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COMMUNICATION TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND DIGITAL CHANNELS

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: In the midst of the era of transformation in digital communication it becomes necessary to review the different ways of being able to relate to others and reflect on the benefits and harms that lead us to choose one over the other. The object of study is to conduct a comparative analysis to review both models (both digital and traditional communication). At the same time, the study will review how the use of these models is affecting the emotional and face-to-face quality of interpersonal relationships, the communicative effectiveness and social bonding. **Methodology:** this study has a mixed methodological approach, both quantitative and qualitative, with a representative sample that will provide sufficient data on the strengths and weaknesses of human interactions and the social consequences of digital transformation. **Results:** the data on the low use of phone calls, the preference to be congratulated by message instead of by phone, the average number of hours of use of the cell phone or which digital platforms were the most chosen and used. There are also some advantages of digital communication such as connectivity, empathy and efficiency. And therefore some disadvantages such as personal communication, misunderstandings, loss of attention or overinformation or fake news. **Conclusions:** the balanced integration of traditional and digital communication models is fundamental to face the challenges of an interconnected world and it will be necessary that both modalities complement each other to enrich human relations and social progress.

Keywords: digital communication; traditional communication; connectivity; social networks; personal relationships; personal communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of human communication has undergone radical transformations with the emergence of digital technologies, which have reconfigured both the modes and means of social interaction. Traditional communication, characterized by its dependence on physical encounters, print media and analog devices, has been confronted by a digital ecosystem defined by immediacy, interactivity and the globalization of interactions. This transition raises fundamental questions about how new communication formats affect interpersonal and social dynamics, as well as the advantages and limitations inherent to each model. The analysis of the differences between digital and traditional communication is essential to understand the structural changes in contemporary social and cultural practices. Recent studies have highlighted the advantages of digital communication, such as its ability to overcome spatial and temporal barriers, especially through collaborative platforms that facilitate real-time interaction (Wolfenstein, 2024). However, this evolution also poses significant challenges related to the quality of shared information and the critical perception of users. According to Vargas Delgado et al. (2024), the growing dependence on digital environments increases exposure to unverified information, affecting the ability of individuals to discern between truthful and misleading content. This phenomenon underscores the need to address the cognitive and emotional implications of digital communication in the context of human communicative skills. In this context, the

present article aims to conduct a comparative analysis between digital and traditional communication models, examining their impact on interpersonal relationships, communicative effectiveness and the formation of social bonds. Based on a mixed methodological approach, the study addresses not only the quantitative characteristics of their use, but also the subjective perceptions of users, in order to offer a comprehensive view of their strengths and weaknesses. The research, based on a diverse and representative sample, aims to contribute to the academic debate on the social consequences of digitalization, raising questions about the sustainability of emotional bonds and human interactions in an increasingly mediatized world. Thus, an invitation to reflect on how technological advances should be consciously integrated into our communicative practices, balancing innovation with the preservation of essential human values.

1.1. Beginnings of the Internet and virtual environments

To begin with the analysis of the different communication options that can be found in the different media, it is necessary to find out where virtual environments started from. When talking about the transformations that have resulted from the emergence of technologies, one cannot fail to mention Dorfsmani (2012) and its beginnings. The Internet originated in the needs of the USA, emerged as a project of the Ministry of Defense and was alternatively included economically by different government departments. Other centers such as research centers and universities also joined in. Its origins were in the military network (Arpanett), where it went from a military project to a scientific project. The Internet was born at the unusual crossroads between big science, military research and libertarian culture (Castells, 2003).

The key technological advances that came from the creation of the Internet and its subsequent development were the result of collaboration between government institutions, major universities and research centers. This joint work was carried out within a climate of freedom of thought and innovation, and since its creation there has been a permanent evolution and change in the network of technologies that support it.

Web 2.0 emerged as part of the second stage of evolution and it can be distinguished by the following characteristics:

- Web 2.0 makes it possible to publish information and make changes to data without the need for advanced technological knowledge. Users become producers and not only consumers of content.
- Web 2.0 is collaborative, since there are interactions between users and content producers.
- It makes it easier to publish, research and consult content on the web, so we could say that information is constantly changing.
- Access to free or low-cost software is facilitated: this is the world of Open Source and Freeware, which respond to content commercialization paradigms.
- The discourse is multidimensional, with distributed nodes and no visible hierarchy.

