

# TECHNOLOGIES IN MIGRATION PROCESSES: MEDIATION IN COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

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## ABSTRACT

**Aim.** This article presents an ethnographic exploration of technology use among migrants. The main question explored is how migration processes are mediated by communication between migrants and their support network, considering the role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

**Methods.** Multi-situated and virtual ethnography have allowed researchers to access and obtain relevant discourse on the experiences, perceptions, and strategies of migrants in a non-invasive way.

**Results.** In pre-digital contexts, support networks of friends and family provided sources of information in the development of migration projects. With the spread of technology, Facebook's virtual communities are a means of facilitating migration strategies. Likewise, ICTs bring migrants and their families closer to the "there", bolstering their bonding social capital and therefore their emotional well-being. Despite the language barriers, and the stereotypes and prejudices held by native-born residents, virtual social networks allow migrants to strengthen their



bridging social capital, facilitating the integration of different Latin American migrant groups in the destination society.

**Conclusion.** Today, ICTs have transformed migration strategies and expanded bonding social capital, allowing migrants to share common interests with their family setting, despite the distance. Limited interaction between migrants and native-born residents restricts bridging social capital, but the virtual sphere allows the Latin American diaspora to pursue common interests and overcome cultural barriers.

**Keywords:** social capital, transnational communication, Peruvian migrants, social media, social networks, ICTs

## INTRODUCTION

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has brought about significant changes for migrant groups, allowing them to remain connected to the society of their origin countries and to establish constant communication with relatives in the “there” (Peng, 2016). Such changes have enabled migrants to strengthen family ties, bringing greater emotional benefit to their lives.

Likewise, the constant use of technology in migratory contexts has made it possible to redefine the figure of the “uprooted” migrant who, in this case, becomes a subject with a broad pattern of permanent interactions over time, mediated by ICTs. In short, migrants have gone from being “uprooted” to “constantly connected” (Peñaranda Cólera, 2010). This “connected presence” with the “there” has allowed links to be established between migrant relatives and family members interested in migrating. Through two-way communication, migration projects are developed and implemented. Relatives who have already settled in the host country provide an economic support network for the migrant, taking care of the cost of travel, providing accommodation, and allowing them to integrate quickly into the employment market of the host country.

In addition, online social media allow potential migrants to establish initial contact with diaspora communities virtually, affording plenty of opportunities to communicate with other migrants settled in the destination country (Melella, 2016a). In general, members of virtual communities present their migratory experiences and provide relevant information to future migrants such as: gaining employment, legalising their status as migrants, and finding language schools in the destination country, among others.

This present study sets out to explore the link between the social capital of migrants and ICTs. In this relationship, social relations and technology are particularly important in planning migration and undertaking the journey itself, as well as when it comes to adapting to the new context in the host country. In this line of study, certain fundamental research questions arise, such as: are ICTs present in communication processes in migratory contexts?

In what way? Are digital devices an effective tool for building bonding and bridging social capital? This research breaks away from the one-directional approach that has predominated the study of migratory processes, historically focused on processes of integration in the destination society.

### “ICTS - MIGRATIONS” AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The revolution in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the global spread and reach of the Internet have had a significant impact on contemporary modes of social communication (Castells, 2006). This impact is particularly relevant in the study of transnational migration processes (Melella, 2014; Peñaranda Cólera, 2010). In this context, research is paying special attention to the new connected actors that interact and combine different logics and temporalities (e-migrants), as new social figures that condense the relationship between space, time and place, as well as to the phenomena of integration, exclusion, deterritorialisation, and relocation (Olivera Cajiga, 2014).

Today, digital technology gives members of a diaspora the possibility of living a double presence, physical and virtual, experiencing a change in their profile due to changes in the social environment related to mobility and the requirement of interconnection and communication (Diminescu, 2008; Králík et al., 2022; Ogáyar-Marín et al. 2018). As a result, new terms have emerged to refer to these subjects, such as connected migrant (Diminescu, 2008), online migrant (Nedelcu, 2009), and co-presence (Baldassar et al., 2016), defined as a migrant in movement who develops relationships with their peer group or social network, representing a definitive shift away from the old image of the uprooted immigrant. As a symbol of modernity, the migrant genuinely contributes to the deterritorialisation of society and creates a new transnational habit through „the way in which lifestyles impose processes of socialisation” (Nedelcu 2012, p. 1345) by means of an omnipresent co-presence achieved through ICTs.

