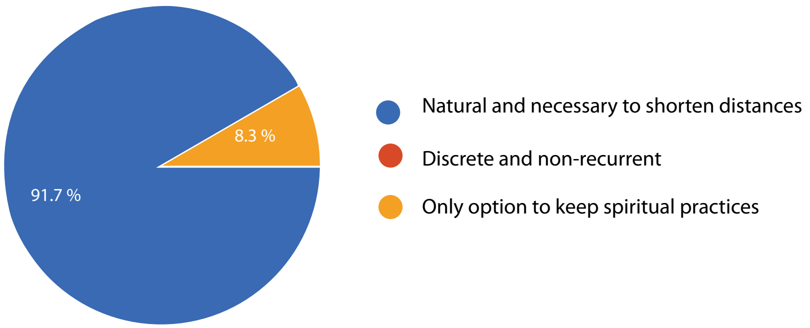
Up to June 2022, 181 638 people studied with "Esperança", with 11 lessons available in Portuguese and eight in Spanish, without mentioning other being for special events such as: Easter, Youth Week and launches of Feliz-7Play or NTPlay. The daily messages number is around 150 000.

It is important to mention that there are people asking for attention because of emotional problems, appointments last only one day and others last more than two years.

The number of cell phones making the hope work varies depending on the WhatsApp policies and other messaging apps, as they limit the number of students per cell phone number and the number of messages sent. At the peak of the pandemic, 2020, around 360 000 messages were sent per day, with an average of 1000 new students daily, having to adapt the infrastructure to the demand.

The second point addressed in how online communication tools were used during the pandemic, as shown in Figure 3:

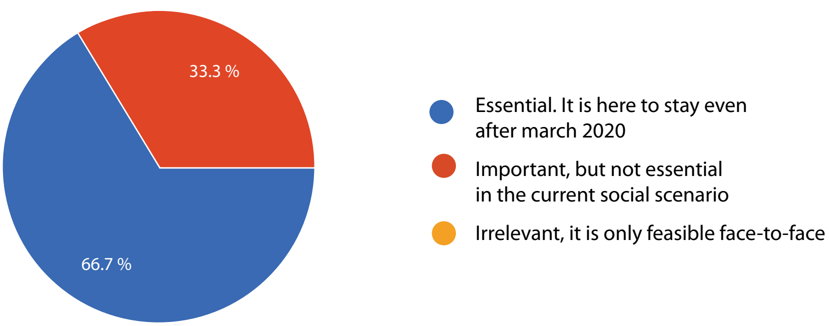
**Figure 3**
*How digital tools were used*




The geographical distance required by humanitarian health issues was the main obstacle to overcome in terms of the practices at issue. For 91.7 % of participants, digital communication tools were the points of support for this overcoming, highlighting that their use occurred naturally and necessarily for the given situation. And, although 8.3 % highlighted that it was the only option for participation, no one showed that this was discouraging.

These responses support the challenges of the next question about how they view online practices in Biblical Education and Religious Communication strategies, as shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**
*Importance of online practices*



33.3 % of the respondents consider online practices to be important for the scenario, but not fundamental as opposed to 66.7 %, considering them as actions that will remain in the daily life of Bible study.

Delving into the "Esperança" chatbot, the question arising is who should support the development, besides the geographic shortening, so the tool can be used in a meaningful way to the principles of this community, as shown in Figure 5.

**Figure 5**

*Meaningful listening to support chatbot development*

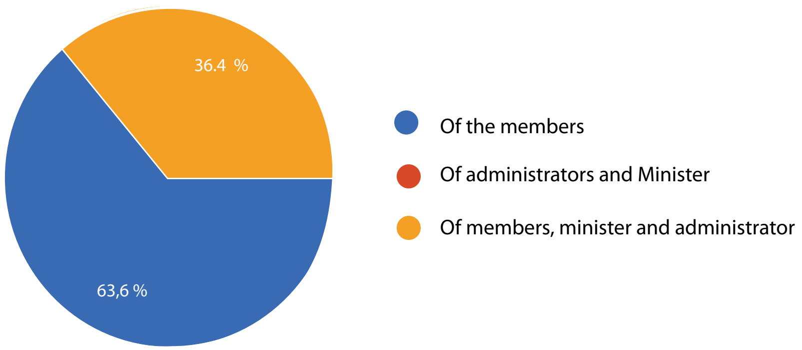



Figure 5 shows that 100 % of participants agree that church members could/should be listened to on important/relevant bases that the chatbot should address. Nevertheless, 36.4 % of these believe that all members should be involved, including pastors and administrators.

Regarding the impact of using a chatbot for Bible studies, the participants of this study highlighted the strengths because, despite the massive use, the agility in the service, the scope, the speed of the answers, makes the chatbot a tool that breaks through to counterbalance the effects of the pandemic and thus the interested individuals assume the message in a unique, innovative way, helping in the activity of preaching, motivating the members to study anywhere, with anyone, giving the perception of a reliable and encouraging tool.

Thus, the responses given help enable coordinated action, providing information and facilitating adaptive behavioral responses, along with the studies of Lange *et al.* (2022).

## Conclusions and discussion

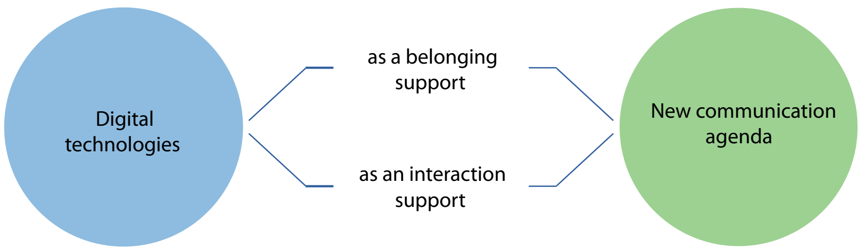
Based on the results of the review and the questionnaire, it is worth highlighting that the participants believe that artificial intelligence is essential and should remain on the innovation agenda in this environment because in times of crisis, it generated the idea of belonging, action. Indeed, mobile media can keep people connected to the church, to the pastoral, without the possibility of returning; work is no longer done without technologies that give the feeling of being present.

From this point of view, digital media, in addition to shortening distances, can embrace the understanding of a paradigm shift in the conception of the relationship between people, a new agenda for the use of the digital, especially when the educational scenario is religious, historically constituted by presence.

Thus, the data presented highlight the following categories of discussion to further think a new digital agenda in times of humanitarian crisis on the technology-church connection:

**Figure 1**

*Technologies as support for a new communication agenda*




## Digital technologies as a support of belonging for a new communication agenda

Through teaching community contexts, such as the one explained, it is observed that it highlights or gives the security of "belonging" and "being together", not being alone. Despite the physical isolation, it even plays an important role in the coordination of social interaction.

Using this means of communication causes critical processes to be checked, as it expands the evidence and points to the symbolic bases of a person. This perception of emotion is related in contextual information.

Additionally, having a return of the expected draws consequential and contextualized inferences from the perceived emotions in the future. However, through conversational ones using artificial intelligence techniques to enhance and personalize automation in teaching, it may be possible to identify pedagogical agent bases.

Not only does a chatbot design may be important to develop engaging, useful and valuable pedagogical agents, but also to understand emotional, cognitive and social educational concerns, grasping that users interact for various purposes and motivations, and for different periods of time.

## Digital technologies as a support for interaction

The social network allows people of different genders, cities, countries, to ask for support in relation to current issues, local problems and personal circumstances. Thus, it is possible to put on the agenda its direct effect of communication style on the attitude and quality of interaction through (digital) social presence.

Thus, this (in)formal communication style promotes a higher perceived social presence influencing positively on the quality of interaction and attitude mentioned for religious practices, through familiarity and perceptions of appropriateness, indicating that participants assign different roles as communication partners.

In this regard, despite understanding there is still a long way to go, such a paradigmatic break also helped to understand the challenge for institutions in different social settings and to bring people closer to their environment with whom wanting to be and stay.

In this perspective, artificial intelligence provides reflection on new communication experiences, new solutions to real problems, transforming the way the institution interacts to facilitate the scope of proposed activities.

Altogether, four levels are seen from the individual member to the global organization: the local church, an organized and united body of individual members; the local association or Mission, an organized and united body of churches of a state, province or territory; the union, a united body of associations, missions or fields within a larger territory, highlighted here by South America.

The digital resource is an efficient tool for the digital Bible school of communication, facilitating the dissemination of educational content and communication with people interested in spiritual matters, religiosity and counseling on the Internet, reaching several countries with an accessible, dialogic language, in a practical, safe, simple and agile way.

However, what is mentioned here is the support for self-improvement, noting that there are several dimensions to gain confidence, such as mentoring, assistance, administration, evaluation and generation of results.

Additionally, it is analyzed a new way of seeing the habits of action, the meaning of relationships, justifying the organization of new habits, new measures of doubts and answers, the challenge at this point is not to lose the essence of mentoring, of support.

Ultimately, users understand that digital media are the meeting point in times of crisis and optimize the time, the waiting time, the time to meet needs, and even emotional ones.

It is possible to offer personalized experiences with intelligent tutoring systems to meet individual and collective needs and, if possible, they can personalize the action plan in/with the institution. In this perspective of online participation, members can create project groups to exchange information, assignments, presentations, providing a viable environment for learning.

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REVISTA DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES Y HUMANAS XXI
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# Cities, digital communication and post-pandemic: from smart cities to platform urbanism

## *Ciudades, comunicación digital y pospandemia: de las smart cities al urbanismo de plataformas*

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***Abstract***

*The paper will focus on the old connection between cities and digital communication in light of transformations speeded up both in the social, economic and health emergency of Covid-19 and in the post-pandemic. Thereby, the aim of the study will be to notice significant changes in the agenda of our field and its relations with urbanistic dimensions and theories. Therefore, it will undertake a strategy of academic literature review in three fundamental instances. Firstly, attention is turned to the conditions that have made possible to understand urban realities in relation to information machines. Secondly, the study will retrieve the definition and criticism of smart cities whose strength becomes legible as an interpretive framework for many digital technologies in cities of our region and in the particular context of global crisis. Finally, the article will address platform urbanism as a perspective that allows to investigate the spread and reconstruction of metropolitan spaces through platformization and app ecosystems. In these aspects we will find a possible agenda for our field that —if it did not wait for the health emergency to begin— has heuristic capacity for understanding and explaining the future realities of Iberoamerican cities in light of mutations derived from the new normalization.*

***Keywords***

*Cities, platforms, urbanism, digital, communication, smart cities, post-pandemic, platformization.*

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**Resumen**
Este trabajo aborda la antigua relación entre ciudades y comunicación digital a la luz de las aceleradas transformaciones tanto en la emergencia social, económica y sanitaria del Covid-19 como en la pospandemia. Con el objetivo de advertir cambios significativos en la agenda de nuestro campo y sus relaciones con dimensiones y teorías urbanísticas, nos aproximaremos desde una estrategia de revisión de la literatura académica a tres instancias fundamentales. En primer lugar, atenderemos a las condiciones que han hecho posible comprender las realidades urbanas en vinculación con máquinas de información tanto a través de aproximaciones morfológicas como en la historia concreta de las ciudades digitales a inicios de nuestra centuria. A continuación, nos detendremos en las definiciones y en las críticas a las *smart cities* cuya fuerza se hace legible como marco interpretativo para muchas de las tecnologías digitales en las ciudades de nuestra región y en el contexto particular de la crisis global. Finalmente, abordaremos el urbanismo de plataformas como perspectiva para indagar la proliferación y reconstrucción de espacios metropolitanos a través de la *plataformización* y de ecosistemas de aplicaciones. En estos aspectos descubriremos posibles líneas y temáticas de investigación para nuestro campo que —si no esperaron a la emergencia sanitaria para comenzar— guardan capacidad heurística para comprender y explicar las futuras realidades de las ciudades iberoamericanas a la luz de las mutaciones derivadas de la nueva normalización.

**Palabras clave**
Ciudades, urbanismo, plataformas, comunicación, digital, smart cities, pospandemia, plataformización.

# Introduction

If at the beginning of the century the *dotcom boom* and the war theaters resulting from terrorist attacks unfolded a progressive control of telecommunications by military conglomerates, secret agencies and corporate actors, the latest crises accelerated this restructuring and extended the cooptation of democratic illusions by undoing the virtual borders of cyberspace. First, the *subprime* defalcation delivered renewed forces to concentrated multinationals that found spaces to extract big data while penetrating local administrations and pursuing *gentrification* and *ghettoization* under generalized surveillance (Zuboff, 2020). Then, the Covid-19 pandemic acted as an amplifying vector of *platformization* and ensured the progressive infrastructural conversion of ubiquitous computing into a reality inseparable from everyday city life.

In this scenario, the links between studies on cities, digital communication and the media are more related for at least two reasons. Firstly, the catastrophic forces unleashed by the pandemic would show that the privileged vector of contagion was the metropolitan areas. This revived the links our field has with urban, architectural and geographical theories rooted in a rich tradition of authors and themes[1] (*cf.* Parker, 2003; Graham, 2004; Hutchison, 2010; da Cunha, 2013). Secondly, a large part of the strategies for prevention, detection and containment of the virus would rely on vast digital ecosystems robust enough to present an infrastructural character with directive forces on urban networks and flows (energy, sanitary, residual, telecommunication, security, commercial, etc.). Such deployment has begun to exhibit the entangled, embodied and embedded profile of *pervasive computing* as a substrate of *standardization* to regulate everyday life practices in post-pandemic normalization by pretending to compute, as Guattari (2008) would say, physical, mental and social ecologies. In this context, media and communication studies are assiduously evoked and provoked in analyses of urban informatics, spatial computing, big data-assisted municipal management, city operating systems, critical geography, smart and digital cities, or, more recently, platform urbanism.

However, these trends and currents go unnoticed in the foundations of our field and create a sustained agenda that -if it has not waited for the pandemic to begin- shows signs of vitality, mutation and growth. Our objective is to systematize some of its conditions and features that can improve new lines of research in digital communication. Therefore, in a first section we present the relationship between cities and informational machines. From there, we will follow a tour through conceptualizations of intelligent cities and we will note their main critical points. In the third section we will dwell on the particularities of the researches that ascribe to platform urbanism, seeing in them a field of theoretical and empirical dispute that aspires to understand how meaning is produced, constructed and mediated in urban space in *platformization*.

1 A minimal list would contain urban sociology driven by Weber, the relationship between metropolis and mental life in Simmel or the Frankfurtian classics (cf. Benjamin and Kracauer). It could also be argued that our field has been influenced by ethnographies of Chicagoan descent focused on city ecologies, by Marxist and structuralist inspired approaches of the new sociology of the urban question (with Castells, Harvey or Lefebvre) or by cultural analyses of consumer practices (de Certeau).

## Method

The methodological strategy is based on the critical review of the academic literature that addresses the multiple relationships between digital communication and cities. As such, it is an analysis that seeks to produce knowledge from other sources and finds justification in the huge volume of contributions -accelerated in the pandemic context- on the subject (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016). In these terms, this work follows Cooper's (1988) classifications, since the proposed review integrates and synthesizes research with a primarily conceptual focus and with an exhaustive analytical structure that was developed through selective processes according to the quality, originality and relevance of the studies resorted for our field. In addition, the chronological order of the notions presented has been important for the following pages, as there are specific changes in communication studies, which not only enables to reconstruct analytical aspects but also to plan new research in prospective terms.

This selection is accompanied by ways of organizing and systematizing information that allow a qualitative strategy characterized as a meta-study that attempts to recover the most relevant theoretical frameworks, data, methods, applications and critical trends (Aveyard, 2014). To this end, the construction of the review was forged according to the (retrospective) analysis of publications that began by classic authors and continued with debates. Then, academic and technical materials that have deployed the notion of smart cities in permanent dialogue and dispute with cultural, social, economic and political studies of communication were approached. Likewidser, relevant publications were obtained at the conceptual innovation level on platforming processes linked to software and media studies, digital economy and governance analysis. In all cases, an evaluation of the literature in terms of regional relevance was introduced by consulting specialized search engines and journals focused on Ibero-American contexts.

## Cities and information machines

It is important to ask about the conditions of the theoretical relationship between cities and digital realities. For this reason - without setting an absolute point, nor a complete genealogy - it is inevitable to refer to Mumford as a recurrent author for our field. The validity of his thought can be seen in the works that describe metropolitan transformations in both poles of the Cold War under a catastrophic tinge:

But where are the new gods? The nuclear reactor is the core of their power; radio transmission and rockets are their angelic means of communication and transport; but there is the control room beyond these secondary agents of divinity, with its Cybernetic Divinity imposing its flashing decisions and its infallible answers: omniscience and omnipotence, triumphantly espoused to science. (2012 [1961], p. 903).

This idea about the destiny of city technology is hypertrophied in "The Myth of the Machine" (2011 [1970], vol. 2), under the concept of a mega-machine that would drive a generalized dehumanization. While the roots are ancestral, the profile of the modern metropolitan mega-machine would then emerge in a pentagon of power, productivity, profit, political control and propaganda that would degrade social and personal relationships and impoverish humanistic values. As the quotation anticipates, this mega-machine -expressed in accelerated conglomeration and large-scale bureaucratic organization- finds, since the middle of the last century, at its core the power of atomic energy, space travel and mainframe computers as the organic (mechanical and electronic control of personality and human life).

This hypothesis will not go unnoticed by French post-structuralism, but it can also be seen in the late work of Lynch (1985) who -exceeding his famous works on mental maps- critically explores three normative models of urban morphology: the cosmic, the organic and, finally, the machinic. The latter is a legacy as old as the bloody American colonization, for when the city acquires machinic form that become mechanical automatons, making possible a functional whole whose power -mirrored in the speedy machines of business corporations- lies in the rapid gridding of space to enable the administration of goods and people. Thus, for Lynch, the machine model was the result of engineering design intended for the transmission of force, motion, energy and *information* - as he will specifically emphasize in our time. The approaches depended on this alienating model that made it possible to encompass complex entities and activities through the progressive *standardization* of traffic, facilities, sanitation, telecommunications, zoning, production processes, etc.

Beyond Mumford and Lynch, as Luque-Ayala and Marvin (2020) point out, there are other possible genealogies of the relationship between cities and computing machines. Not only because, since the second half of the last century, with the first cybernetics, researchers and planners intensified a vision of cities as digital communication systems, but also because attempts to apply statistical, mathematical and computational analysis to the urban have multiplied, transforming it into a domain for technical intervention and decision-making (this topic is recurrent, for example, in the introduction of *mainframes* in Latin America). In fact, although Lynch in the early 1980s[2] dismisses the possibility of defining the shape of a city through the analogy with the computer, he finds possible connections in the management of the vastness of flows. It will be that managerial capacity that will allow these comparisons to be recovered in the futuristic cities of corporate *imagineering*, in the defense functions and in the pragmatic and automated solutions to urban problems under supposedly neutral, value-free and apolitical perspectives that accompanied the rise of neoliberalism (Greenfield, 2013; Rossi, 2017).

By the 1990s, the idea of connected cities would take hold under the ubiquitous computing program (driven by Xerox) that would establish an urban world progressively governed by interconnectivity without limits (Crang and Graham, 2007; Dallabona-Fariniuk and Firmino, 2018). The theoretical intentions of the decade would be described by W. Mitchell (1996), who would advance in the extensive description of programmable places, autonomous vehicles, electronically augmented bodies and connective architectures of *bit cities*. In the topology of the *Infobahn*, civic structures and spatial arrangements would affect both access to economic opportunities and services, and the character and content of public discourse, democratic values, forms of cultural activity and daily routine.

The new century would accelerate certain post-urban fantasies that far exceeded Mitchell's proposals and were based on the supposed immateriality of telecommunications. Therefore, following Castells' (1997) conclusions on the dynamization of urbanization processes through digital networks, Graham (2004) would recover the idea of cyber-cities to capture the materiality of socio-technical interconnections under three clear conceptual trends. First, a perspective in which the territoriality and spatiality of urban life are replaced by information technologies. Then, a co-evolution in which

2 It is not by chance that, in those decades, as seen in Finquelievich (2016) and in Velázquez Ramírez and Pradilla (2013), the work of critical Ibero-American sociologists dedicated to digital technologies in urban transformations, as well as to technology parks, districts and technopolis, has become more consolidated.

electronic and geographic spaces are produced together as part of the restructuring of the globalized capitalist system. Finally, recombination trends that would focus on how technologies involve complex and subtle mixtures of human actors and artifacts to form hybrid networks.

However, just at the moment when the Social Sciences and Humanities agenda was transforming its epistemological bases to think about the relationship between cities and informational machines, agents from the corporate world, began to carve the notional foundations, the rhetoric and the technical systems of urban digital communication.

## Smart cities

During the 1990s[3], the concept of cyber-cities will be accompanied by different terms related to a growing synonymy: digital, virtual, ubiquitous, connected and smart cities (*intelligent* and *smart cities, cf.* Cocchia, 2014; Albino, Berardi and Dangelico, 2015; Sharifi *et al.,* 2021). However, this last denomination, after being the subject of debates, indicators and academic rankings, becomes dominant due to IBM executive report (Dirks and Keeling, 2009) that would be decisive to install a promotion line of technologies for metropolitan areas and that would accompany the global population growth promising, in the midst of crisis, fiscal austerity. The omnipresent information technology of this industry would create the framework for quantitative "control", conceptualizing cities as "systems of subsystems" and operationalizing decision making through *big data* and *cloud computing* to regulate and optimize governmental, citizen (health, education and security), commercial and public infrastructure (transportation, communications, waste, water and energy) services. It is not surprising that, in this context, "intelligence" is defined as the ability to model behavioral patterns from big data processed in these subsystems. Soon, manufacturers, distributors or hardware and software integrators such as Cisco, Siemens, Qualcomm, Microsoft, Intel, Hitachi, Amazon, Alibaba and Alphabet, among others, would join this perspective (Firmino, 2017; Shapiro, 2020).

3 Some authors trace the notion of *smart city* to earlier decades under the development of forms of urban *management* that included smart growth. Other researchers relate them to the Kyoto Protocol, to the European Union's sustainability recommendations and to the promotion of the Internet in local populations with the new century.

As pointed out by Rossi (2017), Mosco (2019) and Luque-Ayala and Marvin (2020) this sort of digital utopianism promoted by corporations and expressed in *datification* will be accompanied by international organizations and local governments through strongly normative visions where proprietary technology will appear as the main force. In fact, its standards will be a matter of discussion for institutions such as the ITU (*International Telecommunication Union*) and the IEEE (*Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers*). At least in the case of the former, as a multilateral association with academic participation, the definition of indicators (U4SSC) that for more than five years have been seeking to be implemented in Ibero-American cities under evaluations of technical groups with the objective (although complex) of improving the quality of life of the population (Lazzaretti *et al.,* 2019; Copaja-Alegre and Esponda-Alva, 2019) would be promoted.

However, the notion of *smart city* has become ambiguous and nebulous as its scope presents a continuous dispute of features that aim to exceed any technocentric conception and include governmental, economic, cultural, psychological, social, environmental, ecological, educational, community and, of course, contextual dimensions (Pellicer *et al.,* 2013; Cocchia, 2014; Kitchin *et al.,* 2017; Luque-Ayala and Marvin, 2020). Thus, definitions often emphasize that smart cities integrate e-governments with mechanisms for public participation, informed citizenship and transparent decision making (based on open data and event modeling). In addition, the generation of smart populations with skilled, flexible, cosmopolitan, empowered, participatory, entrepreneurial human resources, willing to enter continuous learning processes and business communities is encouraged (Piekas *et al.,* 2018).

In the same sense, these definitions include life policies sustained in the promotion of quality in culture, health, safety, housing, education, and tourism (Albino et al., 2015; Scandalora da Silva et al., 2020), a sort of biopolitics that connects with economies based on competitiveness, flexible manufacturing, services, and innovation oriented towards entrepreneurship (knowledge economy but also cognitive capitalism, cfr. Rossi, 2017). Another recurring topic is mobility, accessibility, and transportation systems (public, private, on-demand, shared) restructured to become more efficient (in the face of climate change) and integrated with information infrastructure (Carmona, 2017; Rico-Ramírez et al., 2019). Finally, in addition, the characterizations promote environmental and ecological aspects, reason for which the notion of smart city has shifted in recent years (both in the literature and in corporate and administrative discourses) towards concepts such as sustainable, creative, or resilient cities (Allam, 2020; Cordova et al., 2020).

As stated by Sharifi *et al.* (2021), post-coronavirus scenarios promise a growth in big data management and *deep learning* applied to *smart city* projects, especially since many cities have relied on smart solutions to combat the pandemic in a range of technologies including CCTV, computer biometrics, thermal cameras, air and water sensors, Artificial Intelligence applied to prevention and health monitoring, remote building management (IoT), etc. In the Ibero-American context, when metropolitan areas became emergency zones, research, experiments, and projects (both academic and corporate) have grown to reimagine the relationship between city and digital communication. This is demonstrated by topics such as technological strategies applied to traffic reduction, nightlife and economic reactivation (Lagos *et al.,* 2022); digital governments (Céspedes and Núñez, 2020), sustainability and urban innovation (Araujo and Luján, 2022), big data, GIS and Covid-19 applications (Ferlin *et al.,* 2021; Bastías and Leiva, 2020); emergency management, mass urban living and inclusion (Luter and Mar, 2021). In all these experiences and others, *smart cities* -both in *ex nihilo* construction and in the refabrication of existing areas- are understood to emerge as cultural projects that, as Shapiro (2020) following Stiegler points out, are *phármakon*: remedy and poison at the same time with the consequent overconfidence in the field of urban policy. Therefore, it is not surprising that the criticisms have multiplied with the same speed at which they are gaining followers.

First, it has been questioned that cities, seen as inefficient, are only raw material for the extraction of values and data. A sort of inexhaustible and infinite source of resources recovered through proprietary urban operating systems that are energized by an agenda of corporate interests (Luque-Ayala and Marvin, 2020; Sennett, 2019; Rossi, 2017). Likewise, Greenfield points out that *smart cities* belong to neoliberal economic policies as they imply a deregulation of private actors, as well as limitations on public oversight of business (Negro, 2021). With this, services are progressively privatized and an unrestricted opening to foreign investment and an elimination of taxes that coincides with states reduced to the minimum expression (where citizens are conceptualized as entrepreneurs and consumers). Ultimately, cities become products and governments see as compromised their ability to act in the face of global companies.

Also, as Kitchin points out these projects are often criticized by the emphasis on technical, pragmatic or common-sense solutions rather than political and social guidelines. From a radical positivism, cities seem to be postulated as systems that are knowable, quantifiable, manageable and controllable a priori by algorithmic means instead of being addressed in their contingent, complex and ambiguous problems. In that sense, many of these initiatives are homogenizing, ahistorical and anti-territorial, while reinforcing existing power relations and geometries and their inequities (Mosco, 2019), escaping from democratic processes of accountability and ending up with developments for the people who need them the least (Allam, 2020). As Luque-Ayala and Marvin (2020) point out, there is also questioning from decolonial, gender and ecological perspectives.

Third, as Shapiro (2020) says, connected cities support an infrastructure that creates potentially vulnerable urban systems with a plethora of new risks. Thus, the emerging data flow from companies (in networks, grids, sensors, actuators, scanners, cameras, etc.), from citizen initiative (*crowdsourcing*) or from public administration, and if they sustain the continuous operation of the urban infrastructure also open those systems to greater *cybersecurity* problems (*hacking, cracking,* viruses, etc.) as well as to emerging technical drawbacks (*glitches, crashes*). Likewise, it has been recurrently pointed out that *smart cities* present problematic consequences at the sociopolitical and ethical level by including an expansion of geospatial surveillance, predictive profiling, social sorting, loss of rights and increasing *dataveillance* (Mosco, 2019). As Kitchin says, big data and codes are not neutral, but are always partial, political and imperfect. In the same sense, Greenfield will warn that urban *seamless* technology is potentially consistent with authoritarian regimes because - far from encrypting an unintended consequence - it is in tune with calls for efficiency, optimization, and a will to control every vestige of human beings.

Likewise, Sennett (2019) postulates an ethical critique from the historical relations and tensions between *ville* (physical place) and *cité* (mentality) embodied in two scenarios for what his colleague W. Mitchell had named *bit cities*. In the first, technology straightens and seeks to prescribe how people should use the spaces they inhabit. These are cities that are closed, controlling, hermetic, authoritarian, hindering and particularly onerous, where what is built is imposed on what is lived. In the second, digital technology coordinates, but does not eliminate the disorderly activities of the *city* but stimulates its inhabitants to face complex problems and contemplate human differences through open, democratic, hermeneutic, tolerant, egalitarian alternatives, promoters of living intelligence and under unpackaged, accessible, cheap, and free knowledge-centered technology. As mentioned by Alves *et al.* (2019), these criticisms also imply evaluating projects in Brazil and Portugal, an evolution of the concept that wants to be out of technological limitations and involve urban co-creation with inhabitants and citizens who assume active positions as promoters of innovation projects and improvement of quality of life in terms of inclusion, participation, democratic engagement, access to information and decentralized, distributed and community-driven decision-making (preferred example of much of the literature is Barcelona).

## Platform urbanism

According to Mosco (2019), smart city projects have restructured around the idea of *platforms*. In fact, the same year of the IBM report, Virilio (2009) understood that the circulatory speeds of digital communication, financialization and multimodal freight platforms would contribute to the progressive dissolution of metropolises into networks of a chrono-politics of acceleration (*omnipolis*). Thus, during the capitalist crisis, the French thinker coins the idea of the *city-everywhere* (*l'outre-ville*) characterized by the impossibility of inhabiting the *algorithmic instant* in a war against the civilian population that would have territory in software and where mathematical automatons dedicated to the "trajectory" of exchanges would promote the passage from national identity to a global traceability.

It is not by chance that the architectural and dromological idea of platforms agree with the senses of computational ubiquity. At the end of the last century, the notion began to be used for operating systems, *e-commerce* sites and web 2.0 applications that incorporated *prosumer* activities; while in the first decade of the 2000s, it would show relationships between culture and materiality of computable consoles for *game studies* (Bogost and Montfort, 2007), and it would integrate political dimensions of agency constriction in analyses of digital distribution (*Youtube, iTunes*) (Gillespie, 2010; Plantin *et al.,* 2018). A few years later Helmond (2015) summarized the formatting of social media (*Facebook*) in an infrastructural (modular *programmabili-*

*ty*) and economic model that would allow decentralizing and recentralizing flows of big data. This *platformization* -based on software-as-a-service architectures (Kaldrack and Leeker, 2015)- implied the extension and medial integration of the rest of the Internet, while making online data and external application ecosystems available to be executed and processed on the platforms (*platform ready*).

Observing digital geographies in their deepest materiality, Bratton (2016) would summarize the multilevel integration of planetary-scale computational ubiquity under the analogy of the stack that condensed the new verticality of practices in multiple dimensions. The author referred to certain sections of these mutable structures as *platforms* characterized as both techno-economic institutions (with etymological roots in programs and plans (*platte fourme*)) and reprogrammable engines, generating interactions and transactions. The strength of these platforms would lie in the extraction of differential surplus value by setting possible means of action, standardized remote coordination, information prediction and integrated algorithmic control (Touza, 2022).

Regarding business models based on data mining and processing -within speculations- Srnicek (2018) synthesized the idea of "platform capitalism" from the infrastructural character of those in digital intermediations (between different economic agents) and as a scaffolding for the construction of new services and products. Precisely, the broad-spectrum sociocultural interrogation on *platformization* belongs to Van Dijck *et al*. (2018) who warned of deeper socio-institutional restructurings in legal, axiological and political dimensions. They would also attend to both governance mechanisms (*datification*, commodification and selection) in the areas of proliferation of platforms (tourism, mobility, finance, news, health, education, etc.) and interactions with end users, with public entities and with other companies.