According to Abanades (2024), it can be confirmed that in less than 10 years the network has evolved in giant steps from the passivity of the user to being the protagonist, from the rigidity of the content to its total flexibility. This type of evolution undoubtedly links man with technologies. Susan Bodker (2006) identified a movement she called the third wave, which she took from the work of Bannon (1991), and it corresponds to the stage in which man is perceived in every dimension (reason, will and spirit), when linked to computers and not only as a factor as it was studied at the beginning. This third wave coincides with the Web 2.0 era and with the beginnings of Web 3.0, the latter being the subject of the network and taking it wherever it goes, with a multiplicity of applications and new accessories. Web 3.0 does not depend on the intelligent use that is made of it, but aims to be intelligent by itself, connecting efficiently and adequately to the capabilities of technology with the needs of the subjects.

1.2. The digital society of the 21st century

Today, in the digital era, the ecosystems of our society have changed significantly and as digital natives and migrants, it is necessary to subsist with the current media in order to be in constant communication with our different environments. Certainly, due to the different generations that coexist in the digital world, there is much controversy about a good use of it. According to Scolari (2012), the new forms of communication are great predators of attention: if consumers used to devote a lot of time to a handful of media (press, radio, television) in a few years they began to devote little time to many media (websites, social networks, video games, blogs, mobile devices, etc.). The major media outlets struggled hard to adapt to the new rules of the game and survive in an increasingly hostile environment. Some media managed to survive while others, despite their efforts to adapt, became extinct.

The new forms of participatory and collaborative communication not only modified the media ecosystem: they also made their influence have an impact on fields such as education, politics and art. Schools have been perhaps the institution that has taken the longest to adapt to the new media ecosystem.

Between the 20th and 21st centuries, a field of knowledge that would leave its mark on contemporary science took shape: network theory. Pioneers such as Albert-László Barabási (2002), Andrew Gelman (2010) and Bernardo Huberman (2001) opened a path that would soon be joined by researchers from all disciplines. If in the mid-twentieth century everything was system or structure, at the beginning of the twenty-first century everything became a network. Being a researcher or communication professional in the 21st century is not easy, but it is exciting to live with the current digital communication and see how the different digital media are transforming generations and therefore our society. The most representative point that should be investigated is how this digital communication is influencing in a positive and negative way in our environment, which channels are in disuse and what advantages and disadvantages society detects before this incipient and at the same time continuous and constant change.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main purpose of this article is to carry out an exhaustive analysis on transformations in traditional and digital communication models, evaluating their implications on social interaction, communicative efficacy and the construction of interpersonal bonds. In line with this general objective, the following specific objectives are proposed:

- 1) To identify the differentiating characteristics of traditional and digital communication models in terms of immediacy, accessibility, versatility and emotional presence, based on previous studies and empirical data being collected during the research.
- 2) To analyze the impact of digital communication formats on the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, with emphasis on how they support or limit emotional interaction and empathy compared to traditional channels.
- 3) To examine the advantages and disadvantages perceived by users with respect to both communication models, in order to establish patterns that will enable an understanding of the preferences and challenges they face in their daily use.
- 4) To evaluate the role of digital communication in shaping new cultural and social practices, highlighting its potential to promote global connectivity and its influence on the quality of human interaction.
- 5) To propose recommendations based on empirical findings to foster a balanced integration between digital and traditional communication, maximizing their strengths and minimizing their limitations in social and professional contexts.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a mixed methodological approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to obtain a comprehensive analysis of the differences and similarities between digital and traditional communication models. This methodological design allows not only to quantify the preferences and habits of users, but also to interpret the perceptions and experiences that underlie their choice of communication channels.

3.1. Research design

A descriptive-comparative design was adopted to explore the characteristics and effects of both communication models. The analysis is based on the collection and processing of data obtained through structured surveys and open-ended questions, specifically designed to measure usage patterns, perceived advantages and limitations of the communication channels.