Likewise, this field of study emphasises the need to analyse the types of connections and communication mediated by ICTs in migration processes, and the term „social capital” is of particular interest, addressed in Dieter Zinnbauer’s (2007) research on social capital and ICTs. According to this author, social capital refers to the scope, nature and quality of social relations that individuals and groups can mobilise to manage their affairs (Zinnbauer, 2007). Robert David Putnam (2002) differentiates between two types of social capital:

- Bonding social capital: referring to networks of relationships between people who share similar interests or belong to the same group (kinship, ethnic, religious, etc).
- Bridging social capital: referring to networks of links between people from different groups or communities (for example, in the host society).

To deepen the distinction between these two types of social capital, we should point out that bonding social capital is more common in families and other groups where there is greater equality, and where identities, interests and place of residence are shared. This can generate significant advantages in the health and the emotional and personal well-being of the people involved, as it is based on close relationships and mutual support to face the challenges of life. This type of social capital is usually formed through close social connections, which are developed from previous shared experiences or as a result of lasting commitments or frequent personal encounters (Forni et al., 2004; Tkáčová et al., 2023).

Furthermore, bonding social capital is oriented towards the intrinsic qualities of collective actors. Thus, the social capital of a collectivity (organisation, nation, etc.) focuses on its internal structure, on the relations between individuals or groups within the collectivity, rather than on its external contacts with other external agents. As a result, it is mainly linked to features that create consistency and facilitate the pursuit of common goals (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

Finally, bridging social capital refers to the strengthening of social bonds among different types of people and groups (over ethnic, cultural, gender, social and religious barriers), which is effective in certain individuals seeking social, economic, or other types of benefits outside their own community, society or organisation (Forni et al., 2004).

## LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATIONS AND THE USE OF ICTS

Throughout history, migrants have employed multiple technological means in order to shorten distances and establish connections with their communities of origin and destination. The literature on this subject takes a special interest in the magnitude of migration and the constant use of ICTs, as reflected in the studies of Renzo Jeri Levano and Mónica Ortiz Cobo (2022) and Jacques Paul Ramírez Gallegos (2007). Elsewhere, we find studies such as those of Cecilia Eleonora Melella (2016a; 2016b) and Alicia Szmukler (2016) who focus on identity construction in the diaspora, or those of María Carmen Peñaranda Cólera (2008) and Herminia González Torralbo (2012) linked to transformations in migration practices and the process of technosociality, as well as the use of ICTs as essential tools in the establishment of migration networks.

Furthermore, the use of ICTs by migrants is increasingly widespread, who use them for communication and support in the migratory journey (Castro Cabalceta, 2018). In this sense, potential migrants look for information about routes, closed borders, the risks of the journey, as well as contact with people smugglers, all in order find out more about the countries of destination and choose the one that best suits their needs (Kutscher & Kreß, 2018). These findings suggest that ICTs play an important role in finding

and collecting relevant data for decision-making in contexts of economic or forced migration.

These media are crucially important to the diaspora, allowing them to maintain constant communication with their family (Jeri Levano & Ortiz Cobo, 2021; Králik et al., 2018), and affording them greater social and emotional support, fundamental to deal with the setbacks and difficulties of the migration process (Mancini et al., 2019; Pavlíková, 2017). For this reason, choosing one virtual social network over another depends on usability and the preferences of those with whom you seek to establish a connection (Twigt, 2018). Through social media such as Facebook, migrants have multiple options to share multimedia content (photos, videos, among others.) with relatives in their country of origin, and to be included virtually in events within the family nucleus (Kutscher & Kreß, 2018; Wilding, 2006). However, it is important to note that although these technological means facilitate long-distance communication, they do not replace face-to-face communications. In situations of close relationships, the exclusive use of these technologies can accentuate the sense of distance rather than reduce it (Wilding, 2006).