In all these studies, it seems to be taken for granted that platforms promote changes both in cultural industries (cf. Poell and Nieborg, 2022) and in the activities and services located in cities (cf. Bagó *et al.,* 2018). However, only with Barns' (2019) idea of *platform*[4] urbanism will be fully un-

4 The translation of "*platform urbanism*" is misleading since this category is sometimes used to designate the study of platforms (applications and technological ecosystems) that are deployed in cities and other times it names urban planning based on these digital realities. Because of this ambiguity, we prefer to keep the plural for the Spanish form.

derstood as well as how *platformization* seeks to restructure everyday city life by affecting the ways of thinking, valuing, remembering, perceiving, producing and regulating urban space and its social relations. In doing so, the author sought to investigate the way in which the actors of the platform economy influence collective production and consumption, but also to address the reconfiguration of these by every day and historically situated urban experiences. In that sense, the services of these digital communication entities exceed the idea of business models by being conceptualized as part of dynamic socio-spatial processes of transformation and restructuring of urban relations and institutions. In fact, for Hodson (2020) and Söderström and Mermet (2020) the activities supported by the platforms -as constitutive or parasitic of space and city infrastructure- reconfigure urban materiality and daily life, as well as the ways of experiencing, governing, knowing, and designing cities. Thus, against the idea of "placing platform capitalism in space" that favors a certain dystopian, fetishistic, defeatist and "techno-alarmist" character, as Leszczynski (2020) says, *platformization* is never frictionless or inevitably successful as its interfaces with cities are actively negotiated and contested under forms of coexistence, neighborliness, intimacy, and bonds (Bissell, 2020; Sadowski, 2020).

Likewise, without there being a complete rupture, Barns states that these perspectives would attend to the displacement of the corporate structuring of *smart cities* (both *top-down* and *bottom-up*) towards an increasing presence and intensive interaction with *smart* devices in the urban environment (Fields, Bissell and Macrorie, 2020). Due to miniaturization trends, digital communication artifacts are embedded in the ways we think, dwell, and build everyday city life and are progressively becoming the informational infrastructure of our cities. Thus, for Hodson (2020), platform urbanism can access multiple empirical and effectively existing dimensions in the pandemic context, unlike *smart cities* whose narratives still have a certain utopian bias.

In this sense, a first difference with *smart* urbanism is because platforms seem to entail greater antagonism or conflict with local governments (at least in Western countries[5]). This tension can be seen in the constant regulatory

5 These differences are recalibrated when we talk about non-Western societies, considering the different geopolitics of *platformization*. In fact, Caprotti and Liu (2020 a, b) follow the vicissitudes of the BATH group (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei) both in Chinese smart city projects (City brain and the social credit system) and urban platforms negotiated with governments and local authorities. In fact, the notion of platforms in some authors such as Repette *et al.* (2021) or Zwick and Spicer

disputes between legislative and executive powers and the responsibilities of these companies (which, in addition, structure "privacy policies" constituting gray zones or clickwraps). In this sense, halfway between the public and the private, the (inter)mediations of the platforms exceed the economic levels as they acquire new institutionalization characteristics that are strongly situated and local, but with a complex and difficult to grasp status (Touza, 2022). For Söderström and Mermet (2020) and Stehlin *et al*. (2020). This situation demonstrates an unequal balance between companies and municipal policy makers, as the former quickly takes advantage of the regulatory gap, which creates new forms of flexibility, precariousness, insecurity, opacity, and informality in the markets it transforms (rental, mobility, sharing, etc.) and shapes the legislative agenda. Therefore, according to Graham (2020), the power of platforms lies in taking advantage of "conjunctural geographies" as ways of being simultaneously embedded and detached from the city space-time that they mediate and negotiate permanently, joining the local to obtain rewards and withdrawing to avoid any responsibility and conflict.

From a second point of view, unlike smart cities, the platforms would be characterized by supporting more interactive processes with urbanites (Sadowski, 2020). Thus, instead of studying contracts between a municipality and a monitoring technology provider, these authors focus on big data dashboards as proprietary technological interfaces that overlay smarts systems and deploy a more opaque analytical grid of governmentality that is scaled to the metropolitan areas in which they operate. Thus, platform governance practices are noticed both in the restricted possibility of access to data and in closed designs and architectures that prevent auditing their operations, monopolize information and engender rentier extraction asymmetries (Helmond, 2015; Plantin *et al.,* 2018; Barns, 2019; Shapiro in Hodson, 2020; Odendaal, 2022). Although some platforms share anonymized data with governments (e.g., Airbnb, Waze, Google Maps, Uber), the technical foundation of the progressive closures lies in API and SDK standardization, with programmability of microservices and marketability of third-party applications. As F. Kittler would say, therein lies the power relations based on algorithmic control of data, addresses and commands. Thus, once the intermediation by platforms is urbanized, the city becomes part of their proprietary ecosystem

(2021) is ambiguous enough to refer to the idea of open citizen government that provides information for popular participation and public policy decision-making.

and decision making is relocated within them, allowing them - based on their ubiquity and invisibility - to build legitimacy in urban governance issues and settle in municipal data control rooms (Söderström and Mermet, 2020).

Third, while smart city projects adopt corporate solutions, urban platforms aim to transform and take over the operations of services that are more market-oriented (*sharing, gig*). For Sadowski (2020) and Hodson *et al*. (2020), it means that *platformization* grows because cities are the oldest multilateral markets and their operation allows them to benefit from the spatial proximity of users and workers in sufficiently dense populations (*pool of freelancers*) to mediate social relations (acting on psychic and collective individuation as mentioned by G. Simondon). Therein lie the well-known geolocalized *network effects* in which additional users increase the importance of the platform and trigger increasing monopolization (Srnicek, 2018; Caprotti and Liu, 2020a, 2020b). It is the swift momentum of these effects that allows scaling solutions and designs at the boundaries of metropolitan areas while tempting the venture capital (Chréthien and Isaac, 2020). But the influence is two-way as cities see their markets compromised and platforms create new spaces and times as alternative values are extracted from "unproductive" goods, people and events (an empty bed, a spare seat in the car, cf. Bauriedl and Strüver, 2020).

Fourth, in contrast to the verticality of *smart cities*, as Pollio (2021) demonstrates, platforms drive multiple, small and detailed adaptations of urban infrastructures (such as airports) and of the relationships between agents (such as passengers and drivers). In this sense, *platformization* is never complete, not only because new alternative platforms are always appearing, but also because there is a radical indeterminacy of economic forms, work regimes and future possibilities at the interface between companies and cities - especially in countries of the Global South- inscribed in the materiality of situated relations. Thus, as Leszczynski (2020) and Odendaal (2022) point out, platform/city links are found to be diverse, rhizomatic, fragile, fallible and dependent on specific locations. Therefore, there is a co-generative dynamic between digital platforms and urban life that disregards the strategy of global companies that pretend to establish themselves as a phenomenon without struggles or conflicts (Stehlin, Hodson and McMeekin, 2020; Rose *et al.,* 2021). Therefore, possible oppositional processes and emancipatory potentials also emerge in alternative developments (e.g., platform cooperativisms).

A final difference pointed out by Söderström and Mermet (2020) occurs at the technological level, since the artifactuality of *smart cities* works in an extractive way by tracking and measuring people and things, while platforms are also interactive and constructive (we expose in them, for example, our preferences, tastes, emotions, etc.). Thereby, the idea of platforms emphasizes the situated and material interactional character in cities that allows them to produce embodied effects, affective dimensions and normative frameworks that need to be addressed in order to understand the *micro-political* pathways of subjectivity production (Bauriedl and Strüver, 2020).

In fact, the periods of pandemic distancing and isolation were marked by questions about the urban mutations and renegotiations brought about by *platforming*. Most studies focus on transformations in the world of work (e.g., Battistini and Carmona, 2021; ECLAC, 2021) and in educational and health services; however, research also questions the representation and construction of the social space of Ibero-American cities by these platforms. Thus, for example, ecosystems of *applications* that modify mobility have been addressed. Particularly, in the case of Uber, in addition to multiple analyses on working conditions, both the impact on public services (Brentini and Hirosue, 2021) and the entry strategies in Ibero-American cities during Covid-19 and the algorithmic regulation of displacements and uncertainties in the crisis (Guerra, 2021) have also been analyzed. Other characteristic explorations have to do with the *platforming* of tourism (Souza and Leonelli, 2021) involving both transformations of health and commercial policies in emergence and the reconfiguration of accommodations (Roelofsen and Minca, 2021). Finally, *platforming* also reconstructed urban eating habits (hence the multiple discussions in relation to *delivery* applications) as well as sanitary practices in the *e-health* sector. Of course, in these studies, the changes in the digital communication agenda that will allow linking urban platforms with *social media* (problematizing, for example, identification microservices), as well as with the massive electronic banking and financial "inclusion" (*fintech*) or with the transformations of the cultural industry in *streaming* (audiovisual, musical, literary, recreational, etc.) are also evident.

## Conclusions

The research agenda of pandemic communication and the construction of the so-called new normality - better said, normalization (*standardization*) - shows a huge difference. Nevertheless, the long-standing relationship between *digital realities* and *cities* finds both in the thematization of *smart cities* and in platform urbanism expressions that - if they have not waited for the health, social, economic and political crisis to begin - demonstrate vitality and heuristic capacity.

But an agenda is never complete, nor is it expressed in a clear and distinct way. Therefore, in the first place, there is a whole set of studies that add empirical dimensions to the two aspects we have addressed and that may provide elements to deepen our knowledge of these phenomena. Thus, as we have seen, the tragic contingency multiplied the studies of *platforming*. In fact, although the category of platform urbanism predates the Covid and, indeed, almost a decade ago the critical hypothesis of contemporary capitalism gave full force to current discussions, it is worth noting that the pandemic bequeathed a multiplication of digital mediations and transformations. Understanding the multiple logics in the *platforming* of Ibero-American cities can provide a solution for the analysis of digital communication as situated and contextualized processes.

Therefore, it is possible to imagine future contributions to this agenda that evaluate the diversity of strategies for the inclusion and permanence of platforms in our regions. We will try to follow the deployment of ubiquitous computing, on the one hand, understanding how it restructures surfaces and city practices. But, on the other hand, warning of possibilities to limit the stories of a fantastic capitalism based on immaterial algorithms, angel investors and all-powerful unicorns, by demonstrating that urban standardization through digital mediation does not occur without conflicts, without counterpoints, without readjustment and mutual specification of institutions, citizen regulatory frameworks and application ecosystems that support *platformization*.

Also, at a time when *smart* technologies are proliferating, perhaps we could ask ourselves whether the etymologically correct translation is "intelligent" or "biting". In these terms, the study of digital communication will need to contemplate the details of *smart city* feasibility in line with established traditions of social and engineering analysis. Perhaps an alternative would be to break down these divisions and build critical trends that bring together the best of each field. In any case, it is necessary to analyze carefully how Ibero-American cities are reconstructed by corporate actors, but also how in many of these cities the *smart* discourse finds alliances with local public policy makers under notions of resilience and sustainability that, if they humanize the sector, can also function as a Trojan horse.

In addition, it is necessary to take up the long-range theoretical agenda. Many of the studies, as we pointed out at the beginning, connect communication with the disciplines of urbanism. However, both the problem of smart cities and that of *platformization* call for theoretical frameworks that can grasp the complexity of the realities they are encompassing. The philosophy of technology, post-structuralism and the so-called new media theories can help to elucidate the force diagrams inscribed in spatial, environmental, urban, vertical and informational computation. In this sense, as anticipated in other contributions, *platformization* and *smart* urbanism can be seen as a restructuring deployed on city facilities that works by modulating or managing the main events of multiplicities in open spaces.

Likewise, if considering the hypothesis of platforms as a reorganization of sociocultural relations and interrelations, the minimum consequence is that they "bring into contact", while the maximum implies a reconstruction of the flows of activity and, therefore, of psychic and collective individuation (or of the way in which the actors involved in the new relationship that emerges from the technical substratum think of themselves and others). On the one hand, this would lead us to problematize, in Simondonian terms, the transindividuation processes of technical assemblages and networks (both of smart cities and of *platformization*). While, on the other hand, it could provoke reflections on the consequences of the concretization of cities in computable media (as pointed out by F. Kittler). While the study of the media does not exempt from addressing technical realities, we could imagine analyses that emphasize infrastructural control by attending to the *microservices* of information processing, storage and transmission as fundamental standardization processes of power relations in the urban.

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# MISCELLANEOUS

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# Bicentennial Generation: youth movements against former President Merino

## *Generación del Bicentenario: movimientos juveniles contra el expresidente Merino*

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***Abstract***

*This article studies, from the universe of identity and social movements, the leading role played by young Peruvians known as the Bicentennial Generation against the swearing-in of the then president of the Republic, Manuel Merino, in November 2020. In this context of citizen movements, we identify their main generational characteristics, ideological stances and modes of protest. We also address the way in which they define themselves in order to elaborate a conceptual approach to themselves as a social movement. The research has a mixed approach and exploratory level. In this regard, a survey was applied to 380 Peruvians over 18 years of age, most of them from Generation Y and Z. The results show a greater activism of women; a little partisan linkage with traditional political proposals; and the use of resources such as protests, cacerolazos and social networks. On the other hand, there were acts of solidarity such as the mobilization of demonstrators in cars, donations to brigades, posters on the facades of their homes or the use of Andean music instruments on public streets. We conclude that the Bicentennial Generation demystifies the disinterest of young people in political issues and organizes to defend democracy through two types of demonstrators: pro-democracy and anti-corruption.*

***Keywords***

*Bicentenary Generation, social mobilisations, youth protests, Peru.*

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**Resumen**

Este artículo estudia, desde el universo de la identidad y los movimientos sociales, el protagonismo que tuvieron los jóvenes peruanos conocidos como la Generación del Bicentenario frente a la toma de posesión del entonces presidente de la República, Manuel Merino, en noviembre de 2020. En ese contexto de movimientos ciudadanos identificamos sus principales características generacionales, posturas ideológicas y modos de protesta. Asimismo, abordamos la forma en que se autodefinen para elaborar una aproximación conceptual respecto a sí mismos como un movimiento social. La investigación es de enfoque mixto y de nivel exploratorio. En este sentido, se aplicó una encuesta a 380 peruanos mayores de 18 años, la mayoría de ellos de la Generación Y y Z. Los resultados muestran un mayor activismo de las mujeres; una poca vinculación partidaria con las propuestas políticas tradicionales; y el uso de recursos como marchas, cacerolazos y redes sociales. Por otro lado, identificamos actos solidarios como la movilización de manifestantes en autos, donaciones a brigadas, colocación de carteles en las fachadas de sus hogares o utilización de instrumentos de música andina en la vía pública. Concluimos que la Generación del Bicentenario desmitifica el desinterés de jóvenes en asuntos políticos y se organiza para defender la democracia a través de dos tipos de manifestantes: pro-democracia y anti-corrupción.

**Palabras clave**

Generación del Bicentenario, movimientos sociales, movimientos ciudadanos, protestas juveniles, Perú.

# Introduction

On the eve of the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Peru's independence, the country was overshadowed by a deep political and economic crisis that reached its peak between November 9 and 15, 2020. In this short period, Peru had three presidents. "All this occurred months before the General Elections of April 11, 2021 and in the midst of a global health crisis produced by Covid-19" (Jaramillo, 2021, p.1). The social explosion began with massive, decentralized protests in the interior of the country after the presidential vacancy against Martin Vizcarra Cornejo and culminated with the resignation of his successor Manuel Merino as head of state.

Part of the media attention focused on the protesters who were named as the Bicentennial Generation. Sociologist Noelia Chávez first coined the term on November 12, 2020, in a tweet: "The Bicentennial Generation. The protesters. Merino must resign" (Chávez, 2020). Almost immediately, the concept gained media relevance and Chávez broadened its meaning to refer to a political narrative that generated a collective identity among a group of heterogeneous individuals that defended democracy.

Villanueva (2021) argues that the protests occurred in different scenarios such as the digital (social networks), homes (cacerolazos) and the street (mobilizations and protests). In addition to political activists, the author identified three types of protesters: a) the dedicated, who pursued social causes, b) the non-political, and c) the spontaneous, primary group actors, such as friends and students, who started as spectators but later joined the protests.

In November 2020, a study conducted by the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP) revealed that 13 % of Peruvians participated in the protests, i.e., around 4 million 290 thousand citizens. The research highlighted the main reasons of demonstrations were: the controversial vacancy against the former President of the Republic, Martin Vizcarra Cornejo; the swearing of Manuel Merino as head of state; the discredited Congress of the Republic, among others (Dargent and Rousseau, 2021).

Historically, democracy in Peru has been marked by episodes of corruption that have permeated the collective memory of its citizens, building a political system with fragile and unstable foundations (Paredes and Encinas, 2020). It is contrasted in the National Survey of Values and Citizenship 2020, where 7 out of 10 Peruvians considered corruption as the country's main problem (Datum International, 2020). In this sense, the Bicentennial Generation is the result of a group of citizens who struggled to get rid of the worn-out political system on the eve of the commemoration of Peru's 200 years of independence from the Spanish colony.

This academic article analyzes the Bicentennial Generation as a political generation given that its members "have experienced a drastic change during adolescence or early adulthood in the environment of power relations, which affects them distinctively with respect to their predecessors" (Koeneke, 2007, p. 367).

Political generations have been lines of study in several academic works (Laouni, 2020; Fisher, 2018; Wong *et al.,* 2017). Some of the research relate the emergence of these cohorts to youth citizenship movements (Hadj-Moussa, 2021). These references place special emphasis on the historical, social and political contexts. For example, Deau and Goeury (2019) rescue the historical importance and the intellectual imprint immortalized by the M20F Generation, a term that refers to young Moroccan Protestants who participated in the Arab uprisings of 2011. Likewise, Laouni (2020) elaborates a profile of these young protesters who demonstrated against corruption, nepotism and the favoritism of authoritarianisms. Through surveys, he characterizes youth participation based on gender, education, political affiliation and use of digital platforms.

On the other hand, political generations end the stigmas of the supposed youth disinterest in public affairs, as demystified by some authors (Ross, 2018; Quaranta, 2016). These generational issues escape from the traditional protests related to the struggle for labor and civil rights, and issues such as climate change (Waeterloos *et al.,* 2021; Boulianne *et al.,* 2020; Holmberg, 2021; Bowman, 2019; Dodson and Papoutsaki, 2016); racial discrimination and abuse of authority (Gallagher *et al.,* 2018; Williamson *et al.,* 2018; Reinka and Leach, 2017); as well as feminist (Baylina and Rodo-Zarate, 2020; Moraes and Sahasranaman, 2018); and LGTBIQ (Chironi, 2019; Peterson *et al.,* 2018) movements.

In the last ten years, a very recurrent variable or category in research is the use of digital platforms and how they help to enhance the collective and connective action of protesters (Enikolopov *et al.,* 2020; Raynauld *et al.,* 2018; Ang *et al.,* 2014; García *et al.,* 2014; Valenzuela *et al.,* 2012). Research concludes that digital media reduce the monetary costs of demonstrations; they surpass in immediacy and are more interactive than traditional media; they incorporate new actors with similar collective identities, among others.

In Latin America, there are interesting works on generations (Vommaro, 2020; Sandoval and Carvallo, 2019; Nessi, 2019; Blanco and Vommaro, 2018; Bonviallani *et al.,* 2008). They highlight the importance of youth participation, especially of university students in social mobilizations.

Regarding publications on the Bicentennial Generation in Peru, photojournalistic works can be highlighted (Asociación de Fotoperiodistas del Perú, 2021; Reyna and Sotelo, 2021), as well as testimonials of women protagonists of the Bicentennial Generation (Chávez, 2020; Motta, 2020; Purizaca, 2020). On the other hand, there are published books that compile the testimony of its members (Sifuentes, 2021; Raymundo, 2021).

Regarding the above, there are still not many academic works on the topic. One of these is an essay that compares two Peruvian youth generations that developed in very different contexts (Burga, 2021); and another that analyzes the protests through the media's informative coverage using *framing* theory (Angulo and Bolo, 2021). However, no studies were found that use the protagonists of the Bicentennial as a unit of analysis. Because of the latter, we formulate the following problem: who were these young demonstrators who were protagonists during the protests, what were the political motivations that led them to demonstrate, how did they do it, and how do they define themselves?

## Theoretical framework

Longa (2017) makes a chronological and theoretical review of the first approaches on generations. In his article he highlights the work of Comte, Dilthey, Donati, Martin, among others. Although at first the term was related to the biological and quantitative age dimensions, these evolved to more complex and interpretative topics developed by structural sociology, such as socio-cultural, socio-historical, socio-political contexts, among others (De Oliveira, 2017).

Segura and García (2010) delve deeper int the typology of generations and identify five models: Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. The nomenclatures and age ranges vary depending on each author; however, it is worth highlighting the contribution of Comte, Dilthey, Ortega and Gasset, Gramsci and Mannheim (Leccardi and Feixa, 2011). For example, Comte conducted a more quantitative approach, Dilthey a more historical one, Ortega and Gasset focused on a generational mission, and Mannheim has a more sociological perspective.

Díaz *et al*. (2017) argue that: a) Baby Boomers have an active presence in organizations in positions of power and is a generation concerned with the pursuit of status, loyalty and quality of life; b) Generation X grew up with liberal ideas, without a particular political affiliation and relate education with job opportunities; and c) Generation Y, also known as millennials, embrace technology as a lifestyle and have a detachment to any political affiliation, as well as to institutions such as the church. On the other hand, Dutra (2017) identifies Generation Z as digital natives, dependent on technologies and who manage to better accept changes, are multitaskers, among others.

In practice, generational models are so complex that there is a solid and legitimate criticism of them. From this perspective, structural segmentations such as age and socio-cultural experiences have gone from being very marked to infinite or invisible, even in small units of analysis. For example, most generational models have age ranges as their backbone. On this point, we agree with Leccardi and Feixa (2011) in recognizing that generations do not have a temporal moment as established by some academics, so their rhythm cannot be measured or predicted.

On the other hand, the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and the emergence of phenomena such as digital gap have directly affected the stratification of generations. In this sense, the models present a wide variety of operational applications that must be reformulated in each case if better results are to be obtained (Guisado and Agoiz, 2013).

Despite this operational complexity, the academic field has used the term generations to refer to literary, artistic, and political cohorts. Braungart and Braungart (1986) develop three definitions of generation: a) as a descend; b) as a cohort or age group; and c) as a political generation or special age group working for social change. For the authors, the age group is more related to biological factors, while a generation or political cohort considers the needs and interests of the subjects. For the study on political activism and social mobilizations, the latter two meanings have been used more (Longa, 2017).

According to Galais (2012), unlike the cohort as an age group whose classification depends mainly on age ranges, political cohorts become a factor of cultural change influenced by their values and attitudes in social, historical and political contexts. Braungart (1984) defines political generations as a group that constructs an identity based on a generational mission that determines the public sphere by breaking a pre-existing order. On the other hand, Brea (1983) argues that "the basic element of a political generation consists in the experience, in a given period of life, of a historical experience" (p. 50).

Muñoz (2011) establishes elements to be considered to identify political generations: a) they go beyond age dimensions; b) they do not have a determined biological moment, but rather factors such as memory, identity, historic moments, among others; c) identities can be diverse within the same group; d) they appear in processes of historical change. From a sociological point of view, it should be noted that collective identities are constructed in a group of people who identify themselves as similar by sharing average goals and environments that create group cognitive schemes based on common experiences and interests (Chihu, 1999).

On the other hand, it is important to highlight how some authors relate political generations to youth citizen movements, "youth movements behave in the public arena similar to other social protest movements as conscious agents of social and political change" (González, 2004, p. 227).

De Oliveira (2017) identifies four dominant structures of youth confrontation: a) the student mob, related to the role of school and university students in social mobilizations; b) the party youth, composed of young people organized for policy advocacy; c) the paramilitary organization, related to youth participation in armed conflicts; and d) the social movement of a new generation, composed of pacifists, environmentalists, anti-nuclear, pro-civil rights, among others.

Besides their lack of experience, there are people who highlight their impetus to modify social and political practices through demonstrations (Vázquez and Vommaro, 2008). In Latin America, these protesters are characterized by demanding better educational and socio-political demands to put an end to oppressive relations in everyday life (Acevedo and Correa, 2021).

Agurto *et al.* (1985) emphasize the importance of youth participation as they not only rebel against the *status quo*, but also impose a new social order through their activism. In the same sense, Aguilera (2014) analyzes them as actors of social change who struggle to build an alternative order.

Therefore, political generations and youth citizen movements translate not only into the externalization of youth discomfort, but also as an accumulation of needs and proposals that need to be satisfied.

## Method

This research has a mixed approach and exploratory level. A survey was used based on a non-probabilistic convenience sampling. The research tool was used to identify the generational and political characteristics and the forms of protest of Bicentennials. Perceptions that these citizens had about themselves were also collected

The instrument was applied digitally from November 9 to 11, 2021, days that commemorated one year of the protests of the Bicentennial Generation. The channels used for the promotion of the survey were Facebook groups related to this new political cohort; the support of a public educational institution through mailing; and its dissemination thanks to the support of Instagram users with more than ten thousand followers, who also participated in the mobilizations.

The data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics and ATLAS.ti statistical software. The population consisted of Peruvians over 18 years of age. The sample consisted of 452 people; however, 380 respondents were selected who, through the questionnaire, considered themselves as part of the Bicentennial Generation.

Likewise, a total of 243 responses were analyzed at a qualitative level to create a conceptual approximation of the perception of young people about their political activism. For this purpose, an axial open coding process was carried out, which involved reading the data, recognizing patterns and linking codes generated inductively.

## Results

Of the 452 respondents, 380 Peruvians over the age of 18 considered themselves part of the Bicentennial Generation, i.e., 84.1 % of the total sample. 71.32 % live in Metropolitan Lima, while 28.7 % live in other regions of Peru. Likewise, 65.8 % of the respondents were female and 34.2 % were male.

On the other hand, 362 respondents who considered themselves part of the Bicentennial Generation were from urban areas, while 18 were from rural areas, i.e., 95.3 % and 4.7 %, respectively. Considering that Peru is a multicultural country, it is worth noting that 64.2 % identified themselves as mestizos; 10.4 % as Quechua; 7.1 % as white; 6.8 % as black, brown, Zambo, mulatto or Afro-Peruvian; 1.1 % as Aymara; 0.8 % as native or indigenous to the Amazon; among others. 1.6 % did not identify with any of their origins or customs.

## Generational characteristics

Regarding generational characteristics, the results were grouped through the age ranges used for international marketing studies. For this purpose, the sociological classification made in 2016 by *The Center for Generational Kinetics*, which has already been applied by other researchers (Gómez *et al.,* 2020), was used as a reference.

Table 1 shows that more than 80 % belong to Generation Z and Generation Y. The former grew up in a digital era, while the latter grew up in the early Internet era. Likewise, both generations are characterized by a dependence on mobile devices; however, this trend in Generation Z is more marked and hyperconnectivity is observed.

**Table 1**
*Age segmentation results*

| | | Frenquency | Percentage | Valid percentage | Accumulated percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | From 18 to 27 years old (Generation Z) | 164 | 43.2 | 43.2 | 43.2 |
| | From 28 to 40 years old (Generation Y) | 148 | 38.9 | 38.9 | 82.1 |
| | From 41 to 52 years old (Generation X) | 36 | 9.5 | 9.5 | 91.6 |
| | Over 53 years old (Baby Boomer) | 32 | 8.4 | 8.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 380 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

## Political characteristics

Since 1980 to date, Peru has had mostly democratic governments of the center and right parties. As a result, there has generally been a greater number of demonstrators from the left-wing political party in the protests. It is worth noting that a significant 33.4 % of protesters do not identify with any political ideology, while 12.9 % do not know or do not have an opinion.

**Table 2**

*Segmentation results by political ideologies*

| | | Frenquency | Percentage | Valid percentage | Accumulated percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | None | 127 | 33.4 | 33.4 | 33.4 |
| | Right | 97 | 25.5 | 25.5 | 58.9 |
| | Left | 60 | 15.8 | 15.8 | 74.7 |
| | Do not know / do not answer | 49 | 12.9 | 12.9 | 87.6 |
| | Others | 23 | 6.1 | 6.1 | 93.7 |
| | Center | 21 | 5.5 | 5.5 | 99.2 |
| | Center Right | 1 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 99.5 |
| | Maoist | 1 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 99.7 |
| | Progressive | 1 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 380 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

A similar trend is observed in Table 3, where it is seen that respondents show an apathy towards traditional political parties. A total of 72.4 % of participants did not have any type of sympathy or party affiliation. This could be related to the weariness of young Peruvians towards their democratic institutions, a problem that cannot be overcome in spite of the new parties that are being established and whose proposals do not satisfy their preferences.

**Table 3**

*Segmentation results by party affiliation or sympathy*

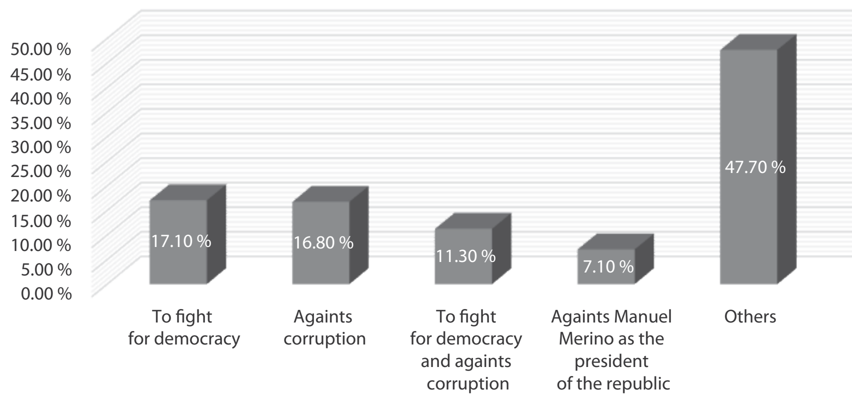
| | | Frenquency | Percentage | Valid percentage | Accumulated percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | None | 275 | 72.4 | 72.4 | 72.4 |
| | Do not know / do not answer | 32 | 8.4 | 8.4 | 80.8 |
| | Other | 14 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 84.5 |
| | Partido Morado | 14 | 3.7 | 3.7 | 88.2 |
| | Acción Popular | 11 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 91.1 |

| | | Frenquency | Percentage | Valid percentage | Accumulated percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frente Amplio | 11 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 93.9 |
| | Fuerza Popular | 8 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 96.1 |
| | APRA | 5 | 1.3 | 1.3 | 97.4 |
| | Perú Libre | 3 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 98.2 |
| | Alianza Para el Progreso | 2 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 98.7 |
| | Avanza País | 2 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 99.2 |
| | Partido Popular Cristiano | 2 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 99.7 |
| | FREPAP | 1 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 380 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

On the other hand, the Bicentennial Generation stated that among the main political motivations for protesting were the fight for democracy and corruption. Some respondents stated other reasons such as the economic crisis, health, a new constitution, their grandchildren, or the mismanagement of the Peruvian National Police.

**Graph 1**

*Segmentation results by political reasons*

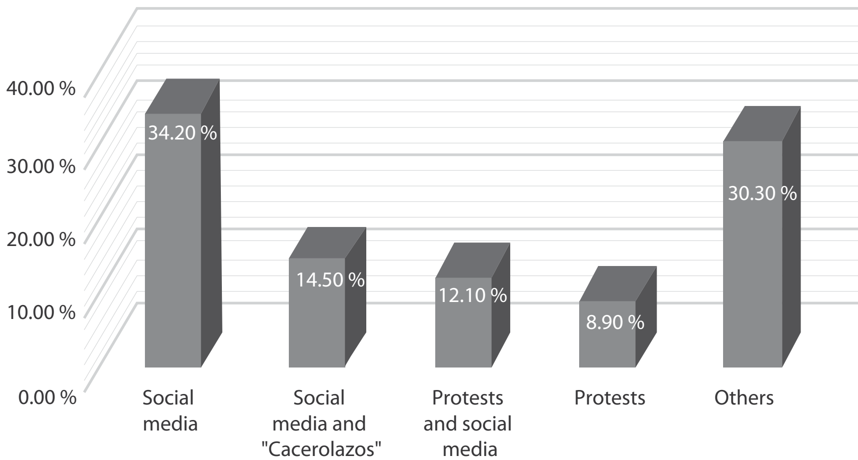


## Characteristics of the forms of protest

In terms of how they protested, most did so through digital platforms. Some participants indicated that they participated in the protests by driving the protesters to their homes; making donations to brigades; placing posters in front of their homes; creating meme pages; and playing Andean musical instruments as other forms of protest.