3.2. Data collection instruments

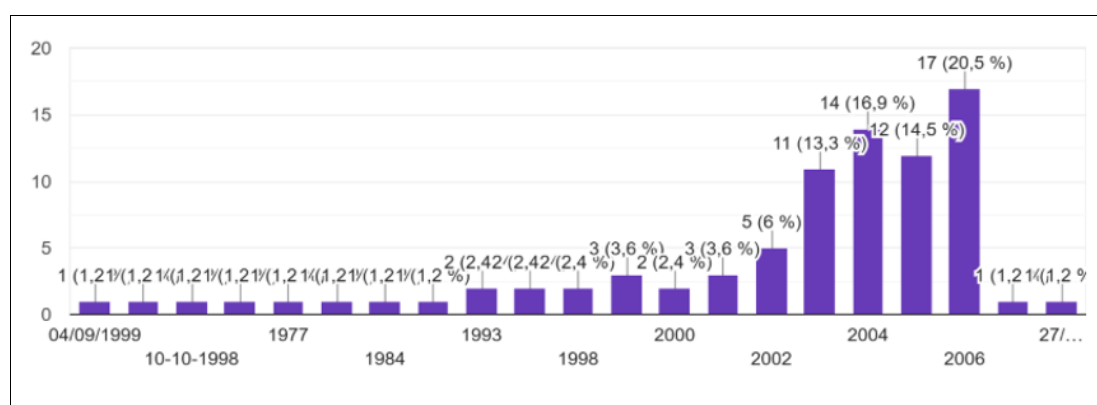
- 1) Structured surveys: A questionnaire combining Likert scale, multiple choice and open-ended questions was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The questions address aspects such as:
 - a. Frequency of use of different channels (phone calls, social networks, video calls, etc.).
 - b. Preferences in communication modality (digital vs. traditional) in specific situations, such as congratulations or conflict resolution.
 - c. Perception of advantages and disadvantages in terms of connectivity, efficiency and empathy.
- 2) Qualitative analysis: Open-ended questions were included to explore personal narratives about users' experiences with both models, allowing a deeper understanding of the emotional and contextual aspects associated with their use. Its Atlas-ti analysis method will provide the different categories in the advantages and disadvantages section.

3.3. Study sample

The sample consisted of 150 participants who were selected through non-probabilistic purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria considered age diversity, gender and experience in the use of digital technologies, with the aim of capturing a wide range of perspectives. The demographic distribution is detailed in Figure 1, which shows a balanced representation between young people and adults, with an age range of 18 to 65 years.

Figure 1.

Sample Data



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

3.4. Data analysis process

- 1) Quantitative analysis: The data collected through closed-ended questions were processed by descriptive statistical techniques (frequencies, means and standard deviation) using specialized software (SPSS v.25). This analysis made it possible to identify patterns of use and preferences.

- 2) Qualitative analysis: Using the Atlas-ti analysis method, the open-ended responses were subjected to a thematic content analysis, classifying the narratives into categories such as in the case of the advantages: Connectivity, Effectiveness and Empathy, and in the case of the disadvantages categories such as Personal communication/Personal relationships, Misunderstandings and loss of attention, and Over-information, fake news and immediacy.

Following the analysis of the sample, the results obtained from the questions in the questionnaire are discussed below.

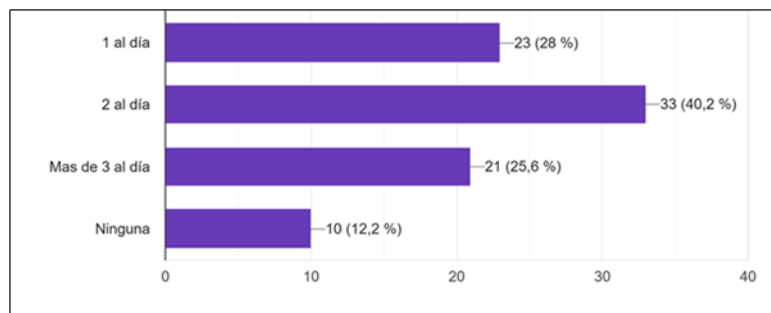
4. RESULTS

In this section the results obtained will be discussed. The sample was asked several questions related to traditional and digital communication.