Likewise, ICTs not only facilitate communication between migrants and their contacts in their country of origin but can also be a means to connect with the local population in the host country, which favours their integration. In this regard, the authors Miguel Osorio García de Oteyza and Rosana Rodríguez Gómez (2016) argue that the Internet and virtual social networks facilitate communication between the native-born population and the migrant collective, providing the latter with possibilities of integration and facilitating their understanding of the host society language and culture. However, the use of ICTs to connect with the native-born population is not enough in itself, since actions are needed that require the intervention of local entities to promote such contact. In fact, in the absence of these actions, contacts established by migrants are often limited to individuals in the same situation or who speak their language, making it difficult to create links with the local population and, in some cases, it can lead to the avoidance of these contacts (Bacishoga et al., 2016; Judák et al., 2022).

## METHODOLOGY

This present study of migration processes and ICT-mediated communication takes into account the role these technologies play in the daily lives of migrant communities, especially in cases of economic and forced migration, as well as family reunification. Technology is a vital means for obtaining extensive information about the destination country or for staying connected with networks of contacts on the migration journey to the new destination country.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, our specific objective has been to analyse how ICTs influence the communication and social connection processes of migrant citizens in Italy and Spain. To do this, we have considered aspects such as access to and use of different technological means, the importance of online social networks in the construction of social relationships, and interaction with family members and diaspora communities. To achieve this goal, we set the following specific objectives:

- Analyse migration processes in a pre-digital context, identifying the role and use of ICTs.
- Investigate the mediation of ICTs in social interactions, specifically the use of social media and virtual communication in migration projects.
- Examine the role of technology in the construction of bridging and bonding social capital among migrants.

With this proposal, we have analysed not only the use of ICTs by a particular migrant group, but also the relationship between ICTs and the migration process, as well as the relationship with the destination society.

This study has used virtual ethnography as a methodology, which shares the interdisciplinary and technical characteristics of traditional ethnography, but at the same time allows for observation in digital environments and facilitates interpretative analysis given the nature of its object of study (Vigna, 2017). This is how virtual ethnography has facilitated innovation in migration studies and deepened our understanding of the relationship between migrants and ICTs, providing a more complete and updated view on migration phenomena in society today. In this sense, virtual ethnography expands our capacity for observation by allowing us to explore the use of technology (Hine, 2000) and digital interactions between individuals, as well as their preferences in the digital space. For the purpose of this study, virtual observation was carried out on two social media sites, Instagram and Facebook, between May 2022 and February 2023.

We also developed a semi-structured interview protocol to further expand our observations and deepen the participants' virtual interaction (Pujadas i Muñoz et al., 2010). In addition, we applied multi-situated ethnography that involves different interrelated spaces. In this sense, contextualisation is developed in various everyday spaces without restrictions, avoiding limiting the unit of analysis to a specific geographical area or context (Marcus, 1998).

The sample was made up of thirty-eight participants, all Peruvian migrants residing in Italy or Spain. Table 1 presents the profile of the informants.

**Table 1**  
*Profile of Peruvian informants living in Italy or Spain*

Informant	Informant details				Means used when developing the migration project
	Age and sex	Host city and country	Years of residence	Type of visa when entering Europe	
P1	63 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	32 years	Exempt from visa requirements (1980s)	Phone calls
P2	68 years old - man	Genoa - Italy	30 years	International employment contract	Phone calls
P3	59 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	29 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P4	57 years old - man	Genoa - Italy	28 years	Tourist visa	*
P5	62 years old - woman	Madrid - Spain	16 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P6	69 years old - woman	Madrid - Spain	20 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P7	47 years old - woman	Madrid - Spain	5 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Facebook and WhatsApp
P8	22 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	4 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp
P9	40 years old - woman	Cáceres - Spain	3 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp
P10	47 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	26 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P11	39 years old - woman	Gijón - Spain	3 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp
P12	42 years old - woman	Gijón - Spain	5 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp

Informant	Informant details				Means used when developing the migration project
	Age and sex	Host city and country	Years of residence	Type of visa when entering Europe	
P13	60 years old - woman	Livorno -Italy	28 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P14	68 years old - man	Fano - Italy	30 years	Clandestine entry	*
P15	67 years old - woman	Fano - Italy	24 years	Family reunification visa	Phone calls
P16	33 years old - man	Modena - Italy	25 years	Family reunification visa	*
P17	48 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	18 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P18	58 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	20 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P19	44 years old - man	Genoa-Italy	28 years	Family reunification visa	*
P20	53 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	35 years	Exempt from visa requirements (1980s)	Phone calls
P21	57 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	21 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P22	66 years old - woman	Milan - Italy	35 years	Exempt from visa requirements (1980s)	Phone calls
P23	61 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	18 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P24	51 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	21 years	Family reunification visa	Phone calls
P25	59 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	34 years	Exempt from visa requirements (1980s)	Phone calls
P26	59 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	29 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls



Informant	Informant details				Means used when developing the migration project
	Age and sex	Host city and country	Years of residence	Type of visa when entering Europe	
P27	49 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	28 years	Tourist visa	Phone calls
P28	59 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	29 years	Clandestine entry	Phone calls
P29	52 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	29 years	Tourist visa	*
P30	57 years old - woman	Milan - Italy	2 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Facebook and WhatsApp
P31	52 years old - woman	Bilbao - Spain	2 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Facebook and WhatsApp
P32	24 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	3 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp and TikTok
P33	22 years old - woman	Cáceres - Spain	2 years	Exempt from visa requirements (Year 2016)	Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp and TikTok
P34	71 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	34 years	Exempt from visa requirements (1980s)	Phone calls
P35	72 years old - man	Genoa - Italy	28 years	Family reunification visa	Phone calls
P36	45 years old - man	Genoa - Italy	28 years	Family reunification visa	*
P37	70 years old - woman	Genoa - Italy	33 years	Exempt from visa requirements (1980s)	Phone calls
P38	70 years old - man	Genoa - Italy	34 years	Exempt from visa requirements (1980s)	*

Note. \* No technological means were used.

Source. Own research.

The Peruvian community represents the largest Latin American immigrant group in Italy. According to statistical data from the Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (2023), there are 94,131 Peruvians living in Italy. In Spain, Peruvians make up the fourth largest Latin American community. According to data from Spain's Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas de España (2023), there are 120,255 Peruvians residing in Spain.

As for sample composition, thirty informants reside in Italy and eight in Spain, which contributes significantly to the heterogeneity of the data obtained from the participants. This variability is manifested in the number of years residing in the country of destination, age range, type of entry visa to Europe, and technological means used in the migration project, among others. In order to identify and differentiate the informants, we have assigned a code (for example: P1, P2, etc.) when presenting excerpts from interviews and the contents of their Instagram and Facebook profiles.

Table 1 shows that Peruvian migrants have experienced different ways of entering countries such as Italy and Spain. A total of seven participants managed to enter without much difficulty in the 1980s, when visas were not yet required in a context similarly without digital technology. However, from 1992 onwards, the European Union began to require visas from Peruvians, so nineteen participants applied for different types of visas (family reunification and tourist) in pre-digital contexts. Only one participant managed to obtain an international employment contract in a pre-digital context. Two other participants entered Europe clandestinely in a context without digital technology. Nine participants were able to enter Italy and Spain easily after 2016, thanks to the visa exemption established by the European Union, in this case in a digital age context.

In the selection of informants, we applied a non-probabilistic sampling process using the snowball technique (Domínguez-Mujica et al., 2016), since it allows us to identify potential participants in investigations in which subjects are difficult to find. The individuals chosen for this study have allowed us to identify additional new participants with similar traits of interest to the study.

Therefore, to establish contact with the Peruvian community in Italy, we first contacted informant P34, via social media, through the website "Peruanos en Liguria". This informant has been key since he actively participates in events organised by the Peruvian community in Genoa (Italy) and has a considerable network of contacts. Having added P34 as a contact on Facebook, we were able to access other informants, found through mutual friends. In the case of informants residing in Spain, we first made contact over the phone with the association "APREX - Peruanos en Extremadura" and later, through social media, with P9, a member of the association. Once we had added P9 on Facebook and WhatsApp, we could access other migrants from the Peruvian collective. Finally, the virtual communities of the Peruvian diaspora were accessed via Facebook.