**Graph 2**

*Segmentation results by form of protest*




## Self-perception

Regarding the conceptual self-perception of the Bicentennial Generation, the protagonists used more than 1200 words for answering.

**Figure 1**

*Most frequent word cloud results*


In the analysis, some terms such as articles, verbs, connectors, among others, were excluded. The most used words referred to “generation” (146), “Peru” (111), “struggle” (51), “democracy” (48), “youth” (33), “bicentennial” (29), among others. These terms were also used by the media during the coverage of the protests.

**Table 4**

*Results of the number of words used in the question:*
*What does the Bicentennial Generation mean to you?*

| Number | Words | Similarities | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Generation | Generation, generational, generations. | 146 |
| 2 | Peru | Peru, peruvian, peruvians, country, etc. | 111 |
| 3 | Fight | We struggled, fight, they struggled, etc. | 51 |
| 4 | Democracy | Democratic, democracies, etc. | 48 |
| 5 | Policy | Policies, politician, etc. | 44 |

| Number | Words | Similarities | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | Corruption | Corrupt, corrupts, etc. | 39 |
| 7 | Youth | Youth, young. | 33 |
| 8 | Bicentennial | | 20 |
| 9 | Law | Rights. | 29 |
| 10 | Against | Contrary. | 24 |
| 11 | | | Others |

*Note:* The words in the "Similar" column were written that way by the respondents.

On the other hand, after processing the data and taking as main reference the most used words in the responses, the codes were inductively grouped into three categories: a) conceptual approaches, b) collective identities and objectives, and c) characteristics.

Regarding the results on conceptual approaches, four types related to age, mobilizations, as well as a positive and a questioning connotation about the Bicentennial Generation were identified.

**Table 5**

*Results of conceptual approaches*

| Code | Comment |
|---|---|
| Generational and age | It is defined around the age of people during the country's bicentennial. It is an objective and simple approximation. |
| Protest November 2020 | The Bicentennial Generation is identified as the group of Peruvians, with an emphasis on young people who participated in the protests of November 2020. |
| Generation that fights | The Bicentennial Generation is described as the one that is "ready to fight" and seeks to generate social and political change. Emphasis is usually placed on the youth. |
| Follow the herd | They are considered to be "ideologized", manipulated, or only follow what is indicated by the majority. |

Table 6 shows the values and objectives related to the Bicentennial Generation that would lead to consolidate their political motivations and demands.

**Table 6**

*Results of collective identities and objectives*

| Code | Comment |
|---|---|
| Democracy | Defense of democracy in the face of abuses by traditional political actors and the search to improve the country's political system. |
| Awareness and social justice | Demands for social justice, fight against racism, classism, machismo; environmental justice, social development, education, health, decentralization and interculturalism, diversity. Solidarity and unity. |
| Equity and equality | Improve the social conditions, living conditions and opportunities of Peruvians, regardless of their condition. |
| Anticorruption | Fight corruption identified as one of the country's most entrenched and harmful social problems. One of the objectives of the Bicentennial Generation is to eliminate corruption. |

Finally, generational characteristics such as information and technology, weariness and indignation, political and civic participation, changes, critical thinking, among others, were identified.

**Table 7**

*Characteristic results*

| Code | Comment |
|---|---|
| Information and technology | Access to technology, network activism, ability to access information quickly, pursuit of technological development. |
| Fed up and outraged | They express their annoyance at the various social problems identified (corruption, injustice, abuse of authority, etc.). |
| Political and civil participation | They are recognized as active actors in the political and civil participation of the Peruvian democratic system. |
| Longing for change | There is a desire for a better country, one that is fairer, supportive, equitable and free of corruption. There is a commitment to work towards this goal. Emphasis is placed on the need to generate changes at the political and social levels. |
| Critical thinking | Individuals capable of seeking information and developing opinions in a critical, independent way. |
| Determined and courageous | They are attributed with the capacity to express their opinions, defend their rights, generate claims. Reference is made to the fact that they have "lost their fear". Decision-making capacity. |
| Free and independent | Also linked to the idea of the bicentennial, the importance of preserving freedom and independence is revalued. |

## Discussion and conclusions

In terms of the characteristics of the Bicentennial Generation, it can be stated that a large part of the respondents who protested on social networks are part of Generation Z or Y. As also happened with the Egyptian uprising in 2011 (Lim, 2012), social networks helped activists to frame problems, propagate symbols and transform *online* activism into *offline* protests using human and material resources, which were characterized by solidarity help among its members, such as the use of vehicles to move the protesters, placing protest messages on the facades of some houses; and, even, playing Andean musical instruments.

The results also show that there is no identification of the protagonists of the Bicentennial Generation with the ideologies or political groupings that represent them. Thus, it cannot be stated that the protests against former President Merino have allowed us to recognize the emergence of a leftist youth movement in Peru, but rather that it has been the result of an ethical stance that demands greater non-partisan political participation.

As for the terms that respondents most used to make a perception of themselves, there are key words that were widely used by traditional and digital media. In this sense, terms such as "generation", "youth", "protest" and "democracy" are relevant to make a consensual meaning.

It should be noted that not all the people who define themselves as part of the Bicentennial Generation have a positive version of themselves. There is a group whose discourse is related to weariness and indignation, and they think that their members only followed the majority without having an individual identity that mobilizes them. Despite the different positions, both discourses are characterized by rapid access to information and technology, by revaluing the democratic system and interpreting Peru's bicentennial as an opportunity for change.

From a sociological point of view, this research concludes that the Bicentennial protesters can be considered as a political generation given that: a) they marked an important milestone in Peru's contemporary history; and b) they created heterogeneous collective identities that were united through a generational mission. Most of the demonstrators were young people who fought for democracy and against corruption, during the crisis following the swearing-in of former president Manuel Merino in November 2020.

On the other hand, we were able to identify two types of protesters in the Bicentennial Generation: pro-democracy and anti-corruption. The former has a positive perspective of its members, as well as a generational mission focused on revitalizing democracy. It also assimilates social changes as positive. The second has a questioning vision of the system and is related to the fight against anti-values such as corruption and the traditional political system. It has a radical discourse and a critical conception of its members.

While it is true that the discussion around the identification of a generation can cause debate, we found evidence that outlines that the protesters who marched against Merino are a generation. Considering Braungart and Braungart (1986) we conclude that as an age group it is driven by the participation of millennials and centennials, and as a special cohort, through the results obtained, we did identify common values and attitudes that lay the foundation to be considered as such.

Díaz-Albertini (2022) argues that the success of the mobilizations is based on the indignation of a large number of people, the construction of a collective identity and a conviction that large-scale citizen changes are possible. Therefore, we consider that the activism of the Bicentennial Generation was successful, but its victory or failure will depend on its long-term contribution and participation in relevant issues of Peruvian politics. In this sense, since this paper is one of the first to use the Bicentennial Generation as a unit of analysis, it will enable scholars to go deeper into the subject.

Even though society's perception of politics in Latin America is characterized by a disinterest provoked by politicians (Ramos-Galarza *et al.,* 2018), the protests against the administration of former President Merino demonstrate that when young people sense the political consequences generated by their authorities, they can organize and rise up against regimes that they consider threatening.

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# The new prisons in Ecuador: an environment for the reproduction of complex crime

## *Las nuevas cárceles en Ecuador: un ecosistema para la reproducción del crimen complejo*

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***Abstract***
*The current crisis of the penitentiary system in Ecuador based on the massacres recorded in recent years has generated a great concern of the national and international community. Despite being a multicausal problem, it is necessary to point out that prisons in Ecuador have been created in a dangerous "environment" for the reproduction of complex criminality. In this sense, through a combination of qualitative and qualitative techniques, this research seeks to analyze the contributing factors that have allowed the infrastructure of Ecuadorian super-prisons to become an adaptive and dangerous criminal ecosystem that currently shows new and alarming forms of violence between 2019 and 2021. It is argued that the onslaught of drug trafficking, criminal policy, self-government and the social dynamics of the prison system have turned it into an ecosystem with the capacity to reproduce complex crime. Reversing this scenario requires a comprehensive and holistic perspective of the problem that combines transformations of internal and external factors of the Ecuadorian prison system in general.*

***Keywords***
*Gangs, prisons, crime, corruption, ecosystem, government, drug trafficking, violence.*

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**Resumen**

La crisis del sistema penitenciario en Ecuador como consecuencia de las brutales masacres registradas entre los últimos años ha generado una gran preocupación por parte de la comunidad nacional e internacional. Aunque se reconoce que este problema es multicausal, es necesario destacar que las cárceles ecuatorianas se han constituido en un peligroso "ecosistema" de reproducción de criminalidad compleja. En este sentido, a través de una combinación de técnicas cualitativas y cualitativas, esta investigación busca analizar los factores coadyuvantes que han permitido convertir la infraestructura de las supercárceles ecuatorianas en un adaptativo y peligroso ecosistema criminal que actualmente muestra nuevas y alarmantes formas de violencia entre 2019-202. Se argumenta que la arremetida del narcotráfico, la política criminal, el autogobierno y la dinámica social del sistema penitenciario lo han convertido en un ecosistema con capacidad de reproducir el crimen complejo. Revertir este escenario requiere una perspectiva integral y holística del problema que combine transformaciones de factores internos y externos del sistema penitenciario ecuatoriano en general.

**Palabras clave**

Bandas, cárceles, crimen, corrupción, ecosistema, gobierno, narcotráfico, violencia.

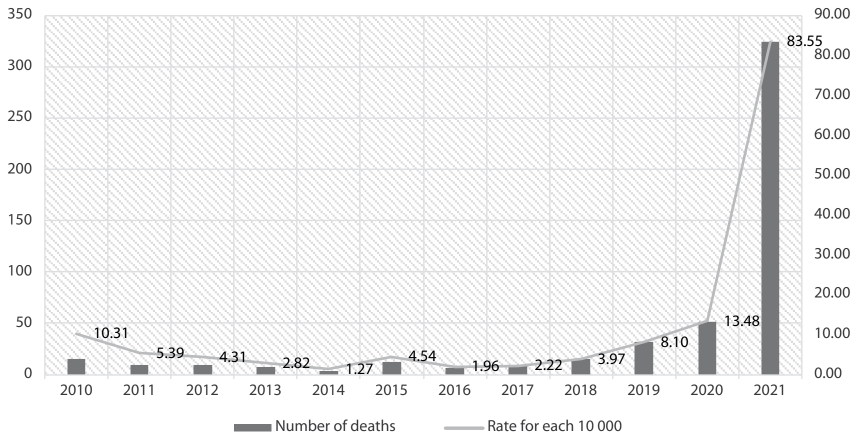
# Introduction

Ecuador has been facing an unprecedented crisis since 2019. The violent clashes between criminal prison gangs have left more than 400 dead, shocking the community not only because of their high level of brutality and sadism, but also because of the number of mutilations and decapitations, surprising national and international public opinion. The most serious situation occurred in September 2021 when around 120 people died in the Penitenciaría del Litoral. According to the newspaper El Universo (2021), in 2021 around three hundred and twenty prisoners died in confrontation in several prisons in the country. As seen in the following figure, the rate of prison deaths per 10,000 inhabitants exceeded 83 per ten thousand prisoners and is by far the most violent year in the history of Ecuador.

Violence inside prisons has been a growing process not been halted. This has drawn the attention of several national and international human right organizations seeking to stop these massacres with state measures and several public policy recommendations for urgent implementation in the medium and long term (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2021; Corte Constitucional de Ecuador, 2021).

**Figure 1**

*Violence in Ecuador's prison system*




*Note.* Ministerio de Gobierno (2022).

Various hypotheses have been suggested to explain the penitentiary crisis in Ecuador. The institutional reports and civil society studies agree that the problem is multi-causal. Structural factors such as deficiencies in the provision of social services inside prisons (health, food, cost of living) (Kaleidos, 2021); overcrowding, overpopulation, mega-prisons, self-government, drug policy play a riveting role (IACHR, 2021), among others. On the other hand, there are also explanations regarding the predominance of logics inherent to the penitentiary system such as corruption, social organization of prisons (Kaleidos, 2021); and other more circumstantial explanations such as limitations in the management of penitentiary security, lack of budget (Asamblea Nacional, 2021) not to mention the absence of a social rehabilitation policy (Secretaría de Derechos Humanos, 2022); state non-compliance with constitutional provisions (Corte Constitucional, 2020). Despite all this, it has been pointed out (especially in public opinion) that the crisis has been caused due to criminal gang confrontations to control illicit businesses, mainly drug trafficking (Plan V, 2021a).

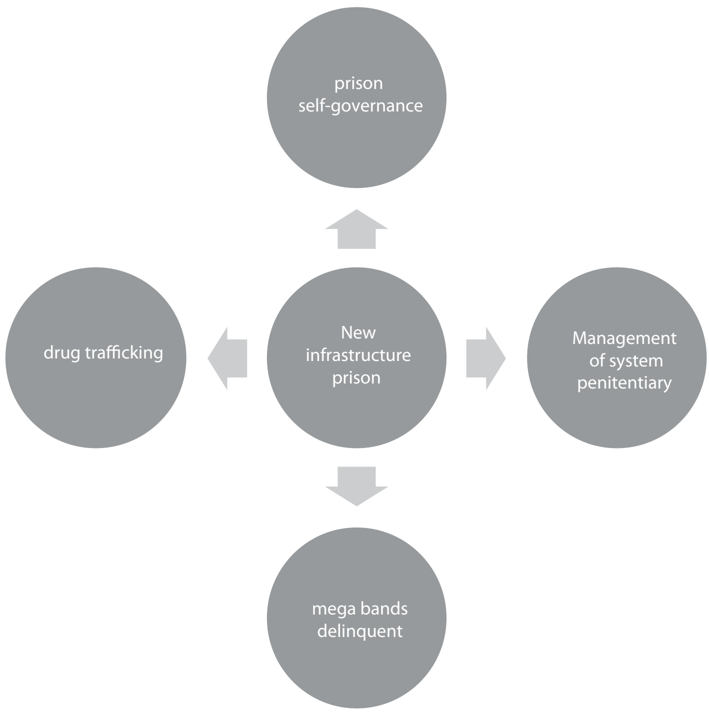
Many of these approaches undoubtedly contribute to a partial understanding of the problem, although it is undeniable the multi-causality of the problem. However, it is necessary to remark these factors have a spatial dimension, contributing to the idea of an "environment" capable of reproducing new criminal dynamics that have led to hyper-violent practices of expression. Albeit the relationship among prison space, violence and criminality is not recent, the current configuration of the new prison infrastructure in Ecuador has become a kind of catalyst for criminal violence and its expansion. Furthermore, a paramount point in the analysis of complex criminality in Ecuador is the current infrastructure of the prison system in Ecuador. How has this environment been spawned? What are its factors?

This research aims to analyze how the new infrastructure of Ecuador's super-prisons has constituted an adaptive and dangerous hyperviolent environment currently displaying new and reproductive forms of complex criminality projection. It will be argued that, due to the confluence of drug trafficking, prison management, prison self-government and mega-gangs, the current infrastructure of new prisons in Ecuador has become a hyperviolent criminal environment with the capacity of a massive complex crime due to the confluence in that space.

This paper focused on an analysis of the crisis of the prison system in Ecuador and its uncontrollable violence between 2019 and 2021. This time frame will be considered since it is then when a growing upturn in violence got evident; nevertheless, there are multiple factors analyzed that were already considered before this date, such as prison infrastructure, drug trafficking, prison self-government, and prison management, being those the reality to state the concept of criminal environment to show the conditions that have altered the management of this new prison infrastructure in Ecuador, reproducing complex criminal systems with extensive connection levels with the outside world. The unit of analysis will focus specifically on the four largest prisons in Ecuador (Latacunga, Turi, the Guayaquil Regional Prison and, above all, the Penitenciaría del Litoral).

This study, given the clandestinity of the criminal world and the fragmentation and discontinuity of the information, will be based on indicative inferences (scrutiny of indications of anomalous but fragmented facts) (Giménez Montiel, 2012). Consequently, the strategy of analytical triangulation (Espinosa, 2009) will be applied through a combination of quantitative sources (official documents, reports, studies on the subject, regulations, and journalistic sources of research) and quantitative sources of official prison and police statistics. Besides, reports from national and international bodies on the crisis in the penitentiary system will be prioritized. A theoretical reflection on the perspective of prisons as a criminal environment will be presented first. This will be followed by an analysis of the current prison crisis and criminal dynamics in Ecuador. Subsequently, the factors that contribute to this criminal environment in Ecuador will be addressed and, ultimately, the potential for regional reproduction that the prison system contributes to organized crime will be analyzed.

**Ilustration 1**
*Analytical framework*



## Prisons as a criminal environment

Understanding prisons as a criminal environment requires an ecological approach to the problem of criminality. This refers directly to the old American criminological current known as the "Chicago School", which led to the creation of an eminently sociological tradition to explain urban criminality now called "common". This biology-based perspective gained value through the introduction of the spatial variable in explaining crime.

Taking this perspective, these criminal environments are the result of social, individual and environmental factors, adapting and reproducing new criminal realities in contexts of social change and transformation (Downes and Rock, 2011). As for Álvarez and Rodríguez (2018, p. 10), a "criminal environment where legal and illegal actors converge in the same space and form a series of interdependent relationships that alter the existing balance and even trigger hierarchies". The area or territory is the criminogenic factor, prevailing over individual behaviors; therefore, it has a high capacity to produce new forms of social organization, independently of individual behaviors.

More up-to-date perspectives of this ecological dimension highlight complex criminal practices in fragile social contexts and with limited capacity for state regulation. Hence, the concept of "transgressive ecosystems" has emerged, defined as a socio-spatial construct going beyond structural factors to explain the predisposition of certain areas and human groups to adaptively transform patterns of illegality; new social orders have appeared due to new types of territorial authority, parasitic economies, and social self-regulation. This scheme bases on "interactions between rational agents committed to the logics of capitalization and opportunistic actors, establishing symbiotic and functional relationships between them to negotiate power and mutual benefits" (Bobea, 2015, p. 80). The change of any factor adaptively alters social interactions in these areas, producing quantitative and qualitative transformations in criminal practices, i.e., a recurrent criminal mutation (Bobea, 2011).

However, this socio-spatial scheme has been little addressed to analyze prison dynamics. As a natural space of the sanction of illegality, the classic studies of panel studies have focused on the functional idea of prison, being a mechanism to contain crime, or at best to make better human beings (Garland, 1999; 2018). Thus, prison has been a natural space for the etiological claims of the positivist criminologist, but has not been analyzed for the growth, adaptation and transformation of criminal dynamics. The paradoxical idea that prison is the "university of crime" is eventually a common sense more than a practice of academic analysis. Similarly, the perspective of criminal markets toughening penalties on the transaction of certain prohibited goods brings with it a greater proliferation of criminal profitability (Andreas, 2013), it seems to be an economic affirmation of the paradox of punishment rather than a sociological exploration of how the criminal world expands within these institutions.

Studies on the functioning and space of the prison world can be found in Foucault's (2008) work on surveillance and punishment, which present the specific technologies of penal power and the rationalities or knowledges arising from these measures. Albeit Foucault's analysis is a microphysics of power dealing with the evolution of penal institutions and the emergence of modern prisons, it is also a sweeping understanding of the ways power is managed over individuals in modern societies. This scheme of power and violence is the analytical origin of disciplinary societies, being power explicit in physical, anatomical and subjective ways and leading to a gradual process of individual normalization of inmates. However, it is necessary to go beyond the prison system. Foucault (2008) conveyed the need to consider the effects of exogenous variables to the prison system that influence over new social life increase, the scheme of illegality, violence and new types of authority.

One of the approach limitations lies in not considering the adaptive mechanisms of resistance to power, organization, self-regulation and negotiation with authority. The Foucauldian perspective, basically, does not focus on the adaptation, reproduction and transformation processes of illegality and violence in prison institutions.

According to Edwin Sutherland (cited by Pires *et al.,* 2016), prisons would highly be a space of prolific transmission of criminal values and techniques, but these values and techniques cannot be conceived without a complex intersection and juxtaposition of exogenous and endogenous variables bringing the criminal world to life through the prison space. Criminal agency then cannot be conceived without the spatial factor, characteristic of the ecological approach to crime.

## Violence, prisons and complex crime

Violence is an inherent characteristic of prisons. Suffering, sorrow, pain, torture and lamentations are part of the dark and silent history of prisons, only known through the fragmented accounts of journalists, human rights defenders, academics, officials and inmates. In the Foucauldian view, prison is a scheme of surveillance and punishment that look for control and discipline individually to an important spectrum of the population that has transgressed the law (Foucault, 2008). Yet, this type of institutional or "legitimate" violence is not the only one. In reality, an array of illegitimate violence coexists in prisons, ranging from interpersonal violence (aggressions) and criminal violence (murders, extortions), violence of resistance and rebellions and other types of violence, informal extrajudicial institutions, torture, executions, among others. From Galtung's standpoint (cited by Calderón Concha, 2009), there are also other types of violence, not necessarily physical, such as structural violence (poverty, exclusion, extreme confinement, overcrowding, corruption) as well as symbolic violence (racism, exclusion, machismo, among others). Such violence can come from both external and internal dynamics of the prison system. In general, there is a high interrelation level between these levels and types of violence. In Ecuador, for example, the levels of interpersonal physical violence unfold within the framework of different types of structural and institutional violence typical of the reality of overburdened Latin American prison systems (overcrowding, corruption, human rights violations, prison mobs, among others) (WOLA, 2010). Regarding this, the physical criminal violence referred to in this paper is one more form of prison violence being explained at the same time by other types of submerged violence, such as structural and symbolic. It is important to note the violence related to complex criminality within prisons. In this context, some authors have characterized this phenomenon as a corporate vision of crime, allowing the organizational aggregation of a series of individual interests around illegal economic and power activities (Abadinsky, 2010; Hofmann, 2009; Ruggiero, 1996). Organization, therefore, becomes an essential attribute to analyze the understanding of complex crime, and also a spontaneous way for the criminal to assign a certain order to the anomic and clandestine world of illegal transactions (De León Beltrán and Silva, 2004, p. 7). The aim is to create a sort of protection from public control through corruption, extortion and violence (Gambetta, 1993; Gilinskiy, 2006). No specific type of organization can be attributed. The criminal environment operates under organizational forms (networks, sizes, specialization), diffuses barriers regarding its internal and external boundaries, diversity of leaderships and decision-making capacity (Alvarez and Rodriguez, 2018). This gives the organization a capacity to dominate and adapt to new reproductive logics of crime.

However, violence does not seem to be a desired product of criminal behaviors, but rather an attribute of illegal rationalities that, in the absence of legal regulatory frameworks, peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms and peaceful competition strategies of competition, constitute the possibilities for regulating highly unstable transactions with high levels of interpersonal distrust (Dombois, 1998). Consequently, according to Gambetta (1993), violence is not the final product or merchandise of organized crime (mobs) but an instrument or means with a specific purpose; it is not a specific natural quality of criminal behavior and/or culture, but an attribute (Llorente *et al.,* 2002, p. 177). This type of instrumental and selective violence can be regulatory, i.e. as a conflict resolution mechanism (settling of scores for unfulfilled agreements, deserters, informers); or strategic-competitive, such as the search for displacement of competitors and control of strategic sites (routes, suppliers, control units, authorities, among others). In a higher level of escalation based on the experience of Mexico, Colombia and Central America, communicative violence also arises, by using traditional media and social networks to generate terror among the population, fear of competitors, state officials, among others. Violence ceases to be instrumental and becomes a commodity, tending to become histrionic, emotive, exuberant, and voluminous due to its communicational role in terms of its frequency (pandemic) (Imbert, 2004). Explosive violence is not a direct consequence of complex criminality, but a form of reproduction of its criminal displays and interests. But beyond this patchwork of legitimate and illegitimate violence, it is worth noting that an abrupt and systematic growth of criminal violence in prisons can only be conceived by the alteration of symbiotic relationships of internal and external rationalities in the criminal world; the outcome of a criminal complexification. For the escalation of violence, therefore, it means to understand the idea of "criminal environment", this time linked to the issue of the prison space and its extensive entailments with the external world.

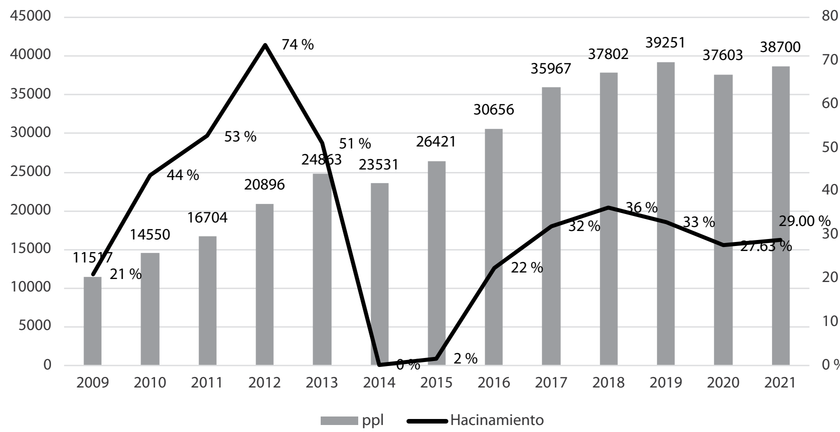
## Prison sprawl, infrastructure and violence in Ecuador

Ecuador expanded its prison infrastructure in 2013 with the aim of overcoming long-standing problems in the penitentiary system, characterized by problems of overcrowding, unsanitary conditions and systematic human rights violations. The main proposals of this intervention were the construction of three new and modern detention centers (with architectural characteristics of maximum-security prisons) located in the provinces of Cotopaxi, Azuay and Guayas (the new Regional Prison of Guayaquil), as well as the modernization of the old Penitenciaría del Litoral (Littoral Penitentiary). This generated a drastic expansion of the prison capacity from 9,000 places to more than 29,000. This measure was part of a broader strategy promoted from 2011 to harden the penal recourse against crime and address the insecurity crisis (Pontón *et al.,* 2020).

Indeed, since 2011, as shown in the following figure, a systematic increase in the prison population was evidenced. In a decade, the prison population practically quadruples, averaging 40,000 inmates between 2019 and 2021. Such a high and explosive rate has not been recorded since prison statistics have been kept. Overcoming the problem of overcrowding was quickly overtaken as from 2015, the existing infrastructure began to be overwhelmed, once again complicating the management of the penitentiary system.

**Figure 2**

*Prison Population and Installed Capacity in Ecuador 2009-2021*




*Note.* SNAI (2021).

Currently, more than 53 % of the country's prison population is held in these new infrastructures. This has imposed diverse logics of corruption and proliferation of mobs not to mention the creation of large and dangerous criminal gangs. A significant fact is that most murders (almost 90 % of the total) have been committed in these new centers. More than 65 % of the murders occurred exclusively in the Penitenciaría del Litoral, which is the largest prison infrastructure in the country and the one with the highest level of overcrowding. Therefore, the new infrastructure and overcrowding have contributed significantly to the proliferation of this new ecosystem of complex criminality in Ecuador.

**Table 1**

*Prisons and levels of violence*

| Name | Type of center | City | Total PPl | Effective capacity | Overpo-pulation | Murders 2019-2021 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Male DF-Guayaquil** | **Remodeled** | **Guayaquil** | **8908** | **5036** | **76.89 %** | **287** |
| **Male DF RZ8-Guayas** | **New** | **Guayaquil** | **3874** | **4368** | **0.00 %** | |
| **MIXED DF RSCN -Cotopaxi** | **New** | **Latacunga** | **4927** | **4600** | **7.11 %** | **43** |
| **MIXED DF RSCS -Turi** | **New** | **Cuenca** | **2286** | **2540** | **0.00 %** | **41** |
| Mixed CPPL - Guayaquil | Remodeled | Guayaquil | 1998 | 545 | 266.61 % | |
| Mixed DF - Santo Domingo | Without any change | Santo Domingo | 1841 | 914 | 101.42 % | 1 |
| Male DF-Esmeraldas | Without any change | Esmeraldas | 1640 | 1110 | 47.75 % | 9 |
| Female DF - Portoviejo | Without any change | Portoviejo | 1637 | 94 | 1641.49 % | |
| Male DF - Machala | Without any change | Machala | 1284 | 524 | 145.04 % | 3 |
| Male CPPL - El Inca | Without any change | Quito | 1007 | 959 | 5.01 % | 1 |

*Note.* Ministerio de Gobierno (2022a), SNAI (2021).

There have been several hypotheses about this problem. However, the suggested hypothesis is that the new infrastructure is directly related to the generation of a complex criminal environment. Notwithstanding, there are other co-factors contributing to this situation. These will be discussed below.

## Prison violence and self-governance Ecuador

Violence in prisons has been present in the history of the Ecuadorian penitentiary system, resulting from a long period of structural and institutional violence, and has been related with the outside world (Kaleidos, 2021). However, analyzing the prison social organization scheme and its close relationship with the criminal underworld, it is important from a historical perspective. It is known that prison measures delinquency, because it is an input and an output of urban criminality. Prison, therefore, would become a kind of catalyst for this problem.

Prison violence as a form of informal regulation has been present in the history of Ecuador. In the 1960s, for example, the practices of rustling and piracy on the Ecuadorian coast led to practices of social extermination, often with state acquiescence. The escape law, informally applied by the State at that time to control crime, had a strong interrelationship with the prison world of the time. In the 80s and 90s, when drug trafficking began to be a priority in criminal policy, overcrowding and limited state management began to germinate the emergence of forms of prison self-government ruled by mobs and complex logics of corruption. Prison protests, insurrections resulted in a significant number of murders inside prisons, imposing themselves as an instrumental form of informal regulation of prison life. As a marginal actor in drug geopolitics, drug trafficking was not a major feature of prisons, but the presence of a large number of managers and small-time traffickers inflated the prison population (Núñez Vega, 2006, pp. 46, 47, 56). Drug trafficking, corruption and extortion were criminal practices of self-regulation of the penitentiary government with a high level of state acquiescence.

Large prisons in Ecuador have been quintessential spaces of self-regulation and reproduction of complex criminality. Since the 1990s, the Penitenciaría del Litoral (inaugurated in 1958) and where the largest number of murders and massacres have occurred since 2019, has been repeatedly denounced as a dangerous place dominated by armed prison mobs with wide influence inside and outside the prison world. As seen in the following image, the presence of mobs inside this prison was already announced in 2008. By 2013, before the inauguration of the new centers, the denunciation is repeated and the occurrence of murders were frequent, although never in the current dimensions.

**Image 1**

*Penitenciaría del Litoral in Ecuador according to journalistic sources 2008*

## La cárcel, en manos de bandas armadas

La cárcel, en manos de bandas armadas

2 de noviembre, 2008 - 00h00

En la Penitenciaría persiste el terror después de los cuatro crímenes de internos ocurridos entre el 23 y 26 de octubre pasado, tres de ellos por enfrentamientos entre bandas.

A esos grupos se los conoce como "mafias" y, según internos y familiares, se dedican a extorsionar, traficar drogas, armas y alcohol, e incluso a violar o asesinar a quien no paga el "empeño" (precio que le ponen al detenido recién llegado).

Hoy, no más de cien internos son los "peligrosos" y, dicen, deben ser llevados al pabellón de máxima seguridad.

Eddy Enríquez Saltos y Soledad Rodríguez León habían sido, según los propios internos de la Penitenciaría del Litoral, dos de los directores más carismáticos que había tenido esa cárcel desde el año 2000. Pese a eso, ambos fueron asesinados (7 de julio del 2005 y 27 de abril del 2007, respectivamente) por 'sicarios' que –según las investigaciones– habían sido contratados por las "mafias" que lideran los internos que hasta ahora operan en el centro carcelario.

The configuration of criminal dangerousness gradually began to undergo important changes as drug trafficking began to take hold as a criminal practice in the 2000s. Plan Colombia and the tightening of drug policy caused the capture of many dangerous drug traffickers of different nationalities, many of them coming from cartels such as the dismembered paramilitaries

(Bacrims) the rastrojos (heirs of the extinct Norte del Valle Cartel) and the FARC that operated in the border area with Ecuador (Plan V, 2019). From this decade onwards, the growing presence of drug traffickers from Mexico and other nationalities also became evident. Similarly, in the 2000s, a local criminal group called "Los Choneros" involved in common crime activities increased logistical service provider to international drug trafficking utterly armed (InSight Crime, 2021).