To the question: Due to the new forms of communication, it seems that the option of calling may have fallen into disuse. Comment on the number of calls made per day. From the results obtained, it can be confirmed that 40% make a maximum of two calls per day. This figure in itself indicates very significant data with respect to the use of mobile telephony currently in use. It is also noteworthy that more than 12% of the sample does not make any calls per day.

Figure 2.

Number of calls per day

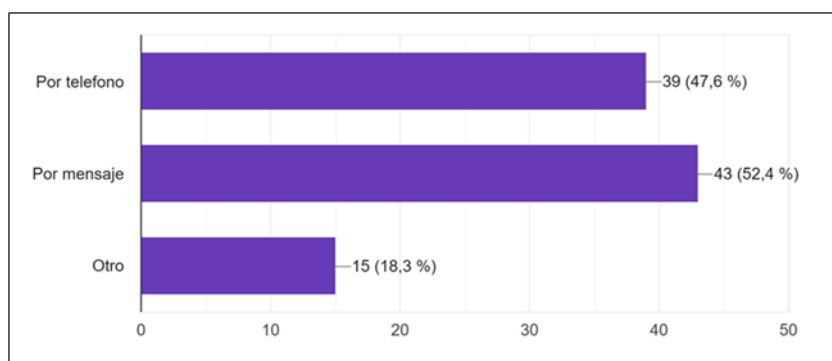


Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

Due to the maximum use of smartphones in different environments, it was also worthwhile to assess how people prefer to be congratulated or get in touch through different means. The question asked was: How do you prefer to be congratulated when you celebrate your birthday or any achievement, by phone or by message? The results were as follows.

Figure 3.

How do you prefer to be congratulated?



Source: Elaborated by the authors, 2024.

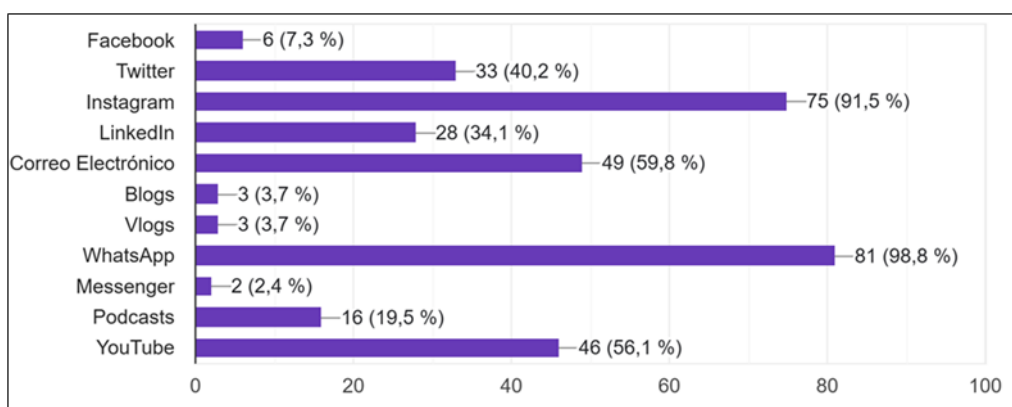
Although only a few years ago, the practice of texting was for short, immediate notes, today more than 52% prefer a text message for a greeting or thank you, compared to 47% who prefer a phone call. The traditional congratulatory phone call is losing ground in society. The total connectivity to the networks facilitating that everyone is more frequently connected to each other has brought with it a loss of telephone time or, if not, face-to-face time with our loved ones or contacts.

In the next question to be answered, the type of media and channels used by society has been evaluated. As mentioned above, there is a wide range of possibilities in the networks to stay informed and in touch, for this reason, the following consideration was made: Indicate what type of communication you have used or currently use and then the following results were obtained.

Reviewing the results, the most common medium used at the moment is WhatsApp, with almost 99%. In second place, with almost 92% Instagram, platform currently in high demand for tips, videos etc., and reaching 60% email. There are also other platforms that, even though they were in great demand at the time, are falling into disuse, such as Facebook or Messenger.