## RESULTS

In our exploration of the link between ICTs and migration processes, data processing has allowed us to establish three broad categories of analysis. The first refers to the construction of migration processes in the absence of ICTs, in a pre-digital period. The following two categories, analysed below, present the role of ICTs in these processes in the digital age, as well as their impact on bonding and bridging social capital of the migrant community.

### *In the Absence of Technology: "Face to Face" as a Means of Constructing Migration in the Imaginary*

In a pre-digital context, subjects developed their migratory projects by communicating with their support networks, made up of relatives and friends residing abroad. Telephone calls made from landlines or phone booths were the main means to establish transnational communication with the diaspora, despite the excessive cost and the marked technological gap between developed and developing countries. The absence of telephones in homes made communication difficult, bearing in mind that only 3% of Peruvians had access to a landline in Peru in the early 90s (Hidalgo Sánchez, 2006). So they sought alternative sources of information, in this case face-to-face interpersonal relationships, obtaining indirect information about the migratory journeys of other compatriots. Here is the account of informant P13, resident in Livorno (Italy) for the past 28 years:

[...] The priest from my congregation helped me migrate and introduced me to other members of the same congregation who told me about the good experiences their relatives had abroad and the many job opportunities and suggested that I travel from Lima to Madrid and from there to Rome. Thanks to the contacts from my congregation, I got preference when it came to accessing the Italian embassy and applying for a visa, since there was a lot of demand. [...] When I arrived in Rome, I was treated badly by the immigration office, and they demanded my visa very rudely and asked me so many questions. I was shocked by the discrimination I faced from people ignoring me and refusing to give me directions to get to the place I would be living, which was a convent. I also noticed that this convent was full of Latina women, it was not like in the photos I was shown in Lima, it was a small place, a bit dirty, but there was food and a place to sleep. [...] I remember not being able to contact my family and I sent my mother a postcard from Rome telling her I had arrived safely. The sisters of the convent got me a job, all the jobs were usually cleaning or caring for sick or elderly people, that was what struck me because I came to get a better job since I was already working as a nursing assistant in a hospital.

The testimony of P13 indicates how the subject had an unrealistic vision of the destination country that clashed with the person's actual experience of the migratory process. She highlights the difficulties encountered in transnational communication with family members, wearing down the bonds with her peer group and without the possibility of constructing new

kinds of two-way relationships or being able to overcome geographical barriers.

### *"A New Age" in Migration: The Digital Age*

The agreements signed in 2016 between the Republic of Peru and the European Union have streamlined migration flows from Peru. Despite the waiver of visa requirements to travel to EU countries, it did not have a massive displacement or "pull effect". However, the COVID-19 crisis and the recent political and social upheaval in Peru (Barturén Núñez, 2022) have spurred new generations of young Peruvians to consider and design migration projects. In this case, they resort initially to transnational communication with relatives who migrated years ago, in some cases resuming communication and in others intensifying it. Therefore, the use of technology has brought about changes in migration strategies. The virtual space has become a viable alternative to establish communication with family members residing in destination societies and to obtain support in migration processes. In fact, migrant relatives assume the responsibility of providing meaningful information and processing documentation to access the country. Once the migrants arrive at their destination, relatives try to provide them with accommodation and greater opportunities to integrate into the new society. One example is the account of P29, living in Genoa (Italy) for 29 years now, who processed entry documentation (issuing a letter of invitation<sup>1</sup>) for their nephews who migrated to Italy in November 2022.

My two nephews arrived 2 months ago (November 2022). One is 19 and the other 18. They entered Italy without any issues, since they didn't need a visa, but to avoid problems with immigration officers I gave them a letter of invitation. [...] The last time I saw them they were still children, and I was surprised they contacted me after such a long time. They told me that they were coming to visit me, and we began communicating often by WhatsApp and later we became friends on Facebook. They were constantly asking me about the possibility for them to stay. I told them the truth, that there wasn't much possibility because the situation is difficult in Italy. However, they have been very lucky because with the political crisis that Peru is experiencing (December 2022 - January 2023), we made an appointment with immigration, and the officer who interviewed us told us that the only way they could stay would be to request political asylum, and their request was approved very quickly.

Online interaction with family support networks prior to travelling to Italy is especially important in migration projects. From the outset, legal entry is guaranteed along with the search for the necessary resources for their reception/integration process, advice with the new language, greater access to information related to legal paperwork in the host country and, not least, emotional support that aids their psychological stability.