**Image 2**

*Penitenciaría del Litoral in Ecuador according to journalistic sources 2013*


≡ MENÚ

ELUNIVERSO

La inseguridad y la extorsión persisten en cárceles del país

La inseguridad y la extorsión persisten en cárceles del país

24 de marzo, 2013 - 00h00

Una torre de control de la Penitenciaría del Litoral, en Guayaquil, estaba vacía la mañana del 7 de marzo pasado. **Foto: redaccion**

Controlan todo lo que ingresa. Disponen quién tiene privilegios para portar armas o pasar la condena en cuartos privados con baño propio y comodidades como televisión, comunicación telefónica o internet. O quién duerme en los pasillos sobre el piso, en medio de hedores de las alcantarillas colapsadas y paredes que sudan humedad.

*Note.* El Universo (2008, 2013).

Journalistic sources indicate that at the beginning of the last decade and resulting from “iron fist” campaign against the criminal boom of Rafael Correa’s government, the group of “choneros” was dismantled when arresting its leaders. However, this criminal organization gradually became the most important group in the penitentiary system. Although disputes with rival criminal gangs have been constant, this group has held an informal prison government with strict and tight control along with groups or gangs such as the “ñetas”. It cannot be denied that the government of the “choneros” maintained relative calm inside the prisons at least in the first five years of the 2010s (La Posta, 2021) and maintained relative calm in the streets of Ecuador (Córdova Alarcón, 2021).

In 2018, and with the political and institutional changes of Ecuador’s new government, prison governance has undergone significant alterations. More than 75 % of the deaths since 2010 have occurred in these four years. There are different reasons and range from structural, institutional, operational and criminal issues. Importantly, in 2020 the main leader of the “choneros”, Jose Luis Zambrano, was released and months later murdered. This sparked a trail of revenge and executions in 2021, making it the most violent year in Ecuador’s prison history. Currently, there is an increase of criminal gangs in the prisons, disputing the supremacy of the choneros (Plan V, 2021a). There are two penitentiary facilities only in Guayaquil (the Regional Prison and the Penitenciaría del Litoral) with almost 15,000 people. Each of the 12 wings of the Penitenciaría del Litoral is currently run by different criminal groups (the regional prison adjacent to the Penitenciaría is run entirely by the “choneros”) (Primicias, 2021).

It is not about demonizing self-government; practices encourage cooperation and solidarity among defenseless and deprived people in every sense of the word to a large extent. However, their corrupt practices that promote cycles of violence and complex criminality within the penitentiary centers are condemned. Over the last years, the alteration and growth of mob practices of self-government have become hyper-violent and have caused a general crisis of Ecuador’s security system, whose projection has been regional and international. The year 2021 seems to indicate a complex threshold of uncertain nature and supremely complex to resolve.

**Image 3**
*Prison violence in Ecuador according to international press 2021*

Ecuador: al menos 118 muertos en una cárcel de Guayaquil en enfrentamientos entre bandas rivales con granadas y decapitaciones

Redacción
BBC News Mundo

29 septiembre 2021
Actualizado 30 septiembre 2021



*Note.* BBC News (2021).

## The spread of drug trafficking

The new cocaine geopolitics has turned Ecuador into an important territory for the collection and export of this substance to international markets (UNODC, 2020). This has triggered an aggressive process of regional criminal expansion, being Ecuador one of the main representatives. Only in 2021, more than two hundred tons of drugs were seized, an unprecedented figure historically unheard (Ministerio de Gobierno, 2022b). The cocaine business continues to be by far the financial engine for the proliferation of organized crime. Ecuador's geographic advantages and the logistical services offered for the development of this illicit activity in the country are the competitive advantages that the most liberal advocates of an open economy for the country, but this time at the service of illegality. From being a marginal player in the international drug trafficking industry, it has led to the proliferation of powerful criminal organizations, as was the case of "Gerald" (Ecuadorian extradited to the US) leading a criminal organization specialized in stockpiling and transporting drugs with a certain level of autonomy from foreign cartels (Plan V, 2018). His is a legacy for the identity of Ecuadorian drug trafficking that has been replicated by other groups.

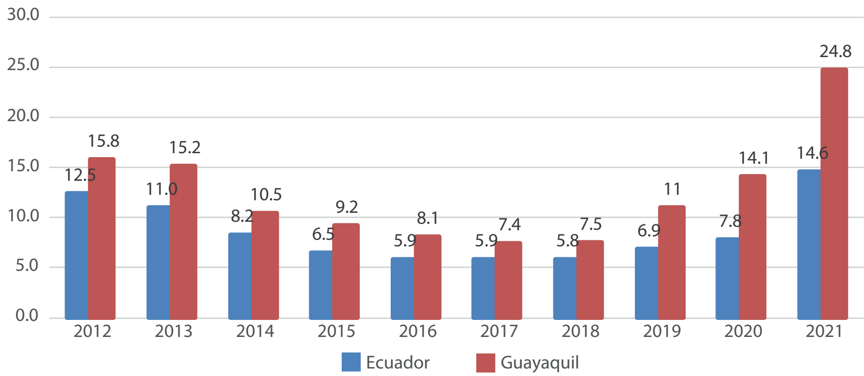
Prison intelligence reports have claimed that international drug trafficking and criminal activities are planned and directed from Ecuadorian prison, partly explaining the bloody disputes between criminal gangs and the violence, given the size of the business. Although there is a constant change, journalistic sources estimate that there are around ten dangerous gangs operating in Ecuador's prisons (Plan V, 2021a). It is known that drug trafficking is financing complex crime (Wainwright, 2016); hence, the proliferation of large and dangerous criminal gangs in Ecuador operating from prisons.

Not only have these disputes occurred inside prisons, but also in the streets. This growth contrasts with a significant decrease in homicides in the last decade, reducing its population from 18 to 5.7 per hundred thousand inhabitants between 2009 and 2017 (Pontón *et al.,* 2020). However, significant increases in this indicator were recorded from 2019 onwards and by December 2021, the rate was again at levels over 14 per one hundred thousand (2,400 homicides in absolute numbers).

Guayaquil has been one of the cities most affected by this crisis of violence and in fact it is the one that has made the greatest contribution to the upturn in homicides at the national level, ranging with a rate of 5.8 homicides per hundred thousand in 2018 to a rate of more than 24.43 % of these deaths are attributed to internal drug trafficking disputes and 70 % to the use of firearms (Ministerio de Gobierno, 2022a). The availability of illicit drug trafficking resources at the hands of small and large-scale drug traffickers is a risk factor fueling different criminal networks that are currently managed from prisons. Consequently, geographically moving this criminal environment from the most dangerous city in the country has emerged as a seductive alternative in terms of public policy. The prison criminal environment in this scenario feeds on this economy and reproduces the polyvalent logics of complex criminality.

**Figure 3**

*Homicide rate in Ecuador and Guayaquil 2012-2021*




*Note.* Ministerio de Gobierno (2022a).

## Management of the prison system

With the arrival of President Lenín Moreno in 2017, there was a surprise political turn in the political management of security that ended in 2018, with a complete restructuring of the country's security services. This resulted in the appointment of new authorities, institutional and legal reforms and changes in the operating models of security and intelligence institutions with a high level of U.S. cooperation. This political operational change is likely to have altered the management of prison intelligence (unit created in 2015) and therefore impacted the growing prison conflict in Ecuador. At the end of 2018, the Ministry of Justice was eliminated and led to the creation of the Service of Integral Attention to Adult People Deprived of Liberty and Adolescent Offenders (SNAI) demoting this competence to the level of service instead of Ministry. After four years with the report of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, it has been proven that this transformation was not adequate as it gave rise to a systematic deinstitutionalization process of the penitentiary system in Ecuador (IACHR, 2021).

However, besides this transformation, the policy of fiscal austerity has complicated the administration and control of this costly infrastructure. With the economic crisis of 2015, the first budget cuts were evident and important investments such as, for example, the prison training school project and other infrastructure to cease control. There is a chronic problem of a shortage of prison guards inside prisons, currently complemented by the National Police without having the technical and legal capacity to do so. Consequently, the relocation of prisoners according to their dangerousness, proposed by the techniques of the new penology of U.S. criminal criminology (Feely and Simon, 1995), has never been fulfilled considering as well that the pandemic led to an abrupt cut of 80 % of the investment budget in 2020. In general, this lack of budget has led to a systematic weakening of state control of prisons and has actually increased the power of criminal gangs and the trail of illegality through corruption and state acquiescence (Asamblea Nacional del Ecuador, 2021).

There are also serious problems of corruption and mobs that have privatized the management of daily life inside prisons (National Assembly of Ecuador, 2021; IACHR, 2021). Thus, the chronic problem of self-government has also been due to the problem of drug trafficking and a failed management process of a new penitentiary model in these large prisons, thereby aggravating the state's response capacity to manage the penitentiary crisis. Large prisons, drug trafficking and state weakness have undoubtedly been the triggers of this violent criminal expansion.

## Mega-prisons, mega-gangs and expressive violence

Famous American criminologist Edwin Sutherland taught that crime is a learning process of criminal values and techniques (Pires *et al.,* 2016). In this regard, having competent subjects in organized crime is one of the main strengths of organized crime (Wainwright, 2016). It seems that the old and hackneyed concept that prison is a "university of crime" is being followed to the letter and this time at the mercy of the proliferation of drug trafficking. In fact, for more than a decade, Ecuador has seen signs of a criminal mutation, whose main component has been the management of international drug trafficking whose teaching center has been "prisons". Arrests of individuals of different nationalities related to drug offenses suggest that in Ecuador, international criminal networks operate together with local networks to ensure control of the supply of an aggressive and at the same time competitive supply of drugs to various destinations around the world in terms of access and prices (El Universo, 2011; Plan V, 2019). Based on this, a new criminal dynasty operating in the country for the maritime transport of cocaine to different consumption centers is the main legacy. The criminal innovation misunderstood by many has found a fertile place in prisons for its transmission (Plan V, 2018). Ultimately, Ecuador gradually went from having networks for drug trafficking to having a dynamic local network that directly and autonomously manages the stockpiling, distribution and sale of drugs to different parts of the world. In essence, a new type of criminal organization in the country, unprecedented and with regional and international projection. Regarding criminal know-how and criminal policy, the system has made the old flaws of imprisoning a large number of people for minor offenses. Almost 60 % of the prison population is incarcerated for crimes against property and drugs, many of them from excluded sectors of society. The illicit economy managed by these gangs that control the prisons and wards is estimated to be considerable. According to some newspaper reports, one of the 12 wards of the Penitenciaría del Litoral can produce between US$10,000 and US$20,000 a day. The prison business includes the sale of drugs, weapons, cell phones, cell rights, beds, food, and any service (La Posta, 2021). No exaggeration to believe that the Penitentiary itself could move more than 30 million dollars a year for the management of this illicit economy, without considering the external illicit businesses. Everything is controlled by these mega-gangs with an expansive level of corruption of the State.

The entries and exits of this population, part of them recidivists, fulfill the cycle of the criminal career through the revolving door, but this time the problem is not institutional, but social. Drug trafficking and other illicit activities offer subsistence alternatives to the imprisoned population and their families, as long as they guarantee their adherence and fidelity. According to the website Código Vidrio (2021), over 60 % of the prison population is estimated to be part, directly or indirectly, of ten criminal groups inside prisons. The "choneros" alone are said to have more than 12 000 members. This becomes a problem of criminal habitus, and prison seems to be a viable option. The social link of organized crime is its main weapon of protection and perhaps its main weapon of strength. This is the only way to understand why narcoculture is a phenomenon already present in the social ideology of many sectors of the population.

**Table 2**
*Criminal gangs identified in the Ecuadorian prison system Ecuador 2021*

| Bands | Average number of members |
|---|---|
| Choneros | 12 000 |
| Lobos | 8000 |
| Lagartos | 1000 |
| Águilas | 1500 |
| Fatales | 800 |
| Tiguerones | 1200 |
| Chone Killers | 900 |
| Gangsters | 200 |
| Pangora | 100 |
| Colón Pico | 20 |

*Note*. Código Vidrio (2021).

This reserve army and its criminal wake has had a high interrelation level with the outside world; the most notorious crimes in the country in recent years have been ordered from prisons. This old scheme now seems to be at the service of society, since any dispute or social and/or criminal conflict would be solved through prison intermediation. It is also likely that some of those responsible or intermediaries of some crimes have already been killed in the massacres, thus contributing even more to the trail of impunity. The prison system appears to have played the role of the intermediary agency for hiring hitmen in Colombia during the most fearsome times of the drug trafficking. A large part of the deaths that have occurred in Guayaquil and its area of influence can be explained by these criminal logics promoted from the prisons. Prison violence has contributed to 35 % of the homicides committed in Guayaquil, and 80 % of the deaths on the streets. The history of these mega-gangs and their leaders seems to be circumscribed to the long list of popular social gangs that conventional history literature tell us little about (Hobsbawm, 1983). Therefore, it would not add up to analyze the power of these prison leaders without considering the media amplification of the mass media and social networks. This situation seems to have been better understood by the prison leaders than by the State itself, generating a war between gangs that is more than drugs, weapons and power; but it is also a communicational and cultural fight. The key to understanding this exuberance of violence, perhaps, can be found in this communicational dispute with other gangs and against the State itself. Its main objective is fear, demoralization and respect. Evil in this regard is also a seductive force, complex and anchored to a cruel, but at the same time seductive, criminal personality. The current prison infrastructure, therefore, is also a space for the reproduction of cultural expressions that have found in violence a complex and dangerous social and regional projection (Plan V, 2021b).

## Conclusions

As shown, the direct effects of the prison crisis in Ecuador have led to unprecedented violence, resulting in disputes between rival gangs. This paper seeks to relate the problem of prison violence in the last four years, leading to an unprecedented crisis in Ecuador's penitentiary and security system, to the criminogenic conditions of the new prison infrastructure, creating an environment for the increase of complex criminality. While it is important to recognize that the factors analyzed are not recent and have been consolidated for many years, it is around the new prison infrastructure and violence where their projection lies. Violence seems to be a phase of the penetration of complex criminality and from pax "mafiosa" theory, it would be comprehensible that it will decrease in the near future. However, there are no winners or losers in the penitentiary crisis let alone peaceful agreements leading to the assumption that it will decrease in the short term. Violence, in this case, seems to have taken on other meanings beyond the instrumental to resolve disputes and criminal conflicts, to a dangerous merchandise with fatal outcomes. It goes without saying that this situation has altered prison governance in Ecuador in recent years. Undoubtedly, the hypothesis of the penetration of complex criminality to explain violence at the institutional and journalistic level in the country seems to be a consistent thesis based on the amount of evidence shown, however, it is necessary to incorporate this concept of criminal environment tied to the problem of the new prison infrastructure for a better understanding of the problem. But this fixation on infrastructure cannot be understood without the historical presence of prison self-government, the State's inability to manage it and, of course, the prevailing criminal policy of the last ten years. Along with these factors, this paper has attempted to account for the complex and dangerous ecosystem of criminal reproduction. This scenario generates the need to have a broad dimension of the problem facing Ecuador. It does not require patchy or repetitive measures, because as analyzed, there is a high interrelation of factors having subjected the prison system to a deep crisis. Through this "ecosystem" idea, it is important to intervene in an integral way combining elements of social, penitentiary and security policy. The absence of intervention could be as dangerous as criminality itself, with unpredictable social, economic and political consequences. If the proposed figure is an "ecosystem", it is essential to alter the contributing factors and avoid their projection.

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REVISTA DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES Y HUMANAS XXI
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# The impact of public policies on film production in Ecuador during the decade 2007-2017

## *Incidencia de las políticas públicas en la producción cinematográfica de Ecuador durante la década 2007-2017*

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***Abstract***

*The aim of this study is to determine the impact of public policies on film production in Ecuador during the decade 2007-2017. With the creation of the Law for the Promotion of National Cinema in 2006, the country initiated a change in film production. The present research is qualitative with an exploratory approach. A literature review was carried out to identify the progress of cinema in the country since the Law for the Promotion of Cinema issued in 2006 and a year later the creation of the National Film Council. Surveys were applied to a group of 200 filmmakers and audiovisual producers for which a questionnaire with six closed questions was designed. As results, it is evident that the lack of foreign investment, the limited application of the Organic Law of Culture and the Communication Law have left cinema out of the priority issues of national development, thus minimizing the creation, distribution and equitable access to different audiovisual contents. The participation of the audiovisual sector in Ecuador's GDP until 2010 was only 0.36 %, the one with the highest number of productions was 2015 with 67 projects and an amount of $1 646 338 with respect to previous years. Despite these gaps, Ecuadorian cinema continues to be characterized by its creativity, entertainment storytelling and resistance that still awaits an upturn.*

***Keywords***

*Cinematography, public policy, production, impacts, communication, culture, creation, exhibition.*

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**Resumen**

El propósito de este estudio es determinar la incidencia de las políticas públicas en la producción cinematográfica de Ecuador durante la década 2007-2017. Con la creación de la Ley de Fomento al cine nacional en el 2006, el país inició un cambio en la producción cinematográfica, la presente investigación es cualitativa con un enfoque exploratorio. Se realizó una revisión bibliográfica para identificar el avance del cine en el país a partir de la Ley de Fomento de Cine expedida en el 2006 y un año posterior la creación del Consejo Nacional de Cinematografía. Se aplicaron encuestas a un grupo de 200 cineastas y productores audiovisuales para lo cual se diseñó un cuestionario con seis preguntas cerradas. Como resultados, se evidencia que la falta de inversión extranjera, la limitada aplicación de la Ley Orgánica de Cultura y la Ley de Comunicación han dejado el cine fuera de los temas prioritarios de desarrollo nacional, minimizando de esta manera la creación, distribución y acceso equitativo a diferentes contenidos audiovisuales. La participación del sector audiovisual en el PIB del Ecuador hasta el 2010 fue solo del 0,36 %, el con mayor cantidad de producciones fue el 2015 con 67 proyectos y un monto de $1 646 338 respecto a años anteriores. A pesar estas brechas, el cine ecuatoriano sigue caracterizándose por su creatividad, relato de entretenimiento y resistencia que todavía aguarda por un despunte.

**Palabras clave**

Cinematografía, políticas públicas, producción, impactos, comunicación, cultura, creación, exhibición.

# Introduction

This study addresses the impact of public policies for the development of the film industry in Ecuador during 2007-2017. It was very difficult to make films in the country due to the high costs of technical resources and lack of support from private enterprise and public institutions; although this activity is a source of economic income it is still not prioritized by the government; considering that it is an effective educational tool to revitalize culture, the identity of peoples, as well as the reconstruction of collective memory.

As stated by Alvarado (2020), cinema contributes to the development of people's awareness with the contents, sometimes making urgent problems visible, as in the case of discrimination and xenophobia. Although the discourse handled is presented in movie theaters, the audience mostly prefers films for entertaining, leaving aside the sociocultural part that affects their daily lives. Currently, digital cinema uses technology to distribute and project moving images, where three fundamental elements are involved in the whole process: production, distribution and exhibition (Batlle and Doll, 2020).

## Background of Ecuadorian cinema

The history of cinema in Ecuador has characterized by constrains to its integral development, and the scarce public policies have not allowed an adequate and competitive production at international level. In its beginnings, cinema was a space for leisure that focused on the middle and upper classes, with very little for the lower classes. In the city of Quito, Jorge Córdovez founded the movie theater company, in 1914 he built and inaugurated four theaters, and did raffles of sweets and household appliances to attract the public. In 1920, some newspapers such as El Telégrafo published Sunday sections about Hollywood. In addition, in the cities of Cuenca and Guayaquil this industry developed between 1923 and 1925, respectively. In the former, the priest Carlos Crespi collected cinematographic material in the Amazon jungle; while in the latter, Carlo Bocaccio and Augusto San Miguel founded a school to start a training process for mime actors (Loaiza and Gil, 2015).

From 1970 onwards, it is possible to speak of Ecuadorian cinema, because before this time, productions were limited, mostly corresponding to the documentary genre made by foreign directors. In addition, fiction works had a high melodramatic content in the Mexican style (Gavilondo and Mercado, 2017). Since 1990, the professionalization of this industry of production and distribution areas begins with Sebastián Cordero's *film* "Ratas, ratones y rateros". Three stages can be established to address the beginnings of filmmaking in Ecuador; the first (1999-2006) is characterized by having a level of willingness to make films considering socio-political aspects of instability, and in the same way the new technological era allowed acquiring new knowledge to improve production aspects. The second stage (2007-2013) was framed by important political and social changes; the creation of CNCINE was a key aspect in the transformation of the film industry. The third stage arises from 2013 in which the executive director of CNCINE is changed, presidential reelection and also the approval of the Organic Law of Communication (Narváez, 2014).

## Ecuadorian cinema in the regional context

There is a similar reality of Ecuadorian cinema with respect to other countries of the region that also face challenges at the production and distribution level. The high presence of U.S. films in the international market becomes a limiting factor for national production, in addition to lack of adequate material and technical resources to position itself in the consumer's mind, as Leal (2020) states "the scarcity of economic resources has consequences on the low technical quality of productions" (p.85). Countries such as Cuba, Mexico, Argentina and Brazil stood out for the production of feature films until the mid-twentieth century.

Becerra and Mastrini (2011) have classified different countries into subsets according to relative access to goods, communication services and culture, which are presented below:

- Argentina, Chile and Uruguay are the countries with the highest comparative levels of social access to media, cultural industries and telecommunications.
- Colombia, Venezuela and Peru have lower indicators of access to these industries than the countries mentioned above; thus, they are above the regional average.
- Brazil and Mexico are countries with high geographic density and infocommunication markets, but despite this advantage, they are below average.
- Ecuador, Paraguay and Bolivia have very limited social access to the cultural industry; the average is well below the regional average.

## Public policies

Wilson (2018) defines public policies as actions executed by the government in the different areas of its activity. They are raised to provide solutions to specific problems demanded by society; these policies must be comprehensive, capable of modifying the current reality to look for the welfare of the population. During Rafael Correa's term in office, the National Plan for Good Living 2013-2017 was designed, in which twelve specific objectives with policies, strategic guidelines and goals focused on improving the country's productive matrix in a sustainable way are set forth. Section 5.4 states:

> Promote cultural and creative industries and enterprises, as well as their contribution to the transformation of the productive matrix) to meet the objective of "promoting cultural industries with diverse and inclusive content". (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo –Senplades–, 2013)

Since 2016, this regulation was replaced by the Organic Law of Culture in which the Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Creation (ICCA) was established as a body responsible for the promotion of this industry and to control the audiovisual content for the promotion and national and international dissemination of different productions.

> In the government of Rafael Correa, resources were invested in audiovisual production, not in a big proportion, but these were higher compared to previous years. In 2013 studies, there were around 40 festivals a year in schools of Ecuadorian cinema in Paris, New York, also of community cinema, small documentaries on the coast, i.e., there were productions: feature films, animations, short films. Works such as Tigra, Ratas, ratones y rateros are still icons because very little had been produced before, one every 5 years. In the government of Lenin Moreno this number reduced even more. (Trujillo, personal communication, 2021)

Likewise, Article 139 of this law establishes the distribution of resources, emphasizing the following:

> Reimbursable and non-reimbursable funds, as well as any assistance or financing in the film and audiovisual sector must be provided to beneficiaries through public project bidding systems and respecting criteria of quality, efficiency, and democratization.

However, in 2017 due to weak management, many projects were suspended and failed to release due to the limited existing economic resources; in addition, other areas of interest were prioritized since it was an election year, leaving aside the artistic and cultural part (Larrea, 2017). In this sense, from a personal communication, Trujillo (2021) states that:

> Current public policies are insufficient; there should be creation of film commissions to facilitate productions, as well as tax incentives for the entire cultural system. Although there is a Ministry of Culture and Heritage and institutes have been created, there is still no real policy of encouragement,

creation, promotion, and dissemination that allows understanding that culture is a human right that all citizens deserve.

Currently, according to the ICCA there are 192 cinematographic works registered between 2017-2019 with the National Secretariat of Intellectual Property Rights (SENADI) among which 64 % are feature films, 34 % short films and 2 % correspond to medium-length films (Sánchez, 2020). Based on statistical figures, there are 302 movie theaters in the country in 21 cities, most of them are in the largest cities: 108 in Guayaquil, 95 in Quito, the remaining number, i.e., 99 are located in 19 cities. Approximately 87 % belong to three large chains: Supercines, Cinemark and Multicines (López *et al.,* 2019).

## Domestic production

Some stages are necessary for designing a film production, among which are: pre-production, production, and post-production. In the first stage, the idea is shaped, researching and organizing elements such as: budget, locations, scripts, technical and artistic team; in the second stage, the filming is carried out and, finally, in the last stage, the visual and sound editing is performed, where the shots are arranged and the narrative sequences are built (Nodar, 2021). Some films that have participated in international festivals and have become references in this industry are: "Ratas, ratones y rateros" (1999) and "Crónicas" (2004) by Sebastián Cordero, as well as "Qué tan lejos" (2006) by Tania Hermida are the feature films and have taken Ecuadorian cinematography to other countries. In addition, "Con mi corazón en Yambo", directed by filmmaker María Fernanda Restrepo in 2011 has won 16 international awards with a successful premiere reaching 150,000 spectators; to date it continues to be presented in educational and human rights advocacy spaces.

"La muerte de Jaime Roldós" directed by Manolo Sarmiento and Lisandra Rivera in 2013 presents a documentary approach with an analysis of national history and a reconstruction of significant events that have allowed the formation of national identity and culture. At the international level, Ecuadorian cinema has had important recognitions and awards, in 2017 the film "Alba" by Ana Cristina Barragan won the award for best fiction film and best screenplay at the International Film Festival of the Countries of the South of the World better known as FIC SUR. On the other hand, the short film "Vida" by Daniel Yépez won the Best Short Documentary category at the sixth International Urban Film Festival (Universidad de las Artes, 2017).

The importance of cinema lies in evoking new knowledge and reactivating debates that were made only subjectively (León, 2019). Before the enactment of the Cinema Law in Ecuador only three feature films were made. The first one "Dos para el camino" in 1981 directed by Jaime Cuesta, and "La Tigra" by Camilo Luzuriaga released in 1990 and was one of the highest grossing films in that year that even beat Batman with 250 000 spectators, and the third feature film was "Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda" based on Jorge Riga. Three feature films were made in twenty years, but there was a boom of productions since the enactment of the Film Law in 2006. The average has remained between ten and twelve feature films to date (Ponce, 2021).

## Materials and methods

This research is qualitative; it has an exploratory approach because "this type of research allows having a first approach to the problem that is expected to analyze and know, and helps the researcher to adapt to a problem that is unknown" (Cortez *et al.,* 2018, p. 22). Specialized literature on the topic was reviewed, as well as the legal regulations governing the film industry in Ecuador, among which are: the National Film Law of 2006, the Organic Law of Culture of 2016 and the Organic Law of Communication with its latest amendment in 2019, in order to analyze their impacts on the development of cinema.

On the other hand, surveys were applied to key actors in order to gather information about their perception on the subject of public policies, their impacts and whether modifications should be made to improve national cinema; also, to know their criteria on the merger of different institutions that currently govern the subject of art, cinema and culture. Non-probabilistic intentional sampling was used considering aspects according to the researcher's judgments as expressed by Hernández and Carpio (2019), "with this method, groups that meet characteristics of interest are included, in addition to intentionally selecting individuals from the population with generally easy access" (p.78); in total 200 filmmakers and producers who are members of the Chamber of Audiovisual Industry of Ecuador were surveyed. The instrument used was a structured questionnaire with six closed questions.

## Results

Rafael Correa governed from 2007 to 2017, time in which several transformations occurred at a sociocultural, political, economic level, and in cinematography with the approval of the Organic Law of Culture of 2016 that repealed and replaced the Promotion Law of National Cinema of 2006 established in the government of Alfredo Palacios and on the other hand, the Organic Law of Communication with its last modification in 2019. In 2007, this government also reformed Executive Decree No. 5 of January 15, which created the Ministry of Culture and Heritage through Executive Decree No. 1507 published in Official Gazette Supplement 960 of May 23, 2013. This entity exercises stewardship of the National Culture System to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions; thus, safeguarding the social memory and cultural heritage, ensuring the full exercise of rights.

The Law for the Promotion of National Cinema aimed to positively contribute to the dissemination and knowledge of customs, history and cultural expressions that are part of the identity of Ecuadorians. Likewise, with the approval of this law, the National Film Council (CNCINE) was created, which allowed important advances in the industry, increasing the number of national productions. The existence of this legal body and the institutionalism of the film industry was developed through the initiative and management of filmmakers. In addition, this law created a Film Development Fund (FFC) which promoted the development of national cinema in its different areas through economic resources from the Ecuadorian State: promotion of production, promotion of circulation and film culture (El Telégrafo, 2016).

Since 2016 this regulation was replaced by the Organic Law of Culture, in which the Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Creation (ICCA) was established as a body in charge of promoting this industry and controlling the circulation of audiovisual content for the promotion and national and international dissemination of different productions. Article 3, in paragraphs b, c, d of this legal regulation establishes the following: b) to promote and encourage the free creation, production, valuation and circulation of products, cultural services and ancestral knowledge and wisdom, c) to acknowledge the work of those who participate in the artistic creation and cultural processes and patrimonial production and management, d) to acknowledge and encourage the contribution to the economy of cultural and creative industries, and strengthen their productive dynamics, articulating the participation of public, private, mixed and popular and solidarity economy sectors.

Article 8 of this law establishes that agencies and institutions of the National Culture System shall implement policies that promote creation, artistic and cultural activity, expressions of popular culture, training, research, promotion and strengthening of cultural expressions, the recognition, maintenance, conservation and dissemination of cultural heritage and social memory and the production and development of cultural and creative industries.

Article 9 establishes the creation of the Integral Cultural Information System, whose purpose is to compile, synthesize, disseminate and enhance the value of cultural and heritage information generated by public, private or community organisms, the artistic community and the public. It is also a tool for the visibility and strengthening of the sector and a means to improve the organization, integration and interrelation of culture and art professionals.

Article 110 of the Organic Law of Culture states:

> The Fund for the Promotion of Arts, Culture and Innovation is hereby created in accordance with the provisions of the Planning and Public Finance Code. This fund shall allocate resources of a non-refundable nature, to creators, producers and cultural managers in accordance with the regulations issued for such purpose, seeking the artistic, cultural and creative strengthening of our society, with quality, diversity, territorial equity and interculturality.

Likewise, Article 139 of this law establishes the distribution of resources, emphasizing the following:

> Reimbursable and non-reimbursable funds, as well as any assistance or financing in the film and audiovisual sector, must be provided to beneficiaries through public project bidding systems and respecting criteria of quality, efficiency, and democratization.

Based on the above, figures from the Institute for the Promotion of Creativity and Innovation were reviewed to identify the annual amount that has been granted in the calls for proposals and thus demonstrate compliance with legal regulations and whether or not the number of productions has increased during Rafael Correa’s term in office.

**Table 1**
*Annual amounts awarded in ICCA calls for proposals.*
*First semester*

| Institution | Year | Number of projects | Amount |
|---|---|---|---|
| CNCINE, Call | 2007 | 43 | 839 000 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2008 | 27 | 541 500 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2009 | 33 | 545 000 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2010 | 34 | 660 000 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2011 | 45 | 700 000 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2012 | 42 | 700 000 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2013 | 38 | 904 000 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2014 | 61 | 1 980 000 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2015 | 67 | 1 646 338 |
| CNCINE, Call | 2016 | 20 | 485 000 |
| ICCA, Development Fund | 2017 | 33 | 756 000 |

*Note.* Taken and adapted from Cinema, in Figures of the Institute for the Promotion of Creativity and Innovation, 2020.

## Analysis

Table 1 shows the annual amount granted to film projects from 2007 to 2016 through the National Film Council of Ecuador. In this decade, the years with the highest number of productions were 2007 with 43 projects and with a considerable amount of $839 000 with respect to previous years where cinema was not taken into account. The years 2011 and 2012 with 45 and 42 projects, respectively had a similar amount of $ 700 000. 2014 with 61 productions and 2015 with 67 were years where the amount was higher with respect to previous years with 1 980 000 and 1 646 338, respectively. However, 2016 presented the lowest amount of the entire decade as it only had 20 productions and a very low economic amount.