Figure 4.

Type of communication in the networks

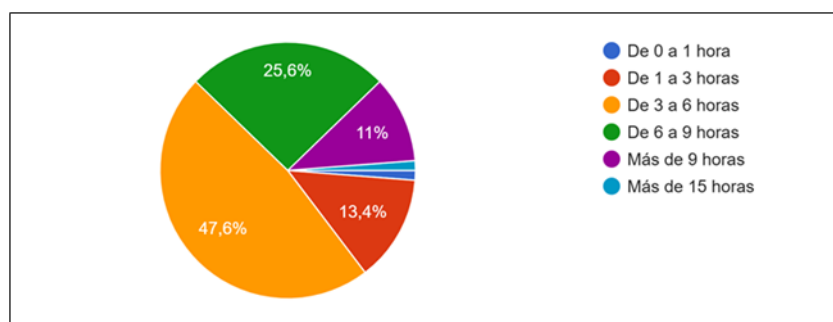


Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

Another of the issues of concern in our society are the hours of telephone consumption during the day. Being hyper connected, people are aware that they tend to use their time to visit different information channels. Indeed, people find pleasure in the repetitive behavior linked to the cell phone, whether it is sending messages, playing games, watching programs, series or movies, or continuously visiting social networks. In response to the question "How many hours a day do you use your cell phone?", the following results were obtained and are shown below.

Figure 5.

Hours of use of mobile phones per day



Source: Elaborated by the authors (2024).

After reviewing the results, the number of hours per day of cell phone use is startling. Nearly 48% claim to use an average of 3 to 6 hours of their cell phone. And almost 26% use their phones for 6 to 9 hours.

As a last question: Digital communication has made it possible for society to communicate in real time millions of kilometers away, although experts comment that it has weakened telephone and face-to-face communication. In your opinion, comment on the advantages and disadvantages.

In the case of the advantages, after a qualitative analysis, there are three categories: connectivity, efficiency and empathy. Below are some of the responses in each of them.

Connectivity

*"Digital communication provides such advantages as connecting and talking remotely with people around the world. Moreover, it makes it easier to express oneself more openly, especially for people who consider themselves introverted, through texts. Writing is often used as a means of relief and a deeper expression of oneself, and it is no longer only handwritten but digitized."*M34

"Instant connection: Allows communication in real time regardless of distance."
M21

*"Real-time access: We can communicate instantly with people in different parts of the world, which facilitates connection regardless of distance."*M85

*"Ease of access to information: Digital platforms allow us to share and consult information quickly and easily, which promotes learning and access to knowledge."*M106

*"being able to be more informed and updated."*M43

*"The advantages are the possibility of staying connected when you have long-distance relationships, or when you have limited time to be able to make face-to-face visits."*M77

*"Digital communication makes it possible to communicate in real time over distances of millions of kilometers, through video calls and social networks, which I find very convenient, as people can easily and quickly keep in touch with their family and friends, even if they are in different countries or regions."*M12

Effectiveness

*"advantages: - it is easier to communicate as it is faster - you can communicate at a distance no matter how far away you are (call, video call, messages...) - you can translate when writing and therefore communicate with people from other countries who do not speak your language."*M49

*"Advantages: - Instant and global communication. - Variety of formats (text, video, etc.). - Logging and organization of messages."*M78

*"Flexibility of schedules: Allows people to communicate at any time, adapting to their own pace and avoiding the limitations of time zones."*M90

*"Part of my family is in another country, so digital communication has always been essential to be able to keep in touch with each other. Therefore, I think that digital communication is essential, and also for work, it allows us to communicate faster and more efficiently."*M6

*"I think it has many advantages because you can communicate with people who are far away and family members who do not live near you and you can be in contact with them, as well as for work or an online meeting."*M65

*"Versatility of formats: It makes it easy to express ideas through text, images and videos."*M87

*"Advantage: long distance collaborative projects."*M11

Empathy

"Advantages: whenever you have people away from you, you will be able to communicate". M83