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1 A letter of invitation issued by an individual (resident in Europe) can be considered for practical purposes the equivalent of proof of accommodation. It is usually required in the case of people travelling to visit friends or family.

### *Diaspora on Facebook as a Migration Tool*

The massive use of mobile telephony (smartphones) exists alongside social media such as Facebook that allow people to establish possible migration strategies and undertake journeys in the best possible way. Through Facebook, potential migrants come into virtual contact with diaspora communities (Jeri Levano & Ortiz Cobo, 2022), providing information on various issues that are relevant to migration such as finding employment in the destination country, the availability of room rentals or the process of requesting entry documents. Such is the case of P33 living in Cáceres (Spain) for two years, who constantly interacted in the Facebook group “Peruanos en España”, which has 31,201<sup>2</sup> members. As noted by P33, this tool becomes a powerful way to find information and look for work:

Before travelling to Spain, I contacted the group “Peruanos en España”. My intention was to find information about Madrid, without having to bother anyone and avoid having to live with my brother in Cáceres. [...] They give you guidance about the employment situation in Spain and the legal paperwork [...] Before travelling, I posted messages on the group about my work experience in Peru to see if I would be lucky enough that someone in the group would offer me a job. It was mainly criticism rather than interest in offering me a job. Others helped me by giving me links on how to get a job through migrant associations or they told me how to get to Cáceres once I landed in Madrid. [...] I became friends with one girl from the group, she advised me to make use of the free Wi-Fi at Madrid airport. That I should remain calm when I met with immigration officers and that she would put me in contact with a friend of hers, a taxi driver, who would take me to the bus station and help me get the bus to Cáceres without any problems.

The account of this informant demonstrates the importance of online interaction with virtual communities in the migration process. The virtual sphere is the “new space” to establish and maintain links with a support network, seeking to minimise the difficulties that accompany the migratory experience, both in the origin and the destination.

### *“Connected” as Emotional Support*

New ICTs become support tools that play a fundamental role in the migratory journey, as a source of emotional support. In this sense, the use of social media has allowed migrants to maintain constant communication with their family, share in real time the geographical position of the different stages of the trip (Charmarkeh, 2013), and receive gestures of support remotely from friends. This is how social media such as Facebook not only allow migrants to share the migratory process through posts in different multimedia formats, but also enable expressions of affection between family members and the migrant once they have arrived at their destination, as well as receiving congratulations from friends for family reunification in

2 Registered as of 24 January 2023



the host country. Figure 1 shows how P5, a resident in Madrid (Spain) for 16 years, posts the video of his granddaughter arriving at Madrid airport and the emotional reunion between daughter and mother (granddaughter and daughter of P5).

### Figure 1

Facebook post of P5, video of his granddaughter's arrival at Adolfo Suárez airport (Madrid) and affectionate messages sent by friends.



Note. Extracted from Facebook.

Source. Own research.

In reference to this image, our informant P5 explains:

When my daughter (living in Spain) lost her job due to the health crisis, my granddaughter's trip was postponed, and both of them had a really tough time. But I was able to help financially to bring my granddaughter over here so that my daughter would not suffer anymore. It took us a while to get the money together and get all the legal paperwork, almost two years because everything was so slow in Spain and Peru because of COVID. My granddaughter

kept us posted on Facebook, she put up pictures or called on WhatsApp to tell us that she was about to board the plane to Madrid, I told my granddaughter to be patient that she would soon see her mum again. [...] There was some fear about the controls when passengers arrive in Madrid airport but thank goodness, she was able to hug her mother.

Figure 1 represents the successful arrival in Madrid and being able to overcome the economic difficulties caused by COVID-19 thanks to the help of P5. Likewise, Facebook is used to show and share feelings, in this case of joy in a private context, involving other family and friends who react to said post with congratulatory comments.