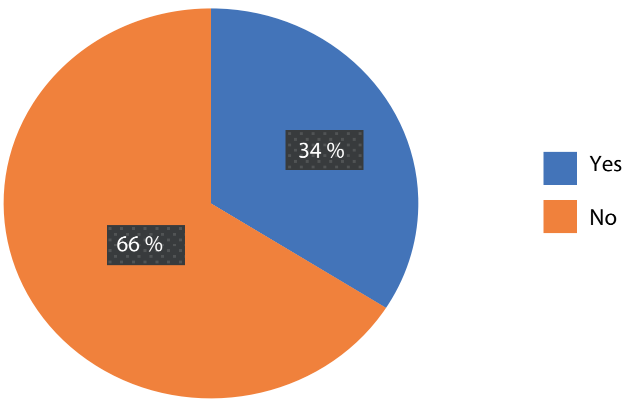
In 2017, the ICCA grants an amount of $756,000 through the Development Fund line, which is higher than the previous year, corresponding to 33 projects. In this period there was an advance in terms of film productions, being a significant progress.

> The competitive funds are good; however, there is no follow-up of the state when an award is won or of what is being done regarding an audiovisual production. In addition, there is no statistical measurement or studies on tangible results in the reports presented: there should be a socio-cultural analysis of the work that is developed. (Trujillo, personal communication, 2021)

The results of the survey are presented below. In the first question: Do you believe that public policies of the film industry have favored the development of cinema in Ecuador? A majority percentage represented by 66 % indicates that public policies have not favored the development of cinema in Ecuador, while a minority percentage of 34 % reflects an affirmative answer to this question. National legislation is not sufficient in the country as can be seen in Figure 1. In addition, there are still limitations that favor the development of this industry; therefore, an active participation of different public-private actors is necessary to promote policies that adjust to the national reality. In this sense, Trujillo (2021) points out that:

> A circulation, projection and exhibition policy has not been designed; small local festivals are needed, as well as contributions from the state where rights are released, and a strong legal framework that guarantees the rights of creation, promotion, circulation and visualization.

**Figure 1**
*Public policies in film development*

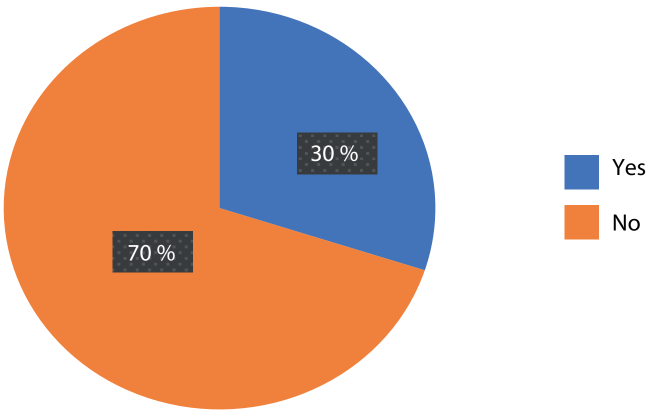



*Note.* Surveys applied to filmmakers and audiovisual producers in Ecuador, 2021.

The second question: Do you consider that national legislation is sufficient for the development of cinema? Seventy percent of respondents believe that the national legislation is not sufficient for the development of cinema, while a percentage represented by 30 % had an affirmative answer. The current legal regulations are necessary to improve this area, the laws that govern national cinema still present flaws at the level of application. Some are fully complied with while others are not; this generates disadvantages for those who are dedicated to this activity, limiting the development of productions that allow them to achieve competitiveness in the international market. It is important to consider that incentives play an important role in cinematography and in the activities that are immersed in a creative industry. Improving relations with the knowledge sector: universities, institutes, research centers should be a governmental strategic axis where it is possible to achieve effectiveness in the design of policies with viable long-term strategic plans through coordinated work (Benavente and Grazzi, 2017).

**Figure 2**

*Considerations on national legislation*



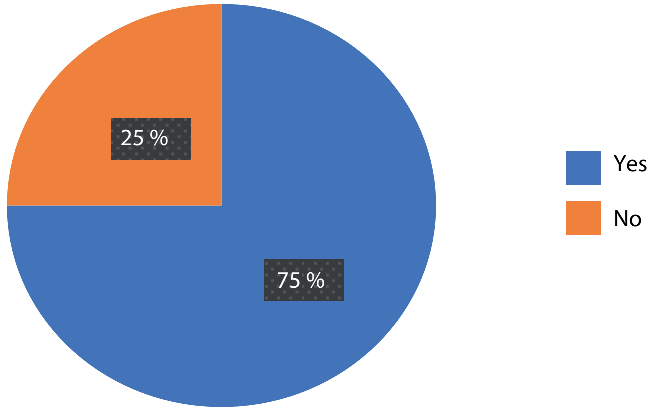

*Note.* Surveys applied to filmmakers and audiovisual producers in Ecuador, 2021.

Question 3, Do you believe that the State should participate in the financing of film or audiovisual production? Seventy-five percent of respondents said that the State should be involved in this aspect, since filmmaking is a costly activity in its different stages. Therefore, state investment is necessary to support the national work of entrepreneurs engaged in this activity. A percentage represented by 25 % expressed that the participation of the State is not necessary; different financing sources should be sought.

> The amounts involved are low and there are no fiscal incentives. The largest fund that uses two categories per year can increase up to $80 000 000, which is enough for two films per year; on the other hand, there must be a track record to get the funds. In the same way, if managing to get the money in an economic film, it is equivalent to 30 % of the budget and it is what offers more. Other projects offer $10 000, which is not enough. (Ponce, personal communication, 2021)

**Figure 3**

*State participation in the financing of cinematographic or audiovisual production*

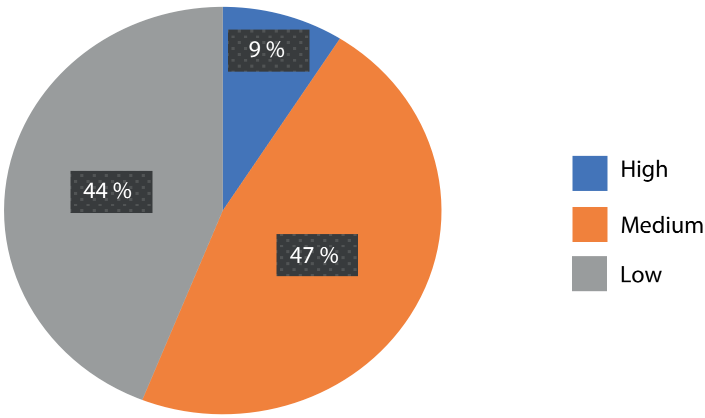



*Note.* Surveys applied to filmmakers and audiovisual producers in Ecuador, 2021.

The fourth question was: How would you rate the impact of the Organic Law of Culture on the development of the film industry? Most of the respondents represented by a percentage of 47 % indicate a medium impact of the Culture Law on the development of the film industry, 44 % express a low impact and only 9 % consider that this law has had a high impact on the industry. The law should guarantee that the State, represented by the Ministry of Culture, concentrates its efforts on promoting film and audiovisual production and accompanies these processes. Article 26 (b) of this law establishes the importance of "generating public policy for research, updating, management, training, production, dissemination and activation of social memory, cultural heritage, arts and innovation". Although there are different projects, there are still deficiencies in the statistical management of audiences. The lack of real data on reactions and perceptions of people regarding a cinematic experience is evident (López *et al.,* 2019).

**Figure 4**

*Impact of the Organic Law of Culture*

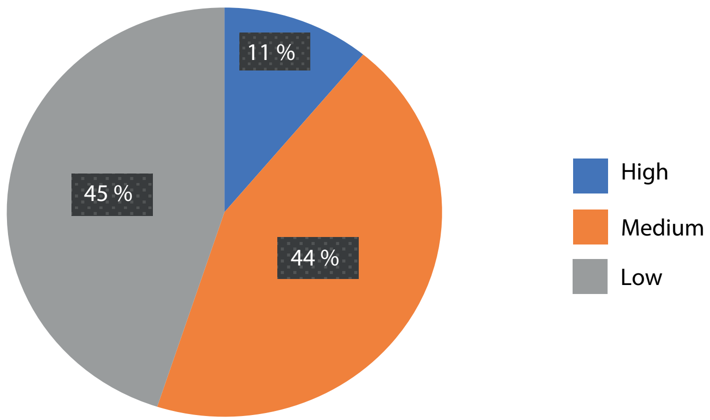



*Note.* Surveys applied to filmmakers and audiovisual producers in Ecuador, 2021.

The fifth question emphasizes the impact of the Organic Law of Communication on the development of the film industry; most of respondents represented by a percentage of 45 % indicate a low impact of the Organic Law of Communication on the development of the film industry while 44 % and 11 % consider a medium and high impact, respectively. The Organic Law of Communication contemplates a screen quota for national cinema in national channels. Article 97 establishes the following: "the audiovisual media, which is national, will progressively allocate at least 60 % of their daily programming in a schedule suitable for all audiences; it points out that the content must include at least 10 % of independent national production". However, the channels prefer to pay fines rather than buy national content, where in most cases, the best purchases are for directors with a longer trajectory, leaving aside young filmmakers. A positive aspect of this regulation is the creation of community media; there can also be cultural management that allows to encourage, promote, disseminate and create products.

**Figure 5**

*Impact of the Organic Law of Communication*




*Note.* Surveys applied to filmmakers and audiovisual producers in Ecuador, 2021.

Question 6, Which of these aspects do you think is the greatest challenge for Ecuadorian cinema? achieving profitability is in the first place, with a percentage of 55 %.

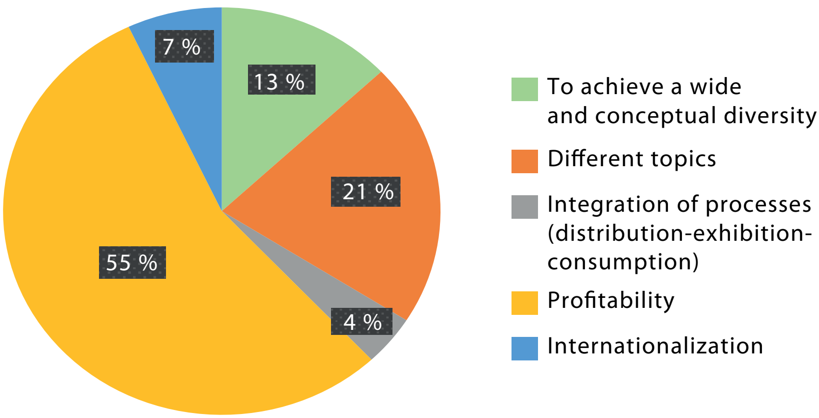
> We cannot depend economically on the State for producing short films because cinema will never be a government priority. The ideal would be to support culture because cinema is the reflection of a country's culture. In this context, it is important that the state generates the conditions for a private producer to create cinematographic works. (Smolij, personal communication, 2021)

The development of a different thematic in the productions is in the second place with 21 %. Achieving aesthetic and conceptual diversity is in third place, with 13 %. Minority percentages represented by 7 % and 4 % correspond to internationalization and integration of processes (distribution, exhibition and consumption) respectively. In Ecuador, distribution is an activity carried out by the producers or directors of a film. At the national level, it is necessary for public policies in this industry to be comprehensive and holistic, focusing on production, marketing and exhibition with state protection in several aspects: regulation of screen quotas, preferential taxes, promotion and dissemination, as well as tax exemption on the exhibition and export of films (Larrea, 2017).

> In this context, there are international organisms to achieve co-production alliances with another country by participating in their competitive funds; while there are audiovisual works that have co-production with budgets from state funds. However, cinema is not yet an industry in the country so it does not represent anything for a foreigner without the existence of fiscal funds, the country is not yet commercial to achieve an investment. (Obando, personal communication, 2021)

**Figure 6**

*Challenges for Ecuadorian cinema*




*Note.* Surveys applied to filmmakers and audiovisual producers in Ecuador, 2021.

## Conclusions and discussion

- During the presidency of Rafael Correa; the Organic Law of Culture of 2016 established the Institute of Cinema and Audiovisual Creation (ICCA) with the aim of promoting the development of productions at national and international level. In addition, the Organic Law of Communication with its last modification in 2019 has positive guidelines as it benefits audiovisual and musical production, promoting national talent. However, among the disadvantages of this regulation are: radio and television owners and producers have been affected since they cannot broadcast international programming at the desired times.
- The Film Industry in Ecuador has had significant progress in the last ten years. In 2018 around 30 productions and 18 feature films of great impact at national and international level were conducted highlighting two genres: documentary and fiction. In identifying the transformation of the film industry from the Ecuadorian regulatory framework, the existing laws for this area still have deficiencies that do not allow achieving competitiveness, where generating profitability becomes a challenge of national cinema that must be accompanied by state incentives to encourage private investment and achieve institutional strengthening.
- In this period, cinema was not a priority area. According to data provided by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, the participation of the audiovisual sector in Ecuador's GDP until 2010 was only 0.36 %. The years 2014 and 2015 had a high budget and developed around 67 projects; although the number of projects increased, the budgets allocated to the film industry were low to achieve a national production positioning at the international level.
- At the national level, research in cinema is limited, there are no repositories for audiovisual works, and there are no special theaters for projecting national cinema. In other words, there are no minimum conditions for the development of this area, which still cannot be considered an industry compared to countries in the region such as Argentina and Chile, which in recent years have had significant progress in the development of their productions.

## Discussion

There is lack of culture in Ecuadorian with respect to cinematography, since most prefer Hollywood films. It should be considered that the purpose of state agencies is to conduct studies on audiences, consumption and also reception of cultural goods; this statistical process is still incipient considering that there is still no real importance given to this area, taking into account appropriate indicators for the dissemination of cultural products. Although efforts have been made to promote the development of the film industry, production should emphasize the expansion of its circulation, i.e., access, market and consumption. There are still challenges in capturing the viewer's attention and making him or her think critically about the film and, in the same way, keeping it in his or her memory.

Hollywood has an excess supply of productions in commercial movie theaters; they have more than 100 feature films per year compared to 17 Ecuadorian films in the same period. There is also a very high investment in promotion of the films of the six largest film studios that lead the box office, known as the Six Majors, among which are: Warner Bross. Pictures, Walt Disney Pictures, Universal Pictures, Columbia Pictures, 20th Century Fox and Paramount Pictures. Additionally, the lack of exhibition policies in national movie theaters become limiting factors to achieve box office investment recovery rates and commercial success in national productions (Vaca, 2015).

There are also differences in the distribution process developed in old and new world countries. In the former, the marketing strategies created are rigid and are directed towards large audiences. Both creators and producers participate in this process by testing and making necessary modifications according to market behavior. In addition, different low-cost technologies available compared to traditional advertising media are applied. On the other hand, in the new world sales are on the web, and in this way distribution in retail stores obtain benefits from advertising campaigns created by producers (Sayán, 2017). From this, there is the need to generate work spaces in which different social actors from public and private enterprise can develop projects using strategies from their perspective and real need; considering the importance of the role of the State in generating the conditions for cinema to develop.

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REVISTA DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES Y HUMANAS XXI
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# The causes of migration. A brief bibliographical review

*Los motivos de la migración. Una breve revisión bibliográfica*

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**Abstract**

*Migration has been a constant since the beginning of history and, in recent years, it has increased both in developed and developing countries due to different reasons. Therefore, its analysis is necessary for its understanding and control. Hence, the aim of this research was to identify and describe the most frequent reasons that motivate migration, according to the available literature. To achieve this, an in-depth bibliographic review was carried out, through the analytical-synthetic method, during the period 1982-2022. The selection of the theoretical material used was carried out through a signing process, following the inductive-deductive method. The results indicated that there are at least five main categories that promote migration, these being economic, social, political, demographic and ecological, each with its own reasons. It was concluded that the migratory phenomenon does not occur within a specific temporality, but in different periods of time. In addition, the factors that are contemplated among the mentioned categories usually develop simultaneously, which contributes to the complexity of analysis and solution of this phenomenon. Also, the characteristics of the place of residence of individuals have a significant influence on migration.*

**Keywords**

*Migration, migration reasons, economic reasons, social reasons, political reasons, demographic reasons, ecological reasons.*

**Resumen**

El fenómeno migratorio ha sido una constante desde el inicio de la historia y, en los últimos años, ha incrementado tanto en los países desarrollados como en los que están en desarrollo por diferentes motivos. Por lo tanto, su análisis se hace necesario para la comprensión y control del tema en cuestión. Por ello, el objetivo de esta investigación fue identificar y describir los motivos más frecuentes que llevan a la migración, de acuerdo con la literatura disponible. Para lograrlo se llevó a cabo una revisión bibliográfica profunda, a través del método analítico-sintético, durante el periodo 1982-2022. La selección del material teórico utilizado se realizó mediante un proceso de fichaje, siguiendo el método inductivo-deductivo. Los resultados indicaron que existen al menos cinco categorías principales que propician la migración: económica, social, política, demográfica y ecológica, cada una con sus motivaciones particulares. Se concluyó que el fenómeno migratorio no se suscita dentro de una temporalidad específica, sino que aparece en diferentes periodos de tiempo. Además, los factores incluidos en las categorías mencionadas tienden a desarrollarse simultáneamente, lo que contribuye a la complejidad de análisis y solución de este fenómeno. Así mismo, las características del lugar de residencia de los individuos influyen significativamente en el proceso de abandono del lugar de origen.

**Palabras clave**

Migración, motivos de la migración, motivos económicos, motivos sociales, motivos políticos, motivos demográficos, motivos ecológicos.

## Introduction

Migration is a constant phenomenon in human life (Gutiérrez *et al.,* 2020); in fact, Sutcliff (1998) explains that current world populations come from African migrations of the past. Indeed, in early times, hunters and gatherers used to face and survive hostile climatic conditions, which did not allow them to stay in the same place for an extended period of time (Alcañiz, 2008). Later, in the glacial era, the settlers crossed the Bering Strait from Alaska to America (Fiedel, 1996).

In the Classical Age, migrations were mostly forced, i.e., exile and ostracism took place. In this regard, Mossé (1987) indicates that banishment is considered a democratic measure, since the purpose of this rule was to remove people considered dangerous from society. In addition, this measure prohibited the exile from participating in any religion, and he could not be in ceremonies, sacred meals, nor could he satisfy his spiritual needs (Fustel, 1982).

In the 15th and 17th centuries, there was a wave of migration from Europe to the Americas, which was mainly due to colonization migrations (Pérez, 2012). According to Irailis and Watson (2018), migrants arrived to populated places in America in 1492 with the arrival of Christopher Columbus, causing the reduction of the diversity of the first settlers of the continent.

On the other hand, demographic movements in the Modern Age caused forced migrations due to the generalization of the slave trade from Africa to the Americas. It is estimated that around 20 million people were forced to leave their place of residence. Consequently, these migrations favored slave traders and plantation owners in the Americas (Sutcliff, 1998).

According to Held *et al.* (2002), the XVI-XVII centuries were marked by religious conflicts which gave way to several waves of migrants seeking to start a new life elsewhere, outside the dogmatic ideals of their countries. Therefore, these situations promoted the emergence of new cities in which the State could not interfere in religious matters.

Later, in the 18th-19th centuries, corresponding to the Contemporary Age, the Industrial Revolution caused the transformation of the economic, social and technological spheres. In this context, peasants were the first to migrate due to the significant reduction of agricultural exploitation and, therefore, there was a migration from rural to urban areas throughout Europe. Thus, there was an intercontinental migration with seasonal or permanent workers and a transatlantic migration (Crosa, 2015).

Likewise, Flores (2009) explains that slave labor in the United States finished with the arrival of industrialization; in addition, forced labor was reduced and free choice labor was allowed with salary included. This situation favored the European population, since it represented a good opportunity for them, in which migration acquired a leading role given the ease of the means for the movement of individuals, in economic and security terms.

At this point, it is important to state that the Contemporary Age was also a time of extreme violence, due to the warlike confrontations that took place at that time, for example the Second World War. In fact, this conflict caused significant displacements of people for political reasons or persecution, such as harassment against Jews, who moved to America and Israel (Alcañiz, 2008).

In the context of recent years, as of January 2021, the total number of international migrants in 2020 was estimated at 280.6 million. Asia has also been identified as hosting approximately 30.5 % of the international migrant population (85.6 million); with the data for the remaining continents distributed as follows: America 26.2 % (73.5 million); Europe 30.9 % (86.7 million); Africa 9.05 % (25.4 million) and Oceania 3.35 % (9.4 million) (Migration Data Portal, 2022).

Also, the impact of the current situation in Ukraine on migration and mobility is significant, as people have left this country due to the recent war conflicts (Migration Data Portal, 2022).

However, among the reasons identified that motivate migration, there are at least five categories that justify it, which are economic, social, political, demographic and ecological. Therefore, this research aims to identify and describe the most frequent reasons related to migration, according to the available literature. Therefore, an in-depth literature review of the abovementioned topics is presented below.

## Materials and methods

This study used the analytical-synthetic method that enable to identify and describe the main reasons that lead to migration. This effort contributes, on the one hand, to the identification of the causes of a phenomenon to later relate them to each other (Lopera *et al.,* 2010); and, on the other hand, it is framed in the traditional research approaches that prioritize the factors of expulsion and migration (Mora, 2013); thus, allowing to fulfill the objective proposed in this research. Reports from international organizations were obtained, as well as specialized articles on the topic. In addition, the Scopus, Redalyc, Scielo and Google Scholar databases were used to select and obtain the theoretical basis, prioritizing two search criteria: key terms and temporality. For the first, the words "history of migration", "causes of migration" and "migratory flows" were used. For the second, the time period of the last five years (2018-2022) was prioritized. However, since the figure of the migration era in the last decade of the 20th century was constructed and the historical scenarios were constituted by a series of activating factors to the migratory trend at the beginning of the 21st century (Martínez Pizarro, 2000), it is justified that the research includes bibliography prior to the aforementioned period. It is important to mention that no exclusions were made either by language or by geographical area of origin. Finally, a total of 76 citations were obtained.

Subsequently, the bibliographic material was filtered and selected according to the title, abstract, number of citations or impact and conclusions of each article, making it possible to organize them in order of importance. Then, a sample of 25 articles was selected and subjected to the inductive-deductive method, which allowed obtaining the works that contributed to identifying and describing the causes of migration. The articles that did not contribute to the fulfillment of the objective were replaced by others, following an order of importance, as well as the criteria indicated in previous paragraphs.

## Results

### Background

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as:

> Any person who moves, or has moved, across an international border or within a country, away from his or her usual place of residence regardless of his or her legal status, the voluntary or involuntary nature of the movement, the causes of the movement; or the duration of his or her stay. (quoted in United Nations, n.d.-a, para. 4)

Hence, it is established that migration is usually motivated by reasons that, although diverse, cause people to leave their place of origin looking for a better lifestyle. Along these lines, according to the literature, there are at least five categories that explain the reasons for migration, which are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Categorization of the causes of migration*

| Category | Causes |
|---|---|
| **Economic** | 1. High unemployment rates<br>2. Inflation<br>3. Globalization |
| **Social** | 1. Violation of human rights<br>2. Gender violence<br>3. Female migration<br>4. War conflicts<br>5. Request for political asylum<br>6. Terrorism and high crime rates<br>7. Racial oppression<br>8. Religious oppression<br>9. Lack of medical care<br>10. Lack of educational opportunities<br>11. Family regrouping |
| **Politicians** | 1. Corruption<br>2. Political instability<br>3. Conflicts:<br>• Communism<br>• High legal regulations in taxes to be paid. |
| **Demographics** | 1. The level of the active population and aging of its population.<br>2. Falling birth rate<br>3. Overpopulation |
| **Ecological** | 1. Crop losses:<br>• Droughts<br>• Contaminated environment<br>• Lack of complementary products<br>2. Natural disasters:<br>• Earthquakes<br>• Volcanic eruption<br>• Floods<br>• Droughts<br>• Contamination<br>• Tsunamis |

*Note*. Makowski and Constantino, 1995; Palacios Zarco, 2007; Eche, 2018; Massey *et al.,* 2009; Jiménez, 2010; Lotero-Echeverri and Pérez-Rodríguez, 2019; Lotero-Echeverri *et al.,* 2019; International Organization for Migration, 2013; García Sánchez, 2016; Domenech and Pereira, 2017; Núñez, 2008; Prado, 2014; (Luque *et al.,* 2019; Sotomayor *et al.,* 2014; Aruj, 2008; Gutiérrez Silva and Romero Borré, 2020; Cortés Maisonave, 2006, Milanovic, 2013; ECLAC, 2017; Gasper *et al.,* 2016; Gómez, 2010; Oyarzun de La Iglesia, 2008; Mervyn, 2014; Woldeab, 2019; Lustgarten, 2019; Robles, 2011; Bordas Santacreu, 2021; Cabieses *et al,* 2018; Hill *et al.,* 2004; Tapias Cote, 2014; Alcalde Campos, 2010; Dagger, 1999; Valencia, 2012; Gómez Sabaini and Rossignolo, 2015; Acosta Argote, 2021; Sociedad, 2021.

## Economic

### High unemployment rates

Suárez (2008) states that high unemployment rates in the country of origin cause migration. In addition, high levels of business requirements in terms of academic training and experience become labor barriers, especially for young people. As a result, the chances of finding a stable job are reduced.

In this same context, it should be noted that migration only occurs when earnings outweigh expenses or, at least, when people believe that changes of residence will lead to economic improvement. In fact, in the past, the main migrants were the heads of households; however, nowadays, the more family members can contribute to increase profits, the lesser the need to migrate (Makowski and Constantino, 1995).

Indeed, after a strong impact on the world economy due to the Covid-19 pandemic, unemployment rates skyrocketed, as many people faced vulnerable conditions due to the loss of jobs and income. Other increases were clandestine migration, the risk of trafficking and the immobilization of migrants in transit who do not have a stable place of residence due to border closures.

### Inflation

Inflation can be negative for families because, added to the economic instability of the country of origin, the increase in the price of goods and services causes the depreciation of the currency. Thus, the loss of purchasing power, added to the economic instability that many families go through, force them to leave the country of origin and seek societies that have a stable economy (García Sánchez, 2016).

### Globalization

Globalization is considered a cause of the migratory phenomenon because, although it creates opportunities, it also takes them away as a result of the significant increase in labor competition, also affecting aspects of society, from culture to ideology, economy and migration. Consequently, professionals and non-professionals who are affected opt to work in other countries with a better salary, a transcendental factor when making this decision (Rivas, 2019).

## Social area

### Violation of human rights

According to Amnesty International's World Report (2022), worldwide, abuse and marginalization of men, women, boys and girls are the main triggers points of migration in the context of human rights violations. Therefore, individuals try to move away when facing situations of danger or threat. On the other hand, in terms of cases of modern slavery arising in insecure environments and that make people to be at risk of becoming victims of sexual violence, human trafficking, forced labor and kidnapping, they will also opt to replace the place of residence for another that provides more security and a better quality of life (Cabieses *et al.,* 2018).

### Gender violence

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), gender-based violence is defined as any act of violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm to a person because of his/her gender (UNHCR, n.d.). In this regard, the Amnesty International World Report (2022) indicates that during the last year, 3427 homicides of women were recorded in Mexico, of which 887 were investigated as femicides. For its part, in Colombia, the Observatory of Femicides in 2021 reported 432 femicides in the first eight months of the year. In Puerto Rico, there were 511 reports of domestic gender violence. Finally, Peru, Uruguay and Paraguay established a state of emergency due to the increase in cases of female rape. For this reason, the search for personal and family well-being becomes a trigger for migration to places where human rights are valued, listened to and applied (Petit, 2003).

### Female migration

Abuse is associated with a person's lack of power to make her own decisions. Thus, when a woman feels threatened or feels that her children are in danger, either by physical or psychological aggression on the part of her partner, and also feels that she cannot retaliate against him, either by force or by legal means, she is forced to leave the country of residence to look for a more suitable environment, with conditions for a dignified life; even if this means abandoning any connection with her former life (Palacios Zarco, 2007).

According to the Migration Data Portal (2022), in the geographical area of the Americas, the number of international migrant women up to mid-2020 was 377 million; in Europe, 44.7 million; in Asia, 35.8 million; 12 million in Africa; and, finally 4.7 million in Oceania due to war, economic and political instability, gender violence and unemployment.

## War conflicts

Political conflicts and opposition of interests in the country of origin, especially under a dictatorial government regime, cause social peace to be affected and migration to be a possibility, where the actors involved are civilians, military force and political authorities, the former being the most violated (Suárez, 2008).

These wars can be of two types: unarmed and armed conflicts. The first one does not involve the use of weapons against the integrity of human beings, but are manifested through protests, strikes, etc. On the contrary, the latter involves the use of physical or chemical weapons intended to harm the integrity of people (Suárez, 2008).

Hence, the inhuman situations caused in this context justify the displacement of people to other countries. The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is an example, where the latter nation has been declared by UNHCR as a level 3 emergency zone (the highest), due to the speed at which the humanitarian crisis is growing, which has forced citizens to look for safety in neighboring countries such as Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Slovakia and Romania (UNHCR, 2022b).

## Request for political asylum

In the context of internal wars, when conflicts and opposition of ideas occur due to political discrepancies, it is common for those in a position of power to threaten the life or freedom of their opponents. This situation can trigger what is known as a request for political asylum, considered as a resource used by the persecuted to settle in a foreign country that offers security and non-extradition to their country of origin (D'Alotto *et al.,* n.d.).

Such is the case of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, where refugees and their families seek political asylum, causing them to move to places where they are provided with shelter, safety, food, medical care, sanitary equipment, visas, cash subsidies for food and clothing, and children study in local schools in countries such as Romania and Hungary (UNHCR, 2022a).

## Terrorism and high crime rates

Terrorism is understood as the series of violent acts directed against civilians, in addition to encompassing most media and having previously defined objectives, where people are involved in creating an atmosphere of fear, insecurity and fatalism to pressure and try to change political, economic and/or criminal decisions (Naciones Unidas, n.d. b).

Around half a million people died in this scenario, and more than 89 000 individuals were victims of active armed conflict and another 19 000 of terrorist attacks in 2017, causing people to mobilize and seek safer places (Naciones Unidas, n.d. c).

## Racial oppression

There are members in each social system who are the dominant ones. Thus, the term 'race' emphasizes the physical differences of a group of people and they are at the mercy of abuse by the dominant people for not being "normal". The idea that a person is not part of the socially dominant group provokes prejudice, generalization and discrimination of these people (Mervyn, 2014).

Although in recent times there has been an attempt to fight racism worldwide, prejudice to certain groups is still very violent. Such is the case of Asian people living in countries such as Italy, Germany, United States and the United Kingdom, who have suffered physical attacks, excessive insults, violence against their businesses and even extended quarantines, just for being part of the Oriental community (Rangel, 2020). In Latin America, Afro-descendants do not have the same inclusion or employment opportunities, causing these individuals to exclude themselves and form their own communities, away from people who intimidate them or simply choose to migrate away from their places of birth (CEPAL and UNFPA, 2020).

## Religious oppression

People who are believers and identify with a religion have their own customs and are very sensitive to confrontations by other beliefs (Cabieses *et al.,* 2018). This is not a current issue as religious oppressions existed since the Middle Ages, such as the crusades, which were called holy wars for persecuting all those who were Jewish Christians, Orthodox, Greeks and Russians with beliefs different from those of the Catholic Church, forcing people belonging to other religions to flee to other countries (Rodríguez García, 2000).

Religious oppression can range from offensive comments to hostile actions against the believer. Therefore, this discrimination towards the beliefs of the other forces people to isolate themselves and look for other places where they can develop professionally and socially, without being treated unfairly because of their religion (Steil *et al.,* 2019).

## Lack of medical care

Migration for health reasons can be caused by economic and social reasons, as a large part of countries have scarce resources and, therefore, a deficit in medical care. Consequently, people are forced to find new places of residence (Amnistía Internacional, 2022).

Along these lines, the pandemic is wreaking havoc in countries where access to medical care and vaccines is unequal and limited. Such is the case in the Americas, where lack of funding and transparency, as well as corruption and widespread neglect of public services by different governments explain a large part of the severity of the crisis, as well as an accelerated increase in migration flows (Amnistía Internacional, 2022).