*"It is true that this aspect of technology and communication is key to evolution, but we can see clear advantages such as: communication with loved ones, globalization, strengthening relationships, among others."*M9

"As for the advantages, I would say that if you have not seen that person for a long time and you want to talk to him/her, and you do it for example by video call, you will feel happier because you have seen that person again; also because you can send videos, photos, audios..." M32

you are close to people who live far away from you, you can notify emergencies at high speed, you can be in contact with many people at the same time." M81

"The advantages are the immediacy and the ability to connect with people you care about in case we are separated (international trips, etc.) even if it is in writing. The distribution of information in general comes faster and we can learn about other cultures and travel without moving." M101

In the case of the disadvantages, the following categories were found: personal communication/personal relationships, misunderstandings and loss of attention, and finally over-information, fake news and immediacy.

The following are some of the responses:

Personal Communication/Personal Relationships

"As for the disadvantages, I would say that as this continues, telephone or personal communication may disappear if we abuse mobile applications too much, so we should take more into account other means such as landlines, letters..." M85

"Disadvantages: Reduction of face-to-face communication, dependence and isolation and loss of face-to-face communication skills". M55

"There are also many disadvantages, it is clear that as there is more digital communication there is less 'person to person', we have become dependent on it, so we start communicating by cell phone at an increasingly early age, which is bad because for example in children you do not let them finish developing". M14

"Personal relationships are weakened". M32

"the isolation of the human being and the sedentary lifestyle it causes". M120

"people have become used to relationships based on immediacy without giving space for reflection, and it has also weakened interpersonal relationships because people do not interact in the same way since the existence of networks and telephone communication". M145

"Social isolation: Although we are more connected digitally, the ease of virtual communication can lead to less effort in maintaining relationships in person, generating loneliness or disconnection in the real social environment". M77

"Disadvantages: Reduces face-to-face contact, It can generate social isolation, It favors misunderstandings due to lack of context". M41

"I think many people lack deep emotional interaction because they rely too much on online communication and neglect face-to-face communication". M76

"Lower quality of interpersonal communication: lack of physical contact and gestures in digital interactions can lead to misunderstandings and less emotional and empathic communication". M55

"disadvantage: you don't interact with people on the street due to mobile addiction, you don't communicate with them". M8

"disadvantages: we often forget that we are people and there are many things we do with our cell phones that we could do physically and interacting with others, reaching relationships". M31

"Disadvantages: In my opinion, we lost that very personal touch when communicating with someone, we lost the emotion of when we used to receive calls or letters in their time. In addition, the ability to have an interpersonal communication and create links in person thanks to social networks is also lost. Very few people prefer to send text messages, than, calls, or keep very long calls". M76

"On the other hand, people are increasingly developing a dependence on the telephone and are forgetting to live and share experiences in person, inhibiting their communication skills". M15

Misunderstandings and Loss of Attention

"misunderstandings that can occur because in person it is easier to be understood the way you want to be understood than by WhatsApp or telematically". M84

"Dependence and distraction: Constant accessibility to digital media can make people dependent and distract their attention from face-to-face interactions". M97

"The disadvantages are that the interpretation of the message is very open and communication can be impaired". M51

"Another disadvantage is that a key element in communication is lost, which is nonverbal communication, in which, with one's gestures, pauses, silences you can get a large part of the message or the emphasis or the way in which the message is intended to be transmitted". M70

"Lack of closeness: Digital interaction can be impersonal. Misunderstanding: Text is easier to misinterpret by not including nonverbal language". M110

"disadvantages: - little face-to-face interaction which decreases the conversational fluency - misunderstanding as messages can be interpreted differently". M59

Overinformation, fake news and immediacy

"The disadvantages are immediacy, overinformation and fake news, personal treatment, immediate dopamine, psychological and health problems and the little possibility of being alone or staying disconnected (in the past you could remove the battery from the cell phone, not nowadays)". M17

"An example of a disadvantage could be that the volume of information and communications that are not contrasted: they overwhelm us, we do not have time to process it and some may not be correct. Sometimes, we don't have time to check it. In social situations, the phone even serves as a barrier or prevents us from connecting with others, sometimes even if we don't realize it. We miss day-to-day details that, if we didn't have a small computer in our hand with access to dopamine monodose, wouldn't happen. Now we have to be aware of when, how much and how we use the phone and the different social media". M54

5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

As seen in the framework, digital communication is a fact that affects all levels and environments of everyday life. Its irruption, driven by globalization, has allowed societies to become more competitive, innovative and technologically advanced. However, it has also raised questions about how these transformations impact social, cultural and professional dynamics. The constant connection and immediacy that characterize digital environments have changed not only communication channels, but also the way we relate to each other and build human bonds.