### *ICTs and Bonding Social Capital: Reinforcing Cultural Identities*

The spread of mobile telephony makes it possible for “communicative practices” to reconfigure modes of communication between migrants and their families in the country of origin. In this way, ICTs enable the recreation of moments and discourses that build affective relationships and commitment between members of the same family, which allows family relationships to be maintained despite the distance (Pavez Andonaegui et al., 2020; Zapata Martínez, 2020). Daily communications and the intensity with which they use cyberspace affords migrants greater possibilities to build migratory experiences in a virtual context, showing a tendency towards strengthening family ties through the choice of multiple virtual social media networks. The choice of one option over another is determined by the digital skills of the subject, which are in turn often determined by the digital generation to which they belong. One example is the story of P12, living in Gijón for 5 years.

[...] With my mum and sisters we are always in touch. We use different social media. With my sisters I use Instagram, WhatsApp, or Facebook. With my mum we do video-calls every day on WhatsApp because it’s easier for her.

The account given by P12 indicates that the technological context affords a wide range of communication opportunities (“polymedia”) through ICT tools. According to the perspective of Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (2012), polymedia regimes create new forms of co-presence that replace physical presence as a key factor in the construction of social relations. In fact, social media networks are a mechanism for strengthening existing links and are regularly used with relatives in the “there”. In this sense, the participants of the study use multiple social media networks as a means of remaining close to relatives: Facebook (all 38 informants), WhatsApp (38), Instagram (16) and TikTok (6).

Social media such as Instagram make it possible to restore the social life left behind, facilitating co-presence at major family events such as birthdays, weddings, and baptisms, among others (see figure 2). In this sense, social media are able to shorten distances and allow users to follow family activities in real time, from video calls to comments posted on their wall,

uploading multimedia formats (photographs or videos). Usually, these practices help to temper feelings of homesickness and allow migrants to experience a certain sense of familiarity. This is indicated by P24, living in Genoa (Italy) for the past 21 years:

On special occasions I video-call my relatives in Peru. We share family gatherings. The 6-hour time difference doesn't matter, the important thing is to see my relatives all gathered together, the people who raised me as a child.

The story uploaded to Instagram by the daughter of informant P24 also offers an example of this. The video corresponds to P24's birthday, and it is her daughter from Peru who shares it with other family and friends from "here" and "there".

### Figure 2

*Instagram video of P24's birthday.*



*Note.* Extracted from Instagram.

*Source.* Own research.



***ICT and Bridging Cultural Capital: Building Bridges with Diversity?***

By considering the virtual interaction of informants who migrated to Italy and Spain in a dual context - the visa exemption in 2016 and the digital age - a certain social distance with the host society is identified. In this case, ICTs do not seem to have played a particularly facilitating role, in contrast to the national and transnational virtual interaction with the diaspora community. The story of P8, living in Genoa (Italy) for 4 years, is relevant here. When asked about the reasons for having few Italian contacts on her social media, she stated:

Because of the language difficulty, and I'm clearly foreign because of the way I speak, and they might think that there's a language barrier that would make it difficult to interact with them. I only have a few Italian work colleagues, and I haven't friended any on my social media that I can think of. I have only added my Peruvian or Latina friends, and I have met up with some of them, we've gone for walks together, to Latino events or things organised by the Peruvian community.

One of the first barriers that makes it difficult to have friendly relationships with native-born residents is the language. The lack of fluency in communication and the insecurity generated by interacting in a second language (L2) has an obvious influence. However, language is not the only reason for poor interaction with the native host society, or even the most important one. Although, as shown in the case of informant P8, language as a vehicle for communication affects the social capital of the Peruvian collective living in Italy, this not the case for Peruvian migrants in Spain. In the latter case, even though a common language is shared, this tendency towards social distance is maintained. In this regard, focus should also be placed on the host society, since stereotypes and prejudices mediate communication in contexts of cultural diversity. This is made clear by informant P31, living in Bilbao (Spain) for the past 2 years.

[...] I arrived in January 2020 and so far, I have had a hard time adapting. The people here don't appear to like interacting with foreigners and so far, I haven't had contact with the people of this city. [...] I felt spurned, I don't know whether it's because I was a foreigner or because they thought something bad was going to happen. Also in my work I don't have many friendships and I think it's because I am different from them, I mean physically, my looks, I suppose. [...] I even felt rejected when I asked for help to find a place to live, I think that, because I'm a foreigner, they looked at me strangely, and I feel that I didn't convey that confidence for them to rent me a room.