## Lack of educational opportunities

The laws and policies of most governments do not guarantee access, permanence, and quality of education for the population, even though it is a fundamental right. Consequently, human potential is wasted and gives way to displacements to new places with better educational opportunities (UNESCO, 2019).

In fact, according to UNESCO figures (2019), 1 out of 8 migrants for educational reasons, stabilize in the foreign country given the greater number of job opportunities after having had the necessary education.

While exclusion in education has increased by Covid-19 in 40 % of countries worldwide, there has been no support for at-risk students during the health crisis. In Latin America and the Caribbean, before the pandemic, almost 12 million children and young people were excluded from education, and poverty represented the main barrier to access to education. For these reasons, people are motivated to migrate to areas where education is more inclusive, diverse and with more opportunities (UNESCO, 2020).

### Family reunification

The search for new and better opportunities in foreign countries has forced migrants to abandon their families; however, once they have managed to settle down properly, they have the desire to reunite with their spouses, children, parents, etc. In this context, migrants will look for the welfare of the family; using administrative processes to bring their family to their place of residence to provide security, opportunities and emotional stability, especially when it comes to children (Alcalde Campos, 2010).

## Politics

### Corruption

Corruption is a driving force for migration because it impacts and destabilizes the economy of countries, not only by affecting and diverting money that could be used to invest in the health, education and security of citizens, but also by causing losses in the progress of services at the public community level, moral damage to the workers of the institutions involved, harm to innocent colleagues, decreased trust in public authorities and a decrease in foreign investment. These acts, which affect society and countries where human rights are better respected, increase the number of people wanting to leave and settle elsewhere with better life opportunities (Soto, 2003).

### Political instability

Political instability is another cause of migration, since people living in this situation are uncertain that the current government may collapse due to conflicts with its competitors or with the government militia, since the economic growth of a country and its industrial development is closely linked to its political stability. It should be emphasized that it is not a matter of a government not changing over a long period of time, but rather that there are no radical changes in the laws (Suárez, 2008).

## Conflicts

### Comunism

Communism is a political belief whose goal is government control of the main areas of production and the elimination of capitalism. It is about living in a society where everyone receives the same without prejudice, where the government shares the wealth of the country equally. However, people are forced to be conformists in most nations under this regime. Therefore, individuals are motivated to change their place of residence, where they can achieve opportunities for a better quality of life (Dagger, 1999).

### High Legal regulations in taxes

The level of tax rates and taxable bases, most of the times exceed the level of profits of a company. i.e., the expenses that the organization has, plus the government taxes for carrying out its work, leaves the company with zero or limited profits. This inequality forces the taxpayer to make decisions, such as closing his business, as well as abandoning his desire to be self-employed. Consequently, this also causes an increase in the unemployment rate, leaving many families without a stable livelihood to meet their most basic needs and thus forcing them to migrate (Gómez Sabaini and Rossignolo, 2015).

## Demographic aspect

### The level of the active population and aging of the population

The level of productivity drops considerably in countries whose population is aging and are popular destinations for retirees, as the very age of the occupants changes the population functioning. These places are important tourist destinations; however, they are unable to provide employment for all their occupants and, with respect to young people, they leave these countries in order to look for a better social situation, especially when they are in marriageable age and want to have a family (Valencia, 2012).

### Falling birth rate

Related to the latter, the aging of the population causes low birth rates since the younger population chooses to look for a partner outside the country of origin. In addition, a movement is developing where young people are not interested in forming families, due to the difficulties it implies. This scenario is worrying, as most young people are moving to countries outside their own in order to fulfill their goals, without intending to return to their country of origin (Huenchuan, 2018).

### Overpopulation

Migrations usually occur because countries have an excess of personnel of any age, which leads to having specialized competence for different jobs; physical discomfort, as they are forced to live in apartments that can measure between 1.5 and 2 square meters; and a lower life expectancy due to the existing pollution. All these factors, added to the stress to maintain their social and economic level, have caused several citizens to leave their countries of origin and settle in different parts of the world, looking for physical and mental wellbeing (Acosta Argote, 2021).

## Ecological aspect

The Earth is undergoing drastic climatic changes that wreak havoc on the planting and harvesting seasons managed by farmers. To illustrate, prolonged droughts, contaminated land, and non-consumable waters make it increasingly difficult for farmers to produce quality food in a short time (Agencia Europea de Medio Ambiente, 2015). In addition, the world's deserts are expanding and arable places are shrinking. As land fails, hundreds of millions of people are forced to choose between fleeing or dying. The result is likely to be the largest wave of global migration to date (WWF, n.d.). It should be emphasized that although scientists can predict certain disasters, natural catastrophes in general are unpredictable. Hence, people will seek better life opportunities in places other than their original place of residence, making their return unlikely (Migration Data Portal, n.d.).

# Conclusions and discussion

## Discussion

Understanding migration requires a comprehensive analysis of several factors that are sometimes interrelated and therefore occur simultaneously.

This is demonstrated by Paz Noguera *et al.* (2021) who analyzed, through a survey of demographic characteristics, the determinants of Venezuelan migration. It was concluded that there are seven main factors: labor informality, lack of food, inflation, insecurity, corruption, lack of medicines and violence against human rights. In other words, a set of economic, social and political factors. In this sense, Canales *et al*. (2019) agree that migration is usually associated with socio-political crises and economic deterioration in different countries, where socioeconomic inequality and the type of governance influence the migration decision of individuals.

Gachúz Maya (2014) conducted a qualitative analysis of the main causes of China's migration using specific indicators from the survey system. The results showed that migration dynamics and patterns are complicated, diverse and non-stationary issues. Overpopulation, labor market saturation, lack of civil liberties and insecurity stand out as triggers. Thus, in addition to economic and social triggers, demographic factors also play a fundamental role when it comes to specific territorial characteristics. Despite the remarkable economic growth that China has experienced in recent years, economic and social inequality has increased significantly, and there have also been problems in access to public benefits and services, given the significant migration in both the urban and rural sectors of the nation (Correa and Núñez, 2013).

Likewise, the migration study in Europe by Devia-Garzón and Bautista-Safar (2017), explains the features of migration crises since 2015 through a literature review. The results reflected that international conflicts, government policies and inequality are the main elements that trigger migration, highlighting the role played by political and economic elements when deciding to leave a place. Following this line, the Inter-Parliamentary Union *et al*. (2014) explain that for 2015, migration was mainly explained by political, economic and social factors, due to the fact that people avoided those scenarios that violate their human rights, security and integrity; undoubtedly, migration continues to be governed by the survival instinct.

On the other hand, a survey study was conducted in Africa to identify why Africans illegally entered Europe from 39 countries, in order to understand the connection between migration and development. The results indicated that those government policies that give way to slow and limited national development, in the economic sphere with social scope, cause the collectivity to face hostile scenarios, such as scarcity of health care and low wages, which forces them to migrate (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

## Conclusions

Individuals may have one or several reasons for migrating, either economic, social, political, demographic and/or ecological, all of them are targeted to look for a better quality of life, protection of integrity and fulfillment of human rights.

However, three fundamental aspects are clear from the research presented. On the one hand, there is no specific factor to motivate migration, but rather there are different factors that originate it; hence, migration is a constant in the history of mankind. On the other hand, the factors that trigger migration may vary depending on the characteristics of a country; however, they usually occur simultaneously, since the categories to which they belong are interrelated. Likewise, it should be noted that, since it is a social issue, all those categories and aspects that simultaneously affect the lives of individuals and force them to make decisions are inevitably addressed, so that the motivating elements of migration are closely related to each other.

It is recommended that new studies be carried out to determine the triggers of migration as a consequence of the new post-pandemic conjunctural configuration. Regarding public and private administration, it is suggested that the feasibility of government policies be examined, as well as the issues associated with migrant settlements in receiving countries, in order to have a holistic and integral vision of migration. Finally, it is advisable to study migration in accordance with the reality of each country through qualitative and quantitative methodologies, so that it will be possible to establish strategies to mitigate this problem.

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# Gender stereotypes in TikTok and Instagram: a reverse engineering experiment for understanding the mechanisms of social network algorithms

## *Estereotipos de género en TikTok e Instagram: un experimento de ingeniería inversa para entender los mecanismos de los algoritmos de las redes sociales*

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***Abstract***

*In the immersion context of digital content during the COVID-19 pandemic, the popularization of algorithmic mechanisms for curating information in everyday life was evident. This article presents the observations of a reverse engineering experiment carried out at PUCRS (Brazil) which aims to look for evidence of the reinforcement (or not) of gender stereotypes in social networks. For this, accounts were created on the TikTok and Instagram apps, one identified with male pronouns, the other with female pronouns. The study was divided into phases in which the levels of interaction with the content were changed so that it was possible to analyze the transformations in the recommended videos to identify clues to the mechanism used by the platform. Finally, it was possible to observe differences between the content suggested for each profile that may be related to gender stereotypes and differences in quality and popular topics in each application. It was also possible to perceive which actions seemed to have more interference in the recommendations and which type of content or interaction was prioritized for each network. This study does not intend to end the discussions on how social networks operate but to bring new questions and reflections on the parameters used by their logic and the possible positive and negative effects of these recommendations in different social contexts.*

***Keywords***

*Communication, technology, reverse engineering, gender stereotypes, algorithms, TikTok, Instagram.*

**Resumen**

En el contexto de la inmersión de los contenidos digitales durante la pandemia del COVID-19, se hizo evidente la popularización de los mecanismos algorítmicos de curaduría contenidos en la vida cotidiana. Este artículo presenta las observaciones de un experimento de ingeniería inversa realizado en la PUCRS (Brasil) en el que se buscó evidencia del refuerzo (o no) de los estereotipos de género en las redes sociales. Para ello, se crearon cuentas en las aplicaciones TikTok e Instagram, una identificada con pronombres masculinos y otra con pronombres femeninos. El estudio se dividió en fases en las que se cambiaron los niveles de interacción con el contenido de las aplicaciones, de manera que fue posible analizar las transformaciones en los vídeos recomendados para identificar pistas del mecanismo utilizado por la plataforma. Por último, fue posible observar las diferencias entre los contenidos sugeridos para cada perfil que pueden estar relacionadas con los estereotipos de género y las diferencias de calidad y temas populares en cada aplicación. También fue posible percibir qué acciones parecían tener más injerencia en las recomendaciones y qué tipo de contenido o interacción se priorizaba para cada red. Este estudio no pretende acabar con las discusiones sobre el funcionamiento de las redes sociales, sino aportar nuevas preguntas y reflexiones sobre los parámetros utilizados por su lógica y los posibles efectos positivos y negativos de estas recomendaciones en diferentes contextos sociales.

**Palabras clave**

Comunicación, tecnología, ingeniería inversa, estereotipos de género, algoritmos, TikTok, Instagram.

## Introduction

The evolution of digital content that we are experiencing since the expansion of the *smartphone* market and the popularization of *apps* (applications) is increasing. This upward curve was boosted during the COVID-19 pandemic, where the popularization of algorithmic mechanisms for content curation in everyday life became apparent. Smartphone applications have served not only for services, but also for communication in society in various dimensions. In this context, we observe the emergence of new networks, such as the Chinese TikTok, which forced competitors to increase monetization systems with more intense content recommendations.

In June 2022, *The Verge* news portal released a memo to Facebook employees that was leaked to the public, recommending that the company's engineers transform the app's *feed* into something more like that of its competitor TikTok (Heath, 2022). TikTok, launched in 2016, also known as *Douyin* in China, is a video platform with recreational features such as posting, following, sharing, commenting, likes and others. Its difference from other similar platforms, such as YouTube, is that videos tend to be shorter, with a maximum length of 15 seconds, with a minority of videos longer than one minute. In addition, the platform can customize the content offered based on user navigation and categories used in the content (Su *et al.,* 2021).

As Wu (2020) points out, in addition to being a platform in which the dissemination of music fragments, which can be easily included in short sequences, is essential, TikTok is also popular for the narrative in *sitcom* format (situation comedy), sequences based on television series, with the script, characters and dialogues. Its main purpose is more entertainment than social relationship between users. According to Wang (2020), TikTok is positioned internationally to attract a younger audience with funny videos of people singing, dancing, while its Chinese version seeks an older audience with videos about daily routine.

TikTok's strength is seen in its numbers: the app has been downloaded 3.6 billion times. In 2021, the app's downloads were 20 % more than Facebook's and 21 % more than Instagram's. In the first three months of 2022, iPhone users spent on average 78 % more time on TikTok than on Facebook (Heath, 2022). In an interview with journalist Alex Heath, representatives of Meta, the company that owns Facebook and Instagram, stated that the company was slow to realize the growth of its competitor, but was now beginning to understand its social impact. According to the journalist:

> This is how the future of Facebook's app will work in practice: the main tab will be a mix of *Stories* and *Reels* at the top, followed by posts that its discovery engineering recommends from both Facebook and Instagram. It will be more visual, a heavily video-based experience with more precise commands to send a direct message to friends. (Heath, 2022, n/p)

Instagram is closer to this scenario. The app was the first online social network native to smartphones, which appeared in 2010 to share images with the possibility of editing them quickly and putting filters on them, all instantly (Pellanda and Streck, 2017, p. 12). From 2016, the app launched the option of stories, photos and short videos, in which it was possible to insert text and emojis, among other features, which initially had a one-day time limit, but which can be set by the user in their profile so that they do not disappear. Stories can also be posted to a group of close friends or to all followers. Finally, in 2020, Instagram implemented a new format, *Reels*, which features posts in the format of short videos from accounts that the user does not necessarily follow, a model closer to the content and distribution of TikTok.

Although the format of the publications -short videos- is essential, what is striking about Facebook's new direction is the attempt to get closer to the recommendation of the Chinese app in its "For You" tab. If the company was already following a logic of recommended content that used clues from users' preferences by their relationships and likes on the network, TikTok goes a step further, guessing what a user wants by his/her passive habits, so that new videos appearing especially for him/her are unlimited (Heath, 2022). Thus, the first question of this article. After all, what would these cues be and how would they be part of an algorithm that determines what will be shown in a user's *feed*? Going further, how can be proved that the logic used to guess does not reproduce biases, especially those linked to race, sexuality, and gender?

Based on these questions, this article aims to reflect on whether there is any parameter in the algorithms of TikTok and Instagram that may be responsible for reinforcing stereotypes, especially gender stereotypes. Thus, we conducted a reverse engineering experiment in which we looked at the suggested content for two different profiles on the two networks in a way that pointed out the differences and their possible relationships with gender stereotypes.

D'Amorim (1997, p. 122) defines gender stereotypes as "[...] the set of beliefs about the personal attributes appropriate to men and women, whether these beliefs are individual or shared". According to the author, although stereotypes are flexible and change continuously, the cognitive aspects remain more resistant to change than the affective ones, restricting genders to specific roles and characteristics. For example, in Western culture, men are associated with activity, competitiveness, independence, decisiveness and self-confidence, while women are associated with emotionality, kindness, understanding and dedication.

According to Carrera and Carvalho (2020), gender stereotypes are also crossed by those of race and social class. Although this study does not delve into the latter two, the understanding of these aspects is relevant and deserves to be highlighted in future research. Just as an example, one can point out the difference in the media treatment received by white and black women. The authors point out that while white women are portrayed in the press and advertising as submissive and affable, black women are represented by the figures of the "Matriarch" (the black mother), "Jezebel" (the sexualized woman) and "Sapphire" (the independent woman).

## Methods and procedures

Based on the assumption that the objects of research are dynamic and have new and typical characteristics, the aim was to create an investigation within the investigation in which the methodology is part of the experiment.

The methodological technique used for the analysis was reverse engineering, in which, starting from an existing product, we seek to understand its operation after interacting with it. As social network applications are systems based on algorithms that seek the user's preferences to define what to display on the screen, certain behaviors were sought within the applications that could shape or interfere with the content displayed.

For the experiment, two formatted cell phones were used (i.e., without data stored in the system), provided by Ubilab, Mobility and Media Convergence Research Laboratory of the School of Communication, Arts and Design of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul (Famecos/PUCRS). The objective was that there would be no data previously stored in the cell phones that could interfere with the results of the research. A TikTok account was created on each of the cell phones. The account was used on only one of the devices so that there would be no interference when browsing one profile on the data of the other.

Hence, fictitious profiles were created for a 29-year-old man named Marcelo and a 29-year-old woman named Marcelly. As the cell phones have geolocation data, it can be identified that both profiles live in the city of Porto Alegre, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. From this information provided to the application, we observed which videos were shown for each profile in the "For you" area, a feed of popular content on the network that may or may not be posts from profiles followed by the user.

In addition to the TikTok accounts, Instagram accounts were also created with the same fictitious users. As Marcelo's account was on the device due to some technical problems, the Instagram application was not working; his profile was observed accessing the network site in an anonymous window opened on the researcher's notebook (laptop). The anonymous window prevents the site's cookies and browsing history from being saved so that they do not interfere with the analyzed algorithms. Although the use of the notebook may present some differences with the use of mobile devices, such as the identification of the user's location, it is considered that its use did not hinder the analysis of this research, since the objectives are focused on gender stereotypes, and not on regional issues.

Three phases were determined for interacting with the networks. In the first phase, the objective would be to observe the contents recommended by the applications without interactions and try to maintain the same amount of time watched in each video, with the objective of not showing preference in some contents. These contents were analyzed as a control group in order to understand what were the possible transformations in the suggested contents in the following phases.

In the second phase, we initiated some interactions, both within the application and in the device's standard browser, analyzing if there were changes in the recommended content. We watched the suggested videos until the end, and explored the profile of the content creators. Finally, in the last phase, interactions such as likes and favoriting content and following specific content creators were performed. At least three videos from each of the followed creators were viewed and liked, showing user preference for that content.

**Table 1**
*Phases defined for the analysis*

| 1st phase | 2nd phase | 3rd phase |
|---|---|---|
| **Observation** | **Exploration** | **Interaction** |
| **Neutral action** | **Neutral action** | **Positive action** |
| Videos in the *feed* were half watched.<br>No interactions were made, such as *likes* and favorites.<br>No other profiles were followed. | Browser (Chrome) and app searches were conducted on specific topics that went against gender stereotypes and norms.<br>The videos in the *feed* were half-watched.<br>No interactions were made, such as *likes* and favorites.<br>No other profiles were followed. | Specific creators were sought.<br>At least three of the creators' videos have been liked and/or favored.<br>The videos in the *feed* have been viewed up to halfway through. |

The aim of the experiment was mainly to understand whether the apps' algorithms somehow reinforce gender stereotypes. Therefore, after passively observing the content offered at first in each of the apps, the interaction aimed to show the profiles' preferences for topics that are generally not associated with their gender. In this way, the content and creators sought differed in each account.

Since women are often associated with beauty and emotion, contrary to stereotype, the male gender profile Marcelo was used to show the preference for videos related to these aspects. Thus, content and creators of male makeup, fashion, pop music and romance were sought. We also looked for *Drag Queen* creators who identified themselves as cis men, but with a feminine character performance, who published videos of both genders, in addition to talking a lot about makeup and fashion, as they were aspects related to their performance.

On the other hand, the female profile, Marcelly, explores topics more linked to men —activity and competitiveness— such as gamers, electronic games and soccer. As stereotypes are not limited to the differences between genders, we also looked for content different to a standard image of women: white, straight-haired and heterosexual. Therefore, in addition to looking for profiles of women linked to LGBTQIAPN+ issues, we also explored videos and profiles of black and curly-haired women and differentiated behaviors, such as searching for vegan recipes.

**Table 2**

*Actions carried out in each of the profiles of phases 2 and 3*

| | Marcelo | Marcelly |
|---|---|---|
| **2nd phase** | Search for influencer Lorelay Fox on Google and in the app.<br>Search for makeup on Google and in the app.<br>Search makeup for men on Google and in the app.<br>Men's fashion search on Google and in the app.<br>At least three videos related to the searches were viewed until the end. | Search for curly hair on Google and in the app.<br>Search vegan recipes on Google and in the app.<br>Search vegan recipes on Google and in the app.<br>At least three videos related to the searches were viewed until the end. |
| **3rd phase** | Following drag *influencers* Lorelay Fox, Bianca DellaFancy and Drag box.<br>Following Lady Gaga and papelpop.<br>Following Luiza Parente (fashion advice).<br>Following Experiencia Bridgerton (romance). | Following Nathaly Néri's profile.<br>After players FFNala and Swat_Ruiva.<br>Following LouiePonto and Sapaatona (LGBTQIAPN+ issues).<br>Following the Gremio team. |

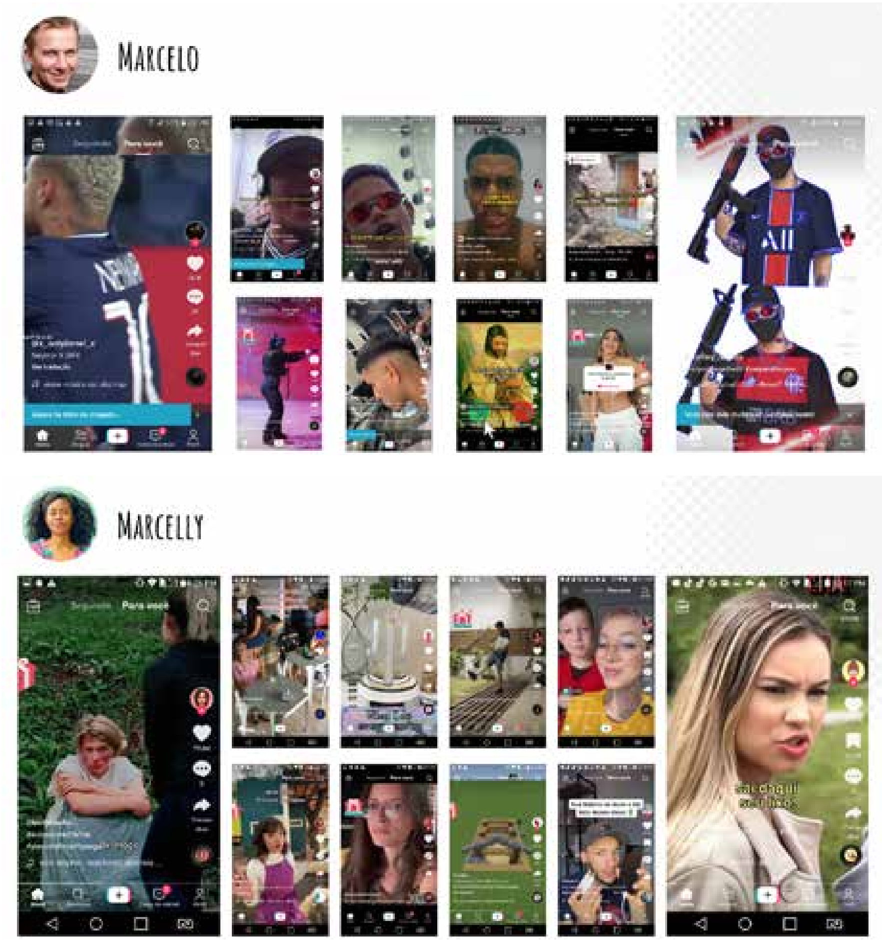
# Results

The results presented below are the result of the researcher's observation. Topics related to the videos in each account's *feed* were noted and screenshots were taken to record and review the content.

## TikTok

Although there were no interactions with the content of the apps in the first phase, even though the accounts had some content in common, some stories seemed to indicate behaviors related to gender stereotypes. In Marcelo's profile, the contents that appeared were related to soccer, guns, trap music, women with less clothes, serenades sung by women, black humor that showed the relationship between heterosexual couples from a man's perspective. In the content, there were more people associated with the male gender. In Marcelly's profile, the topics were related to moral or religious comedies, country music, relationships between heterosexual couples from a female perspective and light jokes. The content was dominated by people associated with the female gender. It was possible to observe, in addition to some popular content, especially pop songs and dances of the moment, videos showing white and cis people in heteronormative relationships.

**Image 1**

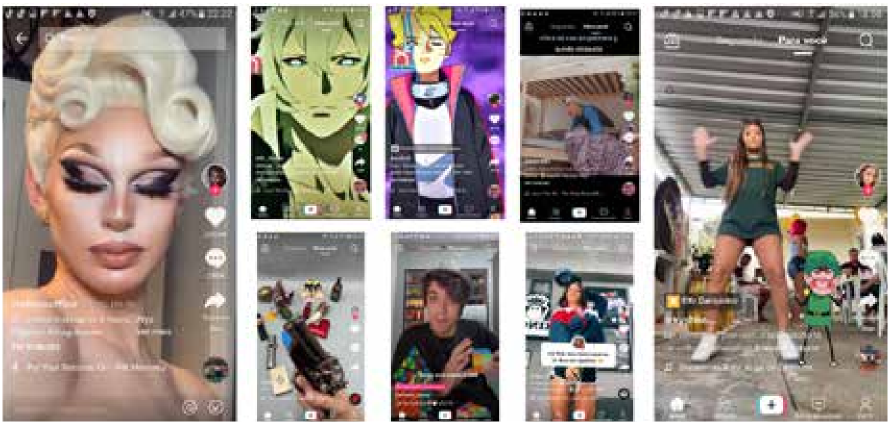



*Note.* Screenshots of the contents that appeared in the profiles created on TikTok, taken by the author.

During the exploration phase, the *feeds* started to be more similar without any direct interaction in the application. However, Marcelly's profile started to show more content that could be considered engaging. While topics in Marcelo's profile were still related to black humor, soccer, guns, dances, especially of women with sexy clothes and poses, and videos with jokes and some *fat-phobic*. In Marcelly's profile, videos with 18+ content, dances with women wearing sexy clothes sexy poses, ingrown toenails, dermatologists squeezing pimples, sex education classes showing sex organs explicitly and even a childbirth scene at the time of the baby's delivery started to appear. The 18+ videos had a profile picture indicating the type of content or showed explicit sex scenes or nudity. In addition, the *feed* also contained humorous videos, moral or religious (Christian) comedies and, on this occasion, images of Jesus Christ.

Notably, neither profile seemed to show videos related to searches and content viewed. Looking in the browser and in the app did not seem to interfere with what was displayed for each user; even after a few days, the same behavior was maintained.

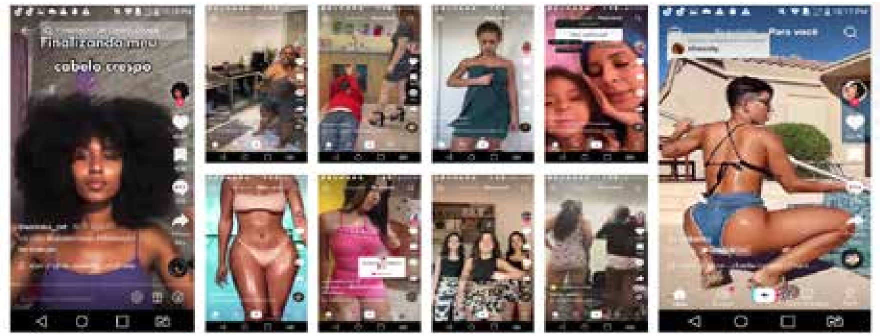
**Image 2**



*Note.* Screenshots of the male profile content. The first image on the left is the information searched. The rest of the posts in the "For you" tab.

Changes were observed in the third phase after users followed content and rejected other content. The most significant change was in the profile of the songs shown. Some stereotypes were maintained, such as comedies with a moral or religious bias for Marcelly, and guns and soccer for Marcelo.

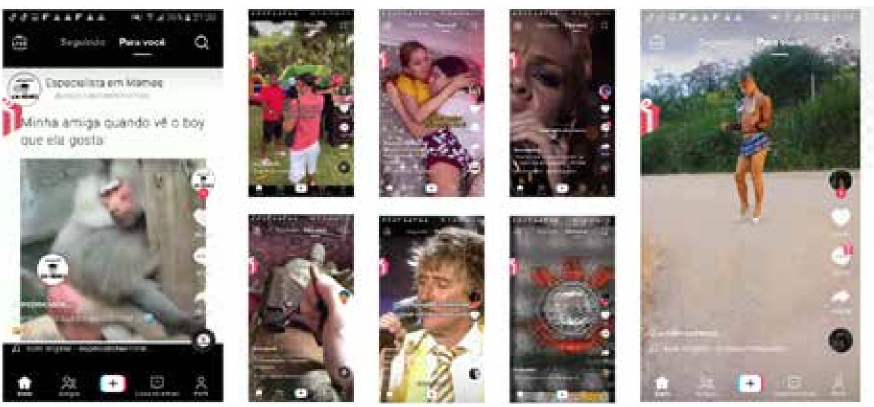
**Image 3**




*Note.* Screenshots of the female profile content. The first image on the left is the information searched. The rest of the posts in the "For you" tab.

In Marcelly's profile, more confusion was observed in the gender treatment intended for the user. Some videos had a woman's perspective. In addition, more images of people who escaped gender stereotypes and heteronormativity, such as transvestites and homosexual couples, started to appear. In videos of transvestites, which differed from *drag* performances, it was impossible to identify whether there was humor or a pejorative bias. However, some posts from trans content creators appeared, commenting on aspects of their lives.

**Image 4**
*Screenshots of the contents of the male profile*

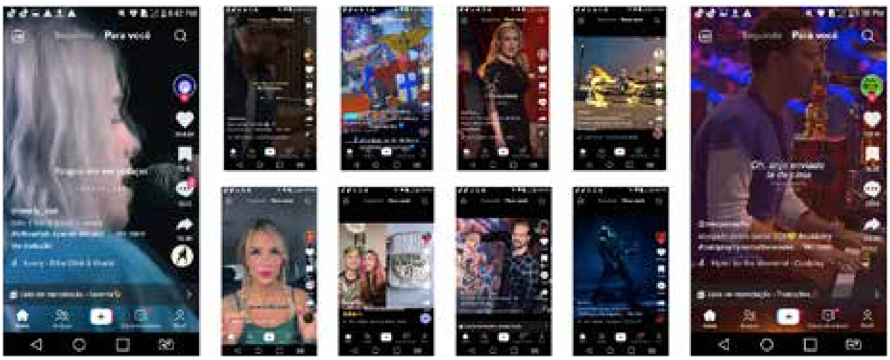


On Marcelly's profile, related videos stopped appearing after content was denied for an 18+ profile and an ingrown toenail video. The music profile shifted from predominantly country concerts to pop singers. The perspective of much of the videos remained as that of a woman (e.g., innuendos of one woman telling another about her boyfriend). A few videos from the *Free Fire* game appeared, related to the profiles followed, but less frequent.

One interaction that escaped somewhat from the methods used was *liking* a video about the *Stranger Things* series, done as a test to observe whether interacting with some content directly in the "For You" tab would have a more noticeable effect. Following this action, the number of stories featuring actors and scenes from the series increased significantly, sometimes appearing in more than five related videos in a row. However, this was not noticeable when *liking* a video with scenes from the game *Free Fire*, when posts on the same topic were much more widely spaced.

**Image 5**

*Screenshots of the contents in the female profile*



## Instagram

An Instagram account was created to find the differences between the applications and possible explanations. The first impression when creating a profile for Marcelly is that the images have better resolution, show a more diverse international audience, and have less nudity. This will be discussed further in the Discussion section, but first, it is worth describing the videos shown in the *Reels* tab.

The first videos of people with Asian features singing popular English pop songs appeared when the female profile was created. There are also videos of animals, mainly cats and dogs, as well as dances, various singers, movements of people on skateboards, scenes from soccer matches and beauty tips. There are videos in several languages.

Early search interactions did not seem to affect the *reels*, or at least took longer to appear. As the beauty tip videos appeared, a post about curly hair care would show up at a particular time related to the search performed. After *liking* this post, *reels* related videos began to pop up: curly hair care and people showing curly or braided hair. The videos also started to be limited to English and Portuguese, decreasing the presence of Asians and Arabs, but posts with pets and sports continued with the same frequency. Videos related to aesthetic treatments, such as painted false nails, also began to appear.