With respect to the objectives set out in this research, the results obtained allow the following aspects to be corroborated:

- 1) Identify the differentiating characteristics of traditional and digital communication models in terms of immediacy, accessibility, versatility and emotional presence: This objective was achieved through theoretical and empirical analysis, which highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of both models. On the one hand, traditional communication stands out for its ability to generate deeper, more authentic and empathy-laden interactions. This model values presence and fosters quality human relationships. On the other hand, digital communication has established itself as a powerful tool for overcoming spatial and temporal barriers, enabling global connectivity that facilitates collaborative projects and international working relationships. Its versatility in formats and its capacity to transmit instant information have redefined the expectations of interaction.
- 2) Analyze the impact of digital communication formats on the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, with emphasis on how they favor or limit emotional interaction and empathy: This analysis has shown that, although digital communication fosters connectivity, it can limit the quality of human relationships due to the lack of non-verbal elements such as body language and emotional cues. This poses a significant challenge to maintaining empathy and

depth in interactions, especially in personal contexts.

- 3) To examine the advantages and disadvantages perceived by users with respect to both communication models, in order to establish patterns that allow to understand the preferences and challenges they face in their daily use: Qualitative and quantitative results reveal that the most valued advantages of digital communication are immediacy, accessibility and the possibility of global interaction. However, disadvantages include social isolation, technological dependence and reduced quality of face-to-face interactions. These perceptions reinforce the need for critical digital literacy that promotes a conscious and balanced use of these tools.
- 4) Assess the role of digital communication in shaping new cultural and social practices, highlighting its potential to promote global connectivity and its influence on the quality of human interaction: Digital communication has transformed key sectors such as education, work and culture, enabling unprecedented interaction. However, these advances also require reflection on how to preserve traditional practices that strengthen emotional and cultural ties.
- 5) Propose recommendations based on empirical findings to foster a balanced integration between digital and traditional communication, maximizing their strengths and minimizing their limitations in social and professional contexts: It is essential to design strategies that combine the best of both models. This includes encouraging face-to-face presence in key interactions and leveraging digital technology to extend the reach and effectiveness of communications. It is also essential to educate users in digital competencies and emotional skills that enable them to effectively manage their presence and behavior in both environments.

In short, the balanced integration of traditional and digital communication models is essential to meet the challenges of an interconnected world. Both modalities complement each other and offer unique opportunities that, properly managed, can enrich human relationships, foster social progress and ensure more inclusive and meaningful communication in the 21st century.

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Professor in Theory and History of Education. Accredited in the figures of Hired Doctor and Professor of Private University. Approved six-year research period. Six-year research period granted by ANECA (2020). PhD in Persuasive Communication (2012). Director of the Degree in Advertising (2021-2022). Director of the Master's Degree in Marketing and Communication of the European University (2016). Dean of the European University of the Canary Islands (UEC) (2012-2014). Director of the Department of Advertising and Content at the European University (2002-2012). He has 25 years of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching experience and he has taught multiple subjects related to the following areas: Creativity, Verbal and Nonverbal Communication, Public Speaking, Persuasive Communication, Transpersonal Communication, Emotional Intelligence, Strategy, Leadership, Management Skills, Mindfulness, Workplace Wellness and Healthy Organizations. He has made multiple external collaborations as an expert guest lecturer with many institutions. He has published more than 78 scientific publications. He has participated in more than 57 national and international scientific congresses. He has directed 5 defended doctoral dissertations. Mindfulness Consultant at Onelife Clinic (2017-2025).

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