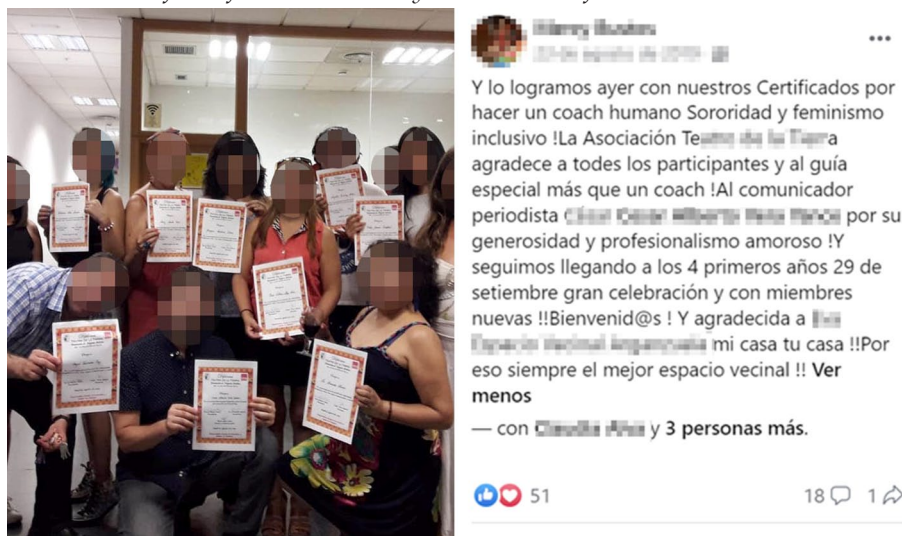
Despite this trend, social media have strengthened support networks in the host country with fellow migrants not only from the same country but from other backgrounds as well, in particular with groups of Latin American origin with whom they share the status of migrants, etc. a common language, and similar experiences. In this sense, P7, who has been living in Madrid (Spain) for 5 years, said:

I am an assistant in an association that promotes theatre and culture, and several of us get together, from various places in Latin America, such as Ecuador, Colombia, Chile. [...] We support one another and create a good community; we always use social media to stay in touch and plan our training meetings. We have organised workshops, talks, and courses. We also keep the culture of all our members alive and we perform on stage or do musical shows with typical dances from almost all Latin American countries. I feel that we are pursuing the same goal even though we're from different countries and have certain cultural differences. What keeps us united to this association is the support we give as Latin Americans and migrants and the training we have on different topics and to gain greater knowledge of Spain so as to be more competitive.

In this regard, below is a very significant image of an act held by the association to which informant P7 refers, which shows the presentation of a certificate for having completed a course on sonority and feminism:

### Figure 3

*Presentation of certificates in sonority and inclusive feminism.*



Note. Extracted from Instagram.

Source. Own research.

In short, we see how the virtual sphere has facilitated the integration of migrants into the host society, promoting support, interaction and cultural exchange with people from other backgrounds, with whom otherwise they would have been less likely to establish not only contact but also a bond.

## CONCLUSIONS

As shown here, in a pre-digital context, Peruvian migrants who arrived in the late 80s and the early years of the new millennium mainly used the support networks formed by migrant relatives. The only means of contact with them was through international telephone calls, which, at the time, were expensive, which limited communication time. In addition, the imposition of visas created additional delays and obstacles to carrying out migration projects. Despite these difficulties, cooperation networks offered support, not only economic for the journey itself, but also mediation to find work and accommodation, or even offering it free of charge, as well as enabling a network of contacts in the destination country. However, migrants who did not have family support networks were forced to resort to unreliable sources of information, in this case strangers or people smugglers. These migrants were faced with very complicated situations, such as labour exploitation, clandestine entry, and the risk of deportation. In this sense, support networks played an important part in the planning and execution of migration projects in the past.

Nowadays, it is clear that Peruvian migrants who have arrived in Europe in recent years, specifically following the approval in 2016 of the visa waiver regime by the European Union, have changed their communication patterns and use technology as a fundamental resource to plan their migration projects. Online social media are an effective means to establish contacts and create support networks, allowing them to interact smoothly and constantly, as well as (re)build or preserve links with family and friends who