**Image 6**

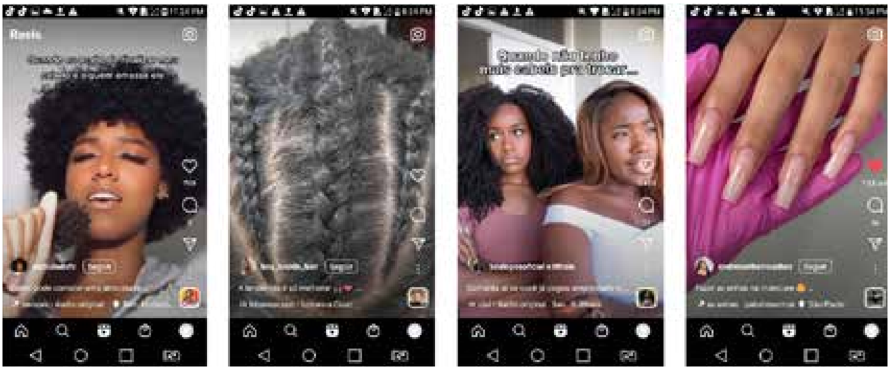
*Screenshots of the content in the female profile on Instagram*


A video of a cake with fun decorations was liked to test the relationship between *liking* content directly on *reels* and increased content on related topics. After a while, it was noticed that images of cakes with the same type of decoration started to appear again and again, in addition to other sweets that could be related.

When Marcelo's Instagram profile was created, it was impossible to install the application for technical reasons. As a solution, an anonymous Google Chrome window was used on a *notebook* with a Windows operating system. It should be noted that the change from a mobile device with geolocation to a *notebook* may have caused changes in data capture by the algorithm. However, it is considered that since this experiment was an initial exploration, and due to the content of what was observed, even with the change of device, it was possible to obtain relevant evidence for the study.

**Image 7**

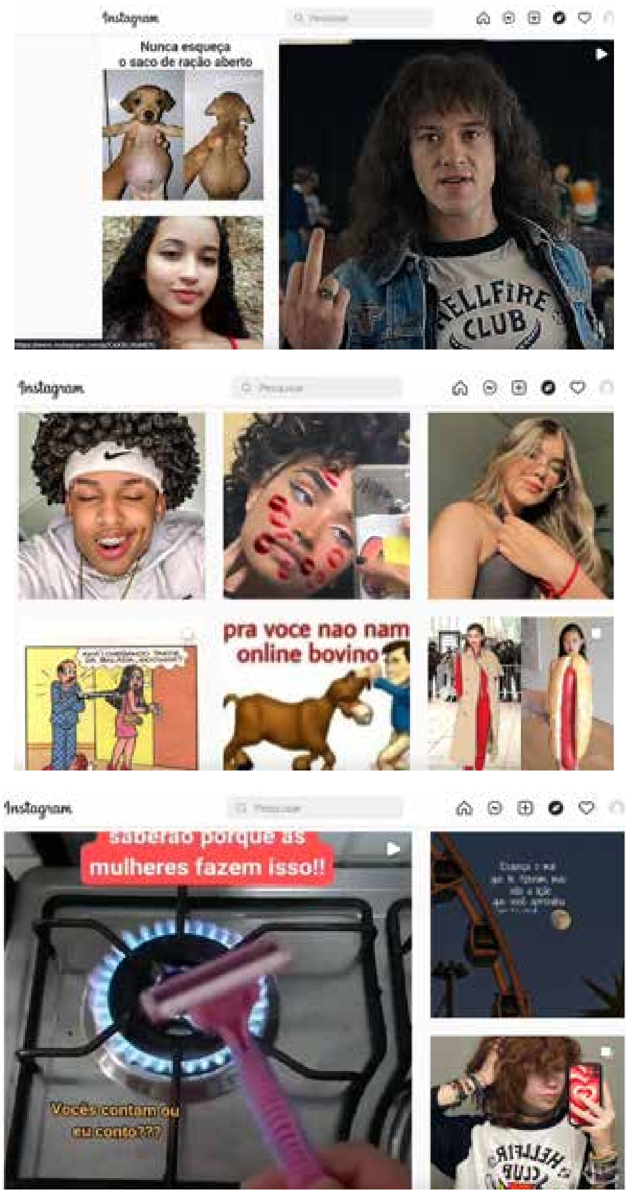
*Screenshots of the contents in the female profile*

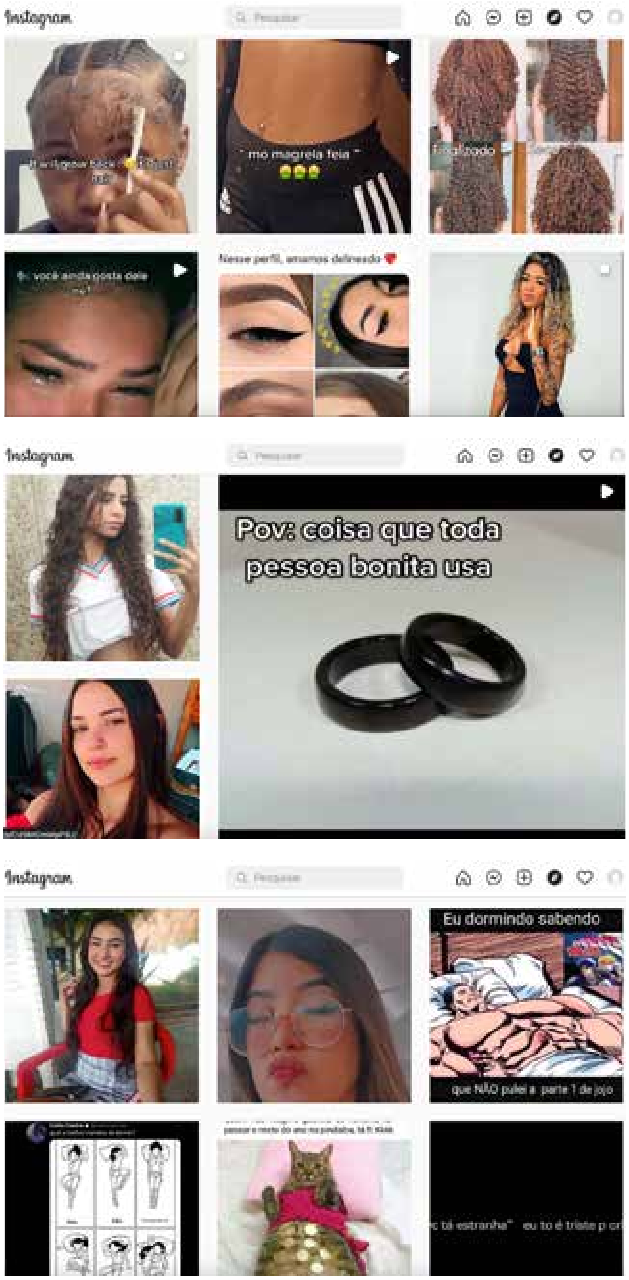


At the beginning, only images of travels around the world appeared. However, when revisiting the page using another computer, with macOS operating system, even using an anonymous window, the *feed* was very different, with contents in Portuguese language. It is possible that this happened due to the possible identification of the connection region, although the use of *cookies* was blocked. The images and videos that appeared to the user can be described as: photos of women, of the face or body, humorous images, videos or images that use a male perspective ("why do women do this", "me when I do a certain thing", showing a figure that can be identified as male), photos or videos of pets, motivational quotes.

**Image 8**

*Screenshots of the contents in the male profile*



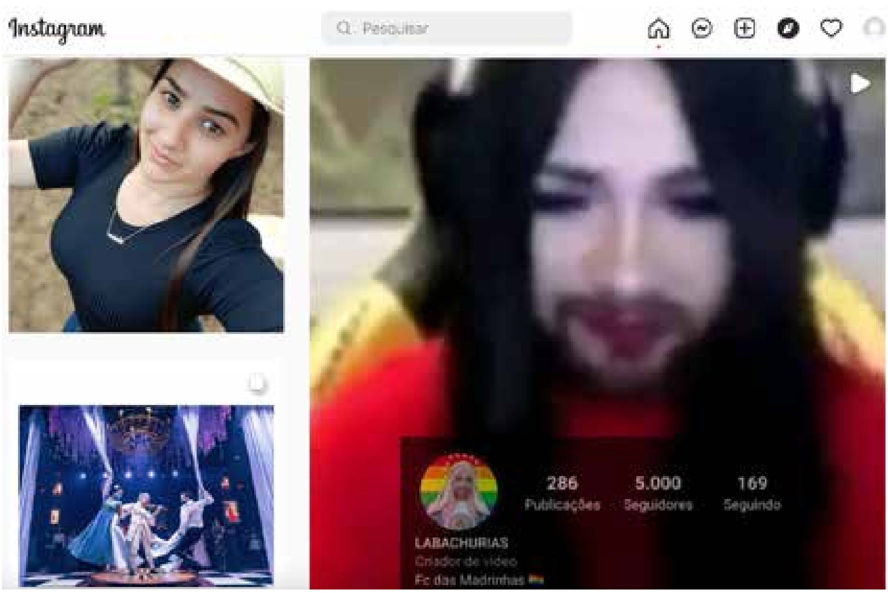

Instagram
mo magrela feia
Nesse perfil, amamos delineado
Instagram
Pov: coisa que toda pessoa bonita usa
Instagram
Eu dormindo sabendo
que NÃO pulei a parte 1 de jojo

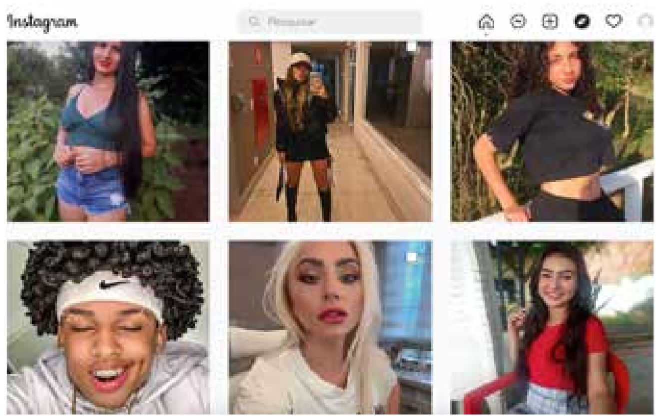
In Marcelly's content *feed*, it is worth noting that although no search related to the topic was performed, images of curly hair tips appeared. Thus, it is possible to note beforehand that the images related to curly hair in Marcelly's profile were not necessarily influenced by the searches and reactions made by the user, but may be content considered popular. However, after interaction on the *Reel* tab of the female profile, the increase in similar images was significant.

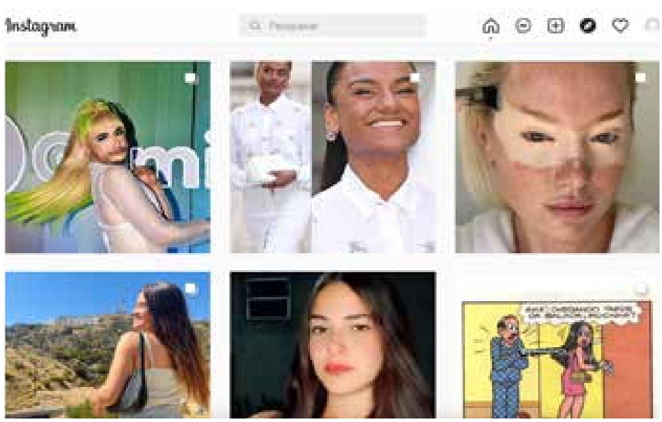
After the interactions in the third phase, the male profile *reels* were immediately updated with content related to the content creators and the images and videos they liked. More images of *drag*, makeup, fashion, Lady Gaga, actors who participated in the *Bridgerton* series, and even cartoons with gender debates and same-sex couples could be seen. In common with the contents of the *feed* before the interaction, photos of women's faces or bodies remained.

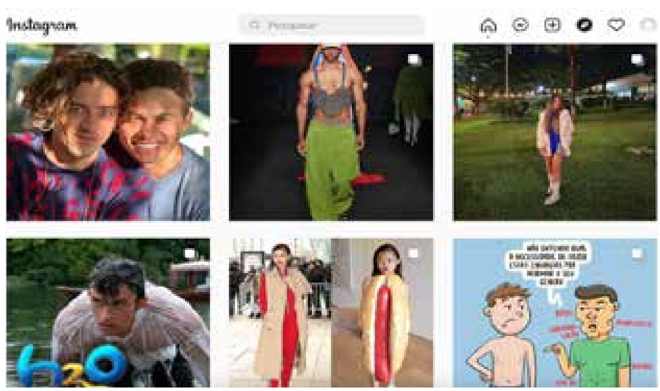
**Image 9**

*Screenshots of the contents in the male profile after interactions*




Instagram

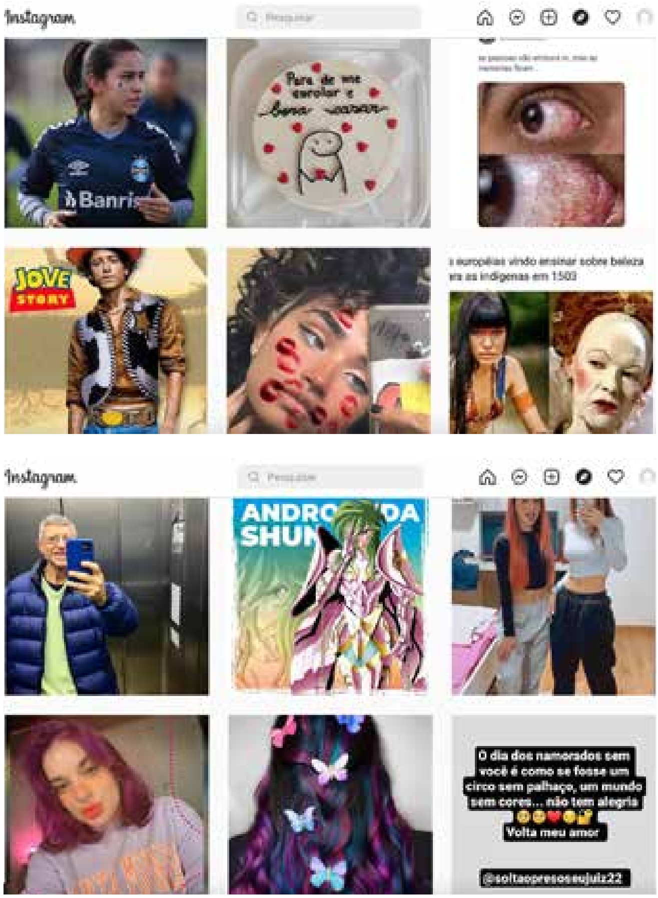

Instagram

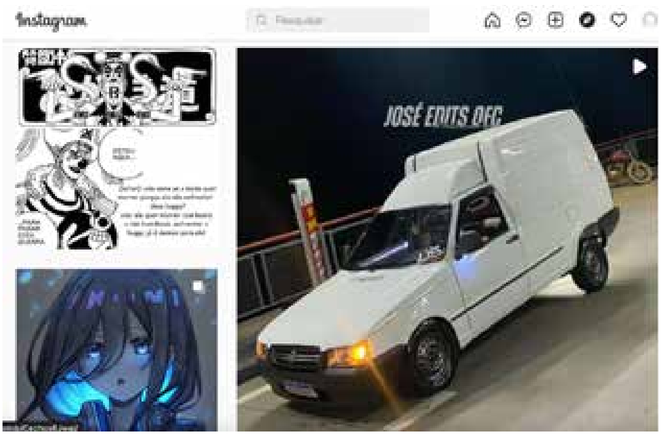

Instagram

Due to the differences between the transformations in the profile *feeds*, a test was included in which Marcelly's Instagram profile was also accessed on the *notebook* in an anonymous window. Even without the interactions, it could be observed that the content was more related with the followed accounts, with images of anime and women with dyed hair (which may be related to the followed gaming accounts) and images of soccer.

**Image 10**

*Screenshots of the contents in the female profile, accessing from the computer*






## Discussion

As Wu (2020, p. 332) states, TikTok is a "pure entertainment" software that recommends a variety of content with the logic of its algorithm. Overall, it was observed that the app seems to invest more in popular web content than in user browsing and interaction, but at first there seems to be a genre cliché. Initially, popular content generates engagement with people of a specific gender, region and age. It may occur based on content that has a gender classification by the author of the post, by the use of specific tags, or because it engages more users with the same demographic characteristics.

As for the second phase of the experiment, it is hypothesized that the app begins to play content that may be more attractive because it generates more engagement or commitment (positive or negative) since there are not many interactions for the algorithm to adapt. Another hypothesis is that the time of use of the app could be influencing more explicit sexual content and black humor, since the app was accessed more at night, after 10 pm.

In the third phase, when looking for profiles of female gamers for Marcelly to follow, it could be observed that some who appeared had more dance videos than game videos, with sensual poses and sexy clothes. Another hypothesis arises: perhaps more 18+ content appears because it is created by profiles that call themselves women, which could have a greater weight on the user who also calls herself a woman.

Finally, the last phase seems to be influenced by the fact that people that users have started to follow also follow or mark as preferences because, although the feed still has no direct relation to the videos searched, the topics of the videos in this new moment seem different. Following other users can also add new trends to the feed, but what is popular and generates engagement continues to dominate. The feed seems to be more influenced when certain content is rejected.

In addition, one can observe that TikTok (from a Brazilian profile, at least) is exceptionally white, heteronormative and Christian. Even when one searches for alternative content starts following creators and likes certain videos, this pattern changes very little. It may have more to do with its audience than with the tool itself.

On the other hand, Instagram is more click-oriented, although search does not affect the content much. If there is a click on one type of video within the Reels tab, at least three other similar ones may appear next. However, searches and likes directly on the creators' profiles do not seem to affect the app's Reels tab either. The videos tend to have better resolution and use image filters and other features. After all, as Wang (2020) states, unlike Instagram, TikTok focuses more on amateurishly produced videos without more elaborate aesthetic production. The videos are reserved, with no +18 content or religious messages (at least in neutral browsing). It may have to do with a more elitist audience, but also with the strong advertising appeal of the tool, which is bound by specific rules.

The use of the tool on the device had problems, making it difficult to compare profiles. On mobile, at first, the content seems more "neutral" in terms of gender stereotypes. At first, Instagram was more diverse, as it includes content in other languages and from various ethnicities, at least on the female profile accessed via smartphone. On the other hand, the male profile, accessed in a notebook, seems to be more influenced by a perspective and gender stereotypes.

A difference could be observed between the content displayed on Instagram Reels when accessing the app from the computer and when accessing it from the mobile. On mobile, many more short videos appeared, while on the computer it was mainly photos or image galleries. In addition, the content was much closer to the accounts with which there was interaction. Further studies on these aspects are needed, but this may indicate that there is a closer approach to the TikTok format and algorithm on the mobile device, showing more popular content, while on the computer the recommendations are still linked to user interactions.

## Final considerations

As stated by Carrera and Carvalho (2020):

> There is scientific relevance in the research on search engines and algorithmic choices that dictate the results of the images that will compose the social imaginary about bodies and subjects. However, it is necessary to continue deepening on the subject in an attempt to expose the issues and contribute to the understanding of the productive dynamics of these artificial agents. (p. 112)

This article was conducted from an observational experiment to try to provide some hypotheses on the operation mechanism of the algorithms of the social networks Instagram and TikTok, mainly in their relationship with the dissemination and reinforcement of gender stereotypes. The study aims to help future research, testing the hypotheses and observations presented so that it can provide further reflections, questioning and, perhaps, some answers about the functioning of social networks and their possible impacts on society.

Some suggestions for future studies are to try to map the content categories (tags) that appear in each profile's *feed* and to include more profiles to obtain more consistent results. In these other profiles, other experiments could be done, such as keeping exact searches and liked or followed content profiles, looking for differences between *feeds*, and if they are related to user profile information, such as gender.

Transformation in forms of interaction is part of the evolution of societies, and technical innovations can bring benefits, as well as disadvantages and difficulties. Understanding and discussing the algorithms that increasingly shape our way of seeing the world and our sense of reality is essential to understanding the negative impacts of new technologies and how to mitigate them.

The importance of understanding the algorithm through its deconstruction becomes latent because the companies that program it do not show its operation. The technique of reverse engineering has the potential to understand these dynamics and enables to monitor the operation of these systems.

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# EDITORIAL GUIDELINES

# NORMAS EDITORIALES

# *Publication guidelines in «Universitas»*

ISSN: 1390-3837 / e-ISSN: 1390-8634

## 1. General Information

«Universitas» is a bilingual scientific publication of the *Universidad Politécnica Salesiana* of Ecuador, published since January 2002 in an uninterrupted manner, with a semi-annual periodicity, specialized in Social and Human Sciences and its interdisciplinary lines such as Sociology, Anthropology, Social Psychology, Social Development, Communities, Latin American Studies, Political Studies, among others.

It is scientific journal, which uses the peer-review system, under double-blind review methodology, according to the publication standards of the American Psychological Association (APA). Compliance with this system allows authors to guarantee an objective, impartial and transparent review process, which facilitates the publication of their inclusion in reference databases, repositories and international indexing.

«Universitas» is indexed in the Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) of Web of Science, the LATINDEX catalog, Regional Online Information System for Scientific Journals of Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal, is part of the Directory of Open Access Journals-DOAJ, belongs to the Ibero-American Network of Innovation and Scientific Knowledge, REDIB, Network of Scientific Journals of Latin America and the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal, REDALYC, It is also part of the Information Matrix for the Analysis of Journals, MIAR and is being evaluated, in the medium term, to become part of SCOPUS.

The journal is published in a double version: printed (ISSN: 1390-3837) and digital (e-ISSN: 1390-8634), in English and Spanish, each work being identified with a DOI (Digital Object Identifier System).

## 2. Scope and Policy

### *2.1. Theme*

Original contributions in Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as related areas: Sociology, Anthropology, Social Psychology, Social Development, Communities, Latin American Studies, Political Studies, and all related interdisciplinary disciplines with the central theme.

### *2.2. Contributions*

"Universitas" preferably publishes results of empirical research on Human and Social Sciences, written in Spanish and / or English, as well as reports, studies and proposals, as well as selected state-of-the-art literature reviews.

All works must be original, have not been published in any medium or be in the process of arbitration or publication.

- **Research:** 5,000 to 6,500 words of text, including title, abstracts, descriptors, charts and references.
- **Reports, studies and proposals:** 5,000 to 6,500 words of text, including title, abstracts, charts and references.
- **Reviews:** 6,000 to 7,000 words of text, including charts and references. Justified references, would be specially valued. (current and selected from among 70 works)

"Universitas" has a biannual periodicity (20 articles per year), published in March and September and counts by number with two sections of five articles each, the first referring to a **Monographic** topic prepared in advance and with thematic editors and the Second, a section of **Miscellaneous**, composed of varied contributions within the theme of the publication.

## 3. Presentation, Structure and Submission of the Manuscripts

Texts will be presented in Arial 10 font, single line spacing, complete justification and no tabs or white spaces between paragraphs. Only large blocks (title, authors, summaries, descriptors, credits and headings) will be separated with a blank space. The page should be 2 centimeters in all its margins.

Papers must be submitted in a Microsoft Word document (.doc or .docx), requiring that the file be anonymized in File Properties, so that the author / s identification does not appear.

Manuscripts must be submitted only and exclusively through the OJS (Open Journal System), in which all authors must previously register. Originals sent via email or other interfaces are not accepted.

### *3.1. Structure of the manuscript*

For those works that are empirical investigations, the manuscripts will follow the IMRDC structure, being optional the Notes and Supports. Those papers that, on the contrary, deal with reports, studies, proposals and reviews may be more flexible in their epigraphs, particularly in material and methods, analysis, results, discussion and conclusions. In all typologies of works, references are mandatory.

**1) Title (Spanish) / Title (English):** Concise but informative, in Spanish on the first line and in English on the second. A maximum of 80 characters with spaces are accepted. The title is not only the responsibility of the authors, changes being able to be proposed by the Editorial Board.

**2) Full name and surnames:** Of each of the authors, organized by priority. A maximum of 3 authors will be accepted per original, although there may be exceptions justified by the topic, its complexity and extent. Next to the names must follow the professional category, work center, email of each author and ORCID number. It is mandatory to indicate if you have the academic degree of doctor (include Dr./Dra before the name).

**3) Abstract (Spanish) / Abstract (English):** It will have a maximum extension of 230 words, first in Spanish and then in English. : 1) Justification of the topic; 2) Objectives; 3) Methodology and sample; 4) Main results; 5) Main conclusions. It must be impersonally written “This paper analyzes ...”. In the case of the abstract, the use of automatic translators will not be accepted due to their poor quality.

**4) Descriptors (Spanish) / Keywords (English):** 6 descriptors must be presented for each language version directly related to the subject of the work. The use of the key words set out in UNESCO’s Thesaurus will be positively valued.

**5) Introduction and state of the issue:** It should include the problem statement, context of the problem, justification, rationale and purpose of the study, using bibliographical citations, as well as the most significant and current literature on the topic at national and international level .

**6) Material and methods:** It must be written so that the reader can easily understand the development of the research. If applicable, it will describe the methodology, the sample and the form of sampling, as well as the type of statistical analysis used. If it is an original methodology, it is necessary to explain the reasons that led to its use and to describe its possible limitations.

**7) Analysis and results:** It will try to highlight the most important observations, describing, without making value judgments, the material and methods used. They will appear in a logical sequence in the text and the essential charts and figures avoiding the duplication of data.

**8) Discussion and conclusions:** Summarize the most important findings, relating the observations themselves with relevant studies, indicating contributions and limitations, without adding data already mentioned in other sections. Also, the discussion and conclusions section should include the deductions and lines for future research.

**9) Supports and acknowledgments (optional):** The Council Science Editors recommends the author (s) to specify the source of funding for the research. Priority will be given to projects supported by national and international competitive projects. In any case, for the scientific evaluation of the manuscript, it should be only anonymized with XXXX for its initial evaluation, in order not to identify authors and research teams, which should be explained in the Cover Letter and later in the final manuscript.

**10) The notes (optional) will go, only if necessary, at the end of the article (before the references).** They must be manually annotated, since the system of footnotes or the end of Word is not recognized by the layout systems. The numbers of notes are placed in superscript, both in the text and in the final note. The numbers of notes are placed in superscript, both in the text and in the final note. No notes are allowed that collect simple bibliographic citations (without comments), as these should go in the references.

**11) References:** Bibliographical citations should be reviewed in the form of references to the text. Under no circumstances should references not mentioned in the text be included. Their number should be sufficient to contextualize the theoretical framework with current and important criteria. They will be presented alphabetically by the first last name of the author.

### *3.2. Standards for references*

#### Periodic Publications

**Journal article (author):** Valdés-Pérez, D. (2016). Incidencia de las técnicas de gestión en la mejora de decisiones administrativas [Impact of Management Techniques on the Improvement of Administrative Decisions]. *Retos, 12*(6), 199-2013. https://doi.org/10.17163/ret.n12.2016.05

**Journal Article (Up to six authors):** Ospina, M.C., Alvarado, S.V., Fefferman, M., & Llanos, D. (2016). Introducción del dossier temático "Infancias y juventudes: violencias, conflictos, memorias y procesos de construcción de paz" [Introduction of the thematic dossier "Infancy and Youth: Violence, Conflicts, Memories and Peace Construction Processes"]. *Universitas, 25*(14), 91-95. https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n25.%25x

**Journal article (more tan six authors):** Smith, S.W., Smith, S.L. Pieper, K.M., Yoo, J.H., Ferrys, A.L., Downs, E.,... Bowden, B. (2006). Altruism on American Television: Examining the Amount of, and Context Surronding. Acts of Helping and Sharing. *Journal of Communication, 56*(4), 707-727. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00316.x

**Journal article (without DOI):** Rodríguez, A. (2007). Desde la promoción de salud mental hacia la promoción de salud: La concepción de lo comunitario en la implementación de proyectos sociales. *Alteridad, 2*(1), 28-40. (https://goo.gl/zDb3Me) (2017-01-29).

#### Books and book chapters

**Full books:** Cuéllar, J.C., & Moncada-Paredes, M.C. (2014). *El peso de la deuda externa ecuatoriana*. Quito: Abya-Yala.

**Chapter of book:** Zambrano-Quiñones, D. (2015). *El ecoturismo comunitario en Manglaralto y Colonche*. En V.H. Torres (Ed.), Alternativas de Vida: Trece experiencias de desarrollo endógeno en Ecuador (pp. 175-198). Quito: Abya-Yala.

Digital media

Pérez-Rodríguez, M.A., Ramírez, A., & García-Ruíz, R. (2015). La competencia mediática en educación infantil. Análisis del nivel de desarrollo en España. Universitas Psychologica, 14(2), 619-630. https://doi.org.10.11144/Javeriana.upsy14-2.cmei

It is prescriptive that all quotations that have DOI (Digital Object Identifier System) are reflected in the References (can be obtained at http://goo.gl/gfruh1). All journals and books that do not have DOI should appear with their link (in their online version, if they have it, shortened by Google Shortened: http://goo.gl) and date of consultation in the format indicated.

Journal articles should be presented in English, except for those in Spanish and English, in which case it will be displayed in both languages using brackets. All web addresses submitted must be shortened in the manuscript, except for the DOI that must be in the indicated format (https://doi.org/XXX).

### *3.3. Epigraphs, Figures and Charts*

The epigraphs of the body of the article will be numbered in Arabic. They should go without a full box of capital letters, neither underlined nor bold. The numbering must be a maximum of three levels: 1. / 1.1. / 1.1.1. A carriage return will be established at the end of each numbered epigraph.

The charts must be included in the text in Word format according to order of appearance, numbered in Arabic and subtitled with the description of the content.

The graphics or figures will be adjusted to the minimum number required and will be presented incorporated in the text, according to their order of appearance, numbered in Arabic and subtitled with the abbreviated description. Their quality should not be less than 300 dpi, and it may be necessary to have the graph in TIFF, PNG or JPEG format.

## 4. Submission Process

Two files must be sent through the OJS system of the journal:

**1) Presentation and cover**, in which the title in Spanish and English will appear, names and surnames of the authors in a standardized form with ORCID number, abstract in both Spanish and English, descriptors and keywords and a statement that the manuscript is an Origina lcontribution, not sent or in the process of being evaluated in another journal, confirmation of the signatory authors, acceptance (if applicable) of formal changes in the manuscript according to the rules and partial transfer of rights to the publisher (use official cover model).

**2) Manuscript** totally anonymized, according to the norms referred in precedence.

All authors must register with their credits on the OJS platform, although only one of them will be responsible for correspondence.

No author can submit or have in review two manuscripts simultaneously, estimating an absence of four consecutive numbers (2 years).

# NORMAS DE PUBLICACIÓN EN «UNIVERSITAS»

REVISTA DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES Y HUMANAS XXI
UNIVERSITAS

ISSN: 1390-3837 / e-ISSN: 1390-8634

## 1. Información general

«Universitas» es una publicación científica bilingüe de la Universidad Politécnica Salesiana de Ecuador, editada desde enero de 2002 de forma ininterrumpida, con periodicidad fija semestral, especializada en Ciencias Sociales y Humanas y sus líneas interdisciplinares como Sociología, Antropología, Psicología Social, Estudios Políticos, Estudios del Desarrollo, Estudios Latinoamericanos, Estudios de la Cultura y la Comunicación, entre otras.

Es una revista científica arbitrada, que utiliza el sistema de evaluación externa por expertos (*peer-review*), bajo metodología de pares ciegos (*doble-blind review*), conforme a las normas de publicación de la American Psychological Association (APA). El cumplimiento de este sistema permite garantizar a los autores un proceso de revisión objetivo, imparcial y transparente, lo que facilita a la publicación su inclusión en bases de datos, repositorios e indexaciones internacionales de referencia.

«Universitas» se encuentra indizada en Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI) de Web of Science, el catálogo LATINDEX, Sistema Regional de información en Línea para Revistas Científicas de América Latina, El Caribe, España y Portugal, forma parte del Directory of Open Access Journals-DOAJ, pertenece a la Red Iberoamericana de Innovación y Conocimiento Científico, REDIB, Red de Revistas Cientificas de America Latina y el Caribe,España y Portugal, REDALYC, además conforma la Matriz de Información para el Análisis de Revistas, MIAR y está siendo evaluada en mediano plazo para pasar a formar parte de SCOPUS.

La revista se edita en doble versión: impresa (ISSN: 1390-3837) y electrónica (e-ISSN: 1390-8634), en español e inglés, siendo identificado además cada trabajo con un DOI (Digital Object Identifier System).

## 2. Alcance y Política

### *2.1. Temática*

Contribuciones originales en materia de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, así como áreas afines: Ciencias Sociales y Humanas y sus líneas interdisciplinares como Sociología, Antropología, Psicología Social, Estudios Políticos, Estudios del Desarrollo, Estudios Latinoamericanos, Estudios de la Cultura y la Comunicación y todas aquellas disciplinas conexas interdisciplinarmente con la línea temática central.

### *2.2. Aportaciones*

«Universitas» edita preferentemente resultados de investigación empírica sobre Ciencias Humanas y Sociales, redactados en español y/o inglés, siendo también admisibles informes, estudios y propuestas, así como selectas revisiones de la literatura (*state-of-the-art*).

Todos los trabajos deben ser originales, no haber sido publicados en ningún medio ni estar en proceso de arbitraje o publicación. De esta manera, las aportaciones en la revista pueden ser:

- **Investigaciones:** 5.000 a 6.500 palabras de texto, incluyendo título, resúmenes, descriptores, tablas y referencias.
- **Informes, estudios y propuestas:** 5.000 a 6.500 palabras de texto, incluyendo título, resúmenes, tablas y referencias.
- **Revisiones:** 6.000 a 7.000 palabras de texto, incluidas tablas y referencias. Se valorará especialmente las referencias justificadas, actuales y selectivas de alrededor de unas 70 obras.

«Universitas» tiene periodicidad semestral (20 artículos por año), publicada en los meses de marzo y septiembre y cuenta por número con dos secciones de cinco artículos cada una, la primera referida a un tema **Monográfico** preparado con antelación y con editores temáticos y la segunda, una sección **Miscelánea**, compuesta por aportaciones variadas dentro de la temática de la publicación.

## 3. Presentación, estructura y envío de los manuscritos

Los trabajos se presentarán en tipo de letra Arial 10, interlineado simple, justificado completo y sin tabuladores ni espacios en blanco entre párrafos. Solo se separarán con un espacio en blanco los grandes bloques (título, autores, resúmenes, descriptores, créditos y epígrafes). La página debe tener 2 centímetros en todos sus márgenes.

Los trabajos deben presentarse en documento de Microsoft Word (.doc o .docx), siendo necesario que el archivo esté anonimizado en Propiedades de Archivo, de forma que no aparezca la identificación de autor/es.

Los manuscritos deben ser enviados única y exclusivamente a través del OJS (Open Journal System), en el cual todos los autores deben darse de alta previamente. No se aceptan originales enviados a través de correo electrónico u otra interfaz.

### *3.1. Estructura del manuscrito*

Para aquellos trabajos que se traten de investigaciones de carácter empírico, los manuscritos seguirán la estructura IMRDC, siendo opcionales los epígrafes de Notas y Apoyos. Aquellos trabajos que por el contrario se traten de informes, estudios, propuestas y revisiones podrán ser más flexibles en sus epígrafes, especialmente en Material y métodos, Análisis y resultados y Discusión y conclusiones. En todas las tipologías de trabajos son obligatorias las Referencias.

**1) Título (español) / Title (inglés):** Conciso pero informativo, en castellano en primera línea y en inglés en segunda. Se aceptan como máximo 80 caracteres con espacio. El título no solo es responsabilidad de los autores, pudiéndose proponer cambios por parte del Consejo Editorial.

**2) Nombre y apellidos completos:** De cada uno de los autores, organizados por orden de prelación. Se aceptarán como máximo 3 autores por original, aunque pudieren existir excepciones justificadas por el tema, su complejidad y extensión. Junto a los nombres ha de seguir la categoría profesional, centro de trabajo, correo electrónico de cada autor y número de ORCID. Es obligatorio indicar si se posee el grado académico de doctor (incluir Dr./Dra. antes del nombre).

**3) Resumen (español) / Abstract (inglés):** Tendrá como extensión máxima 230 palabras, primero en español y después en inglés. En el resumen se describirá de forma concisa y en este orden: 1) Justificación del tema; 2) Objetivos; 3) Metodología y muestra; 4) Principales resultados; 5) Principales conclusiones. Ha de estar escrito de manera impersonal "El presente trabajo analiza…". En el caso del abstract no se admitirá el empleo de traductores automáticos por su pésima calidad.

**4) Descriptores (español) / Keywords (inglés):** Se deben exponer 6 descriptores por cada versión idiomática relacionados directamente con el tema del trabajo. Será valorado positivamente el uso de las palabras claves expuestas en el Thesaurus de la UNESCO.

**5) Introducción y estado de la cuestión:** Debe incluir el planteamiento del problema, el contexto de la problemática, la justificación, fundamentos y propósito del estudio, utilizando citas bibliográficas, así como la literatura más significativa y actual del tema a escala nacional e internacional.

**6) Material y métodos:** Debe ser redactado de forma que el lector pueda comprender con facilidad el desarrollo de la investigación. En su caso, describirá la metodología, la muestra y la forma de muestreo, así como se hará referencia al tipo de análisis estadístico empleado. Si se trata de una metodología original, es necesario exponer las razones que han conducido a su empleo y describir sus posibles limitaciones.

**7) Análisis y resultados:** Se procurará resaltar las observaciones más importantes, describiéndose, sin hacer juicios de valor, el material y métodos empleados. Aparecerán en una secuencia lógica en el texto y las tablas y figuras imprescindibles evitando la duplicidad de datos.

**8) Discusión y conclusiones:** Resumirá los hallazgos más importantes, relacionando las propias observaciones con estudios de interés, señalando aportaciones y limitaciones, sin redundar datos ya comentados en otros apartados. Asimismo, el apartado de discusión y conclusiones debe incluir las deducciones y líneas para futuras investigaciones.

**9) Apoyos y agradecimientos (opcionales):** El Council Science Editors recomienda a los autor/es especificar la fuente de financiación de la investigación. Se considerarán prioritarios los trabajos con aval de proyectos competitivos nacionales e internacionales. En todo caso, para la valoración científica del manuscrito, este debe ir anonimizado con XXXX solo para su evaluación inicial, a fin de no identificar autores y equipos de investigación, que deben ser explicitados en la Carta de Presentación y posteriormente en el manuscrito final.

**10) Las notas** (opcionales) irán, solo en caso necesario, al final del artículo (antes de las referencias). Deben anotarse manualmente, ya que el sistema de notas al pie o al final de Word no es reconocido por los sistemas de maquetación. Los números de notas se colocan en superíndice, tanto en el texto como en la nota final. No se permiten notas que recojan citas bibliográficas simples (sin comentarios), pues éstas deben ir en las referencias.

**11) Referencias:** Las citas bibliográficas deben reseñarse en forma de referencias al texto. Bajo ningún caso deben incluirse referencias no citadas en el texto. Su número debe ser suficiente para contextualizar el marco teórico con criterios de actualidad e importancia. Se presentarán alfabéticamente por el primer apellido del autor.

### *3.2. Normas para las referencias*

#### Publicaciones periódicas

**Artículo de revista (un autor):** Valdés-Pérez, D. (2016). Incidencia de las técnicas de gestión en la mejora de decisiones administrativas [Impact of Management Techniques on the Improvement of Administrative Decisions]. *Retos, 12*(6), 199-2013. https://doi.org/10.17163/ret.n12.2016.05

**Artículo de revista (hasta seis autores):** Ospina, M.C., Alvarado, S.V., Fefferman, M., & Llanos, D. (2016). Introducción del dossier temático "Infancias y juventudes: violencias, conflictos, memorias y procesos de construcción de paz" [Introduction of the thematic dossier "Infancy and Youth: Violence, Conflicts, Memories and Peace Construction Processes"]. *Universitas, 25*(14), 91-95. https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n25.%25x

**Artículo de revista (más de seis autores):** Smith, S.W., Smith, S.L. Pieper, K.M., Yoo, J.H., Ferrys, A.L., Downs, E.,... Bowden, B. (2006). Altruism on American Television: Examining the Amount of, and Context Surronding. Acts of Helping and Sharing. *Journal of Communication, 56*(4), 707-727. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00316.x

**Artículo de revista (sin DOI):** Rodríguez, A. (2007). Desde la promoción de salud mental hacia la promoción de salud: La concepción de lo comunitario en la implementación de proyectos sociales. *Alteridad, 2*(1), 28-40. (https://goo.gl/zDb3Me) (2017-01-29).

#### Libros y capítulos de libro

**Libros completos:** Cuéllar, J.C., & Moncada-Paredes, M.C. (2014). *El peso de la deuda externa ecuatoriana*. Quito: Abya-Yala.

**Capítulos de libro:** Zambrano-Quiñones, D. (2015). *El ecoturismo comunitario en Manglaralto y Colonche*. En V.H. Torres (Ed.), Alternativas de Vida: Trece experiencias de desarrollo endógeno en Ecuador (pp. 175-198). Quito: Abya-Yala.

Medios electrónicos

Pérez-Rodríguez, M.A., Ramírez, A., & García-Ruíz, R. (2015). La competencia mediática en educación infantil. Análisis del nivel de desarrollo en España. Universitas Psychologica, 14(2), 619-630. https://doi.org.10.11144/Javeriana.upsy14-2.cmei

Es prescriptivo que todas las citas que cuenten con DOI (Digital Object Identifier System) estén reflejadas en las Referencias (pueden obtenerse en http://goo.gl/gfruh1). Todas las revistas y libros que no tengan DOI deben aparecer con su link (en su versión on-line, en caso de que la tengan, acortada, mediante Google Shortener: http://goo.gl) y fecha de consulta en el formato indicado.

Los artículos de revistas deben ser expuestos en idioma inglés, a excepción de aquellos que se encuentren en español e inglés, caso en el que se expondrá en ambos idiomas utilizando corchetes. Todas las direcciones web que se presenten tienen que ser acortadas en el manuscrito, a excepción de los DOI que deben ir en el formato indicado (https://doi.org/XXX).

### *3.3. Epígrafes, tablas y gráficos*

Los epígrafes del cuerpo del artículo se numerarán en arábigo. Irán sin caja completa de mayús-culas, ni subrayados, ni negritas. La numeración ha de ser como máximo de tres niveles: 1. / 1.1. / 1.1.1. Al final de cada epígrafe numerado se establecerá un retorno de carro.

Las tablas deben presentarse incluidas en el texto en formato Word según orden de aparición, numeradas en arábigo y subtituladas con la descripción del contenido.

Los gráficos o figuras se ajustarán al número mínimo necesario y se presentarán incorporadas al texto, según su orden de aparición, numeradas en arábigo y subtituladas con la descripción abreviada. Su calidad no debe ser inferior a 300 ppp, pudiendo ser necesario contar con el gráfico en formato TIFF, PNG o JPEG.

## 4. Proceso de envío

Deben remitirse a través del sistema OJS de la revista dos archivos:

**1) Presentación y portada**, en la que aparecerá el título en español e inglés, nombres y apellidos de los autores de forma estandarizada con número de ORCID, resumen, abstract, descriptores y keywords y una declaración de que el manuscrito se trata de una aportación original, no enviada ni en proceso de evaluación en otra revista, confirmación de las autorías firmantes, aceptación (si procede) de cambios formales en el manuscrito conforme a las normas y cesión parcial de derechos a la editorial (usar modelo oficial de portada).

**2) Manuscrito** totalmente anonimizado, conforme a las normas referidas en precedencia.

Todos los autores han de darse de alta, con sus créditos, en la plataforma OJS, si bien uno solo de ellos será el responsable de correspondencia. Ningún autor podrá enviar o tener en revisión dos manuscritos de forma simultánea, estimándose una carencia de cuatro números consecutivos (2 años).

# GUIDELINES FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWERS OF «UNIVERSITAS»

The **Council of External Reviewers of «Universitas»** is an independent collegiate body whose purpose is to guarantee the excellence of this scientific publication, because the blind evaluation - based exclusively on the quality of the contents of the manuscripts and carried out by experts of recognized International prestige in the field - is, without a doubt, the best guarantee for the advancement of science and to preserve in this header an original and valuable scientific production.

To this end, the **Council of External Reviewers** is made up of several scholars and international scientists specialized in **Education,** essential to select the articles of the greatest impact and interest for the international scientific community. This in turn allows that all the articles selected to publish in **«Universitas»** have an academic endorsement and objectifiable reports on the originals.

Of course, all reviews in **«Universitas»** use the internationally standardized system of double-blind peer evaluation that guarantees the anonymity of manuscripts and reviewers. As a measure of transparency, the complete lists of reviewers are published on the official website of the journal (www. http://Universitas.ups.edu.ec/) los listados completos de los revisores.

## 1. Criteria for acceptance/rejection of manuscript evaluation

The editorial team of «Universitas» selects those that are considered more qualified in the subject of the manuscript from the list of reviewers of the Council of Reviewers. While the publication requires the maximum collaboration of reviewers to expedite the evaluations and reports on each original, acceptance of the review must be linked to:

a. **Expertise.** Acceptance necessarily entails the possession of competences in the specific theme of the article to be evaluated.
b. **Availability.** Reviewing an original takes time and involves careful reflection on many aspects.

c. **Conflict of interests.** In case of identification of the authorship of the manuscript (despite their anonymity), excessive academic or family closeness to their authors, membership in the same University, Department, Research Group, Thematic Network, Research Projects, joint publications with authors ... or any other type of connection or conflict / professional proximity; The reviewer must reject the publisher's invitation for review.
d. **Commitment of confidentiality.** Reception of a manuscript for evaluation requires the Reviewer to express a commitment of confidentiality, so that it cannot be divulged to a third party throughout the process.

In the event that the reviewer cannot carry out the activity for some of these reasons or other justifiable reasons, he/she must notify the publisher by the same route that he/she has received the invitation, specifying the reasons for rejection.

## 2. General criteria for the evaluation of manuscripts

*a) Topic*

In addition to being valuable and relevant to the scientific community, the topic that is presented in the original must be limited and specialized in time and space, without excessive localism.

*b) Redaction*

The critical assessment in the review report must be objectively written, providing content, quotes or references of interest to support its judgment.

*c) Originality*

As a fundamental criterion of quality, an article must be original, unpublished and suitable. In this sense, reviewers should answer these three questions in the evaluation:

- Is the article sufficiently novel and interesting to justify publication?
- Does it contribute anything to the knowledge canon?
- Is the research question relevant?

A quick literature search using repositories such as Web of Knowledge, Scopus and Google Scholar to see if the research has been previously covered, may be helpful.

*d) Structure*

Manuscripts that refer to «Universitas» must follow the IMRDC structure, except those that are literature reviews or specific studies. In this sense, the originals must contain summary, introduction, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion.

- The ***title, abstract, and keywords*** should accurately describe the content of the article.
- The ***review of the literature*** should summarize the state of the question of the most recent and adequate research for the presented work. It will be especially evaluated with criteria of suitability and that the references are to works of high impact - especially in WoS, Scopus, Scielo, etc. It should also include the general explanation of the study, its central objective and the followed methodological design.
- In case of research, in the ***materials and methods,*** the author must specify how the data, the process and the instruments used to respond to the hypothesis, the validation system, and all the information necessary to replicate the study are collected.
- ***Results*** must be clearly specified in logical sequence. It is important to check if the figures or charts presented are necessary or, if not, redundant with the content of the text.
- In the ***discussion,*** the data obtained should be interpreted in the light of the literature review. Authors should include here if their article supports or contradicts previous theories. The conclusions will summarize the advances that the research presents in the area of scientific knowledge, the future lines of research and the main difficulties or limitations for carrying out the research.
- ***Language:*** It will be positively assessed if the language used facilitates reading and is in favor of the clarity, simplicity, precision and transparency of the scientific language. The Reviewer should not proceed to correction, either in Spanish or English, but will inform the Editors of these grammatical or orthographical and typographical errors.

- Finally, a thorough **review of the references** is required in case any relevant work has been omitted. The references must be precise, citing within the logic of the subject at study, its main works as well as the documents that most resemble the work itself, as well as the latest research in the area.

## 3. Relevant valuation dimensions

***«Universitas»*** uses an evaluation matrix of each original that responds to the editorial criteria and to compliance with the publication normative. In this sense, the reviewers must attend to the qualitative-quantitative assessment of each of the aspects proposed in this matrix with criteria of objectivity, reasoning, logic and expertise.

| **RESEARCHES** | |
|---|---|
| **Valuable items** | **P.** |
| 01. Title and abstract (clarity and structure) | 0/5 |
| 02. Thematic relevance<br>03. Originality of the work<br>04. Review of the literature | 0/10 |
| 05. Structure and organization of the article<br>06. Argumentative capabilities<br>07. Redaction | 0/10 |
| 08. Methodological rigor<br>09. Research instruments | 0/10 |
| 10. Research results<br>11. Advances<br>12. Discussion<br>13. Conclusions | 0/10 |
| 14. Quotations (variety and richness)<br>15. References | 0/5 |
| Total | 50 |

If the original is a review of the literature (status of the subject) or other type of study (reports, proposals, experiences, among others), the Editorial

Board will send to the reviewers a different matrix, including the characteristics of Structure of this type of originals:

| **REPORTS, STUDIES, PROPOSALS, REVIEWS** | |
|---|---|
| **Valuable items** | **P.** |
| 01. Title and abstract (clarity and structure) | 0/5 |
| 02. Thematic relevance | 0/10 |
| 03. Review of the literature | 0/10 |
| 04. Structure and organization of the article<br>05. Argumentative capabilities and coherence<br>06. Scientific redaction | 0/10 |
| 07. original contributions<br>08. Conclusions | 0/10 |
| 09. Quotations<br>10. References | 0/5 |
| Total | 50 |

## 4. Ethical Considerations

***a) Plagiarism:*** Although the journal uses plagiarism detection systems, if the reviewer suspects that an original is a substantial copy of another work, he must immediately inform the Editors citing the previous work in as much detail as possible.

***b) Fraud:*** If there is real or remote suspicion that the results in an article are false or fraudulent, it is necessary to inform them to the Editors.

## 5. Evaluation of the originals

After the quantitative-qualitative evaluation of the manuscript under review, the reviewer may make recommendations to improve the quality of the manuscript. However, the manuscript will be graded in three ways:

a. **Acceptance without review**
b. **Conditional acceptance** and therefore review (greater or lesser). In the latter case, it is necessary to clearly identify which review is necessary, listing the comments and even specifying paragraphs and pages suggesting modifications.
c. **Rejection** due to detected deficiencies justified and reasoned with quantitative and quantitative assessment. The report should be longer if a score of less than 40 of the 50 possible points is obtained.

# INDICADORES PARA REVISORES EXTERNOS DE «UNIVERSITAS»

El **Consejo de Revisores Externos de «Universitas»** es un órgano colegiado independiente cuyo fin es garantizar la excelencia de esta publicación científica, debido a que la evaluación ciega –basada exclusivamente en la calidad de los contenidos de los manuscritos y realizada por expertos de reconocido prestigio internacional en la materia– es la mejor garantía y, sin duda, el mejor aval para el avance de la ciencia y para preservar en esta cabecera una producción científica original y valiosa.

Para ello, el **Consejo de Revisores Externos** está conformado por diversos académicos y científicos internacionales especialistas en **Ciencias Sociales,** esenciales para seleccionar los artículos de mayor impacto e interés para la comunidad científica internacional. Esto permite a su vez que todos los artículos seleccionados para publicar en **«Universitas»** cuenten con un aval académico e informes objetivables sobre los originales.

Por supuesto, todas las revisiones en **«Universitas»** emplean el sistema estandarizado internacionalmente de evaluación por pares con «doble ciego» (doble-blind) que garantiza el anonimato de los manuscritos y de los revisores de los mismos. Como medida de transparencia, anualmente se hacen públicos en la web oficial de la revista (www. http://Universitas.ups.edu.ec/) los listados completos de los revisores.

## 1. Criterios de aceptación/rechazo de evaluación manuscritos

El equipo editorial de **«Universitas»** selecciona del listado de revisores del Consejo de Revisores a aquellos que se estiman más cualificado en la temática del manuscrito. Si bien por parte de la publicación se pide la máxima colaboración de los revisores para agilizar las evaluaciones y los informes sobre cada original, la aceptación de la revisión ha de estar vinculada a:

a. **Experticia.** La aceptación conlleva necesariamente la posesión de competencias en la temática concreta del artículo a evaluar.
b. **Disponibilidad.** Revisar un original exige tiempo y conlleva reflexión concienzuda de muchos aspectos.

c. **Conflicto de intereses.** En caso de identificación de la autoría del manuscrito (a pesar de su anonimato), excesiva cercanía académica o familiar a sus autores, pertenencia a la misma Universidad, Departamento, Grupo de Investigación, Red Temática, Proyectos de Investigación, publicaciones conjuntas con los autores… o cualquier otro tipo de conexión o conflicto/cercanía profesional; el revisor debe rechazar la invitación del editor para su revisión.
d. **Compromiso de confidencialidad.** La recepción de un manuscrito para su evaluación exige del Revisor un compromiso expreso de confidencialidad, de manera que éste no puede, durante todo el proceso, ser divulgado a un tercero.

En caso que el revisor no pueda llevar a cabo la actividad por algunos de estos motivos u otros justificables, debe notificarlo al editor por la misma vía que ha recibido la invitación, especificando los motivos de rechazo.

## 2. Criterios generales de evaluación de manuscritos

*a) Tema*

La temática que se plantea en el original, además de ser valiosa y relevante para la comunidad científica, ha de ser limitada y especializada en tiempo y espacio, sin llegar al excesivo localismo.

*b) Redacción*

La valoración crítica en el informe de revisión ha de estar redactada de forma objetiva, aportando contenido, citas o referencias de interés para argumentar su juicio.

*c) Originalidad*

Como criterio de calidad fundamental, un artículo debe ser original, inédito e idóneo. En este sentido, los revisores deben responder a estas tres preguntas en la evaluación:

- ¿Es el artículo suficientemente novedoso e interesante para justificar su publicación?

- ¿Aporta algo al canon del conocimiento?
- ¿Es relevante la pregunta de investigación?

Una búsqueda rápida de literatura utilizando repositorios tales como Web of Knowledge, Scopus y Google Scholar para ver si la investigación ha sido cubierta previamente puede ser de utilidad.

*d) Estructura*

Los manuscritos que se remiten a **«Universitas»** deben seguir obligatoriamente la estructura IMRyD, excepto aquellos que sean revisiones de la literatura o estudios específicos. En este sentido, los originales han de contener resumen, introducción, metodología, resultados, discusión y conclusión.

- El ***título, el resumen y las palabras clave*** han de describir exactamente el contenido del artículo.
- La ***revisión de la literatura*** debe resumir el estado de la cuestión de las investigaciones más recientes y adecuadas para el trabajo presentado. Se valorará especialmente con criterios de idoneidad y que las referencias sean a trabajos de alto impacto –especialmente en WoS, Scopus, Scielo, etc. Debe incluir además la explicación general del estudio, su objetivo central y el diseño metodológico seguido.
- En caso de investigaciones, en los ***materiales y métodos,*** el autor debe precisar cómo se recopilan los datos, el proceso y los instrumentos usados para responder a las hipótesis, el sistema de validación, y toda la información necesaria para replicar el estudio.
- En los ***resultados*** se deben especificar claramente los hallazgos en secuencia lógica. Es importante revisar si las tablas o cuadros presentados son necesarios o, caso contrario, redundantes con el contenido del texto.
- En la ***discusión*** se deben interpretar los datos obtenidos a la luz de la revisión de la literatura. Los autores deberán incluir aquí si su artículo apoya o contradice las teorías previas. Las ***conclusiones*** resumirán los avances que la investigación plantea en el área del conocimiento científico, las futuras líneas de investigación y las principales dificultades o limitaciones para la realización de la investigación.
- ***Idioma:*** Se valorará positivamente si el idioma utilizado facilita la lectura y va en favor de la claridad, sencillez, precisión y transpa-

rencia del lenguaje científico. El Revisor no debe proceder a corrección, ya sea en español o inglés, sino que informará a los Editores de estos errores gramaticales u ortotipográficos.

- Finalmente, se requiere una profunda ***revisión de las referencias*** por si se hubiera omitido alguna obra relevante. Las referencias han de ser precisas, citando en la lógica de la temática a estudiar, sus principales obras así como los documentos que más se asemejen al propio trabajo, así como las últimas investigaciones en el área.

## 3. Dimensiones relevantes de valoración

«Universitas» utiliza una matriz de evaluación de cada original que responde a los criterios editoriales y al cumplimiento de la normativa de la publicación. En este sentido los revisores deberán atender a la valoración cuali-cuantitativa de cada uno de los aspectos propuestos en esta matriz con criterios de objetividad, razonamiento, lógica y experticia.

| **INVESTIGACIONES** | |
|---|---|
| **Ítems valorables** | **P.** |
| 01. Título y resumen (claridad y estructura) | 0/5 |
| 02. Relevancia de la temática<br>03. Originalidad del trabajo<br>04. Revisión de la literatura | 0/10 |
| 05. Estructura y organización artículo<br>06. Capacidad argumental<br>07. Redacción | 0/10 |
| 08. Rigor metodológico<br>09. Instrumentos de investigación | 0/10 |
| 10. Resultados de investigación<br>11. Avances<br>12. Discusión<br>13. Conclusiones | 0/10 |
| 14. Citaciones (variedad y riqueza)<br>15. Referencias | 0/5 |
| Total máximo | 50 |

En caso de tratarse el original de una revisión de la literatura (estado de la cuestión) u otro tipo de estudio (informes, propuestas, experiencias, entre otras), el Consejo Editorial remitirá a los revisores una matriz distinta, comprendiendo las características propias de estructura de este tipo de originales:

| ESTUDIOS, INFORMES, PROPUESTAS, EXPERIENCIAS | |
|---|---|
| **Ítems valorables** | **P.** |
| 01. Título y resumen (claridad y estructura) | 0/5 |
| 02. Relevancia de la temática | 0/10 |
| 03. Revisión de la literatura | 0/10 |
| 04. Estructura y organización artículo<br>05. Capacidad argumental y coherencia<br>06. Redacción científica | 0/10 |
| 07. Aportaciones originales<br>08. Conclusiones | 0/10 |
| 09. Citaciones<br>10. Referencias | 0/5 |
| Total máximo | 50 |

## 4. Cuestiones éticas

***a) Plagio:*** Aunque la revista utiliza sistemas de detección de plagio, si el revisor sospechare que un original es una copia sustancial de otra obra, ha de informar de inmediato a los Editores citando la obra anterior con tanto detalle cómo le sea posible.

***b) Fraude:*** Si hay sospecha real o remota de que los resultados en un artículo son falsos o fraudulentos, es necesario informar de ellos a los Editores.

## 5. Evaluación de los originales

Una vez realizada la evaluación cuanti-cualitativa del manuscrito en revisión, el revisor podrá realizar recomendaciones para mejorar la calidad del original. Sin embargo, se atenderá a la calificación del manuscrito de tres maneras:

a. Rechazo debido a las deficiencias detectadas, justificadas y razonadas con valoración cualitativa y cuantitativa. El informe ha de ser más extenso si obtiene menos de los 30 de los 50 puntos posibles.
b. Aceptación sin revisión.
c. Aceptación condicionada y por ende con revisión (mayor o menor). En este último caso, se ha de identificar claramente qué revisión es necesaria, enumerando los comentarios e incluso especificando párrafos y páginas en las que sugieren modificaciones.

# PROTOCOL OF MANUSCRIPT EVALUATION FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

| Article Details | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Date of submission for evaluation: | Date of return of evaluation: | | Article code: xxxx |
| Title of the article to be evaluated: | | | |
| **SECCIÓN: INFORMES, ESTUDIOS, PROPUESTAS Y EXPERIENCIAS** | | | |
| 01. Title and abstract (clarity and structure) | Mandatory comments: | | |
| | | Value 0 to 5 | |
| | | | |
| 02. Thematic relevance | Mandatory comments: | | |
| | | Value 0 to 5 | |
| | | | |
| 03. Review of the literature | Mandatory comments: | | |
| | | Value 0 to 5 | |
| | | | |
| 4. Structure and organization of the article<br>5. Argumentative capabilities and coherence<br>6. Scientific redaction | Mandatory comments: | | |
| | | Value 0 to 5 | |
| | | | |
| 7. Original contributions<br>8. Conclusions | Mandatory comments: | | |
| | | Value 0 to 5 | |
| | | | |
| 9. Quotations<br>10. References | Mandatory comments: | | |
| | | Value 0 to 5 | |
| SOCORE | Of the total of 50 foreseeable points, this evaluator grants: | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **REDACTED OPINION** (More detailed if the work does not get 40 points, to inform the author(s)<br><br>This text is sent verbatim to the author (s) anonymously. | | | | | | | | |
| **WORTH PUBLISHING** | | No | | | Yes | | | Yes, with minor changes |
| **PROPOSED CHANGES** (In case of “Yes, with conditions”) | | | | | | | | |

# PROTOCOLO DE EVALUACIÓN DE MANUSCRITOS PARA REVISORES EXTERNOS

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Datos del artículo</th></tr>
<tr><td>Fecha envío evaluación:</td><td>Fecha devolución evaluación:</td><td>Código artículo: xxxx</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Título del artículo a evaluar:</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">SECCIÓN: ESTUDIOS, PROPUESTAS, INFORMES Y REVISIONES</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">01. Título y resumen (claridad y estructura)</td><td colspan="2">Comentarios obligatorios:</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td>Valore de 0 a 5</td></tr>
<tr><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">02. Relevancia de la temática</td><td colspan="2">Comentarios obligatorios:</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td>Valore de 0 a 10</td></tr>
<tr><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">03. Revisión de la literatura</td><td colspan="2">Comentarios obligatorios:</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td>Valore de 0 a 10</td></tr>
<tr><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">4. Estructura y organización artículo<br>5. Capacidad argumental y coherencia<br>6. Redacción científica</td><td colspan="2">Comentarios obligatorios:</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td>Valore de 0 a 10</td></tr>
<tr><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">7. Aportaciones originales<br>8. Conclusiones</td><td colspan="2">Comentarios obligatorios</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td>Valore de 0 a 10</td></tr>
<tr><td></td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">9. Citaciones<br>10. Referencias</td><td colspan="2">Comentarios obligatorios:</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Valore de 0 a 5</td></tr>
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# Cover Letter

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Miscellany ___

## Title in Spanish: Arial 14 bold and centered. Maximum 80 characters with spaces

*Title in English: Arial 14 cursive.*

*Maximum 80 characters with spaces*

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ORCID

**Name author 2 (standardized)**
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Institutional email
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**Name author 3 (standardized)**
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## Abstract (Spanish)

Minimum 210 and maximum 230 words. It must include 1) Justification of the topic; 2) Objectives; 3) Methodology and sample; 4) Main results;

5) Main conclusions. It must be impersonally written "The present paper analyzes ..."

## Abstract (English)

Minimum 210 and maximum 230 words. It must include 1) Justification of the topic; 2) Objectives; 3) Methodology and sample; 4) Main results; 5) Main conclusions. It must be impersonally written "The present paper analyzes ..." Do not use automatic translation systems.

## Descriptors (Spanish)

6 standardized terms preferably of a single word and of the UNESCO Thesaurus separated by commas (,).

## Keywords

The 6 terms referred to in English separated by commas (,). Do not use automatic translation systems.

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### Resumen

Mínimo 210 y máximo 230 palabras. Debe incluir 1) Justificación del tema; 2) Objetivos; 3) Metodología y muestra; 4) Principales resultados; 5)

Principales conclusiones. Ha de estar escrito de manera impersonal "El presente trabajo analiza…"

## Abstract

*Mínimo 210 y m*áximo 230 palabras *cursiva. Debe incluir 1) Justificación del tema; 2) Objetivos; 3) Metodología y muestra; 4) Principales resultados; 5) Principales conclusiones. Ha de estar escrito de manera impersonal "El presente trabajo analiza..." No utilizar sistemas de traducción automáticos.*

## Descriptores

6 términos estandarizados preferiblemente de una sola palabra y del Thesaurus de la UNESCO separados por coma (,).

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*Los 6 términos referidos en inglés separados por coma (,). No utilizar sistemas de traducción automáticos.*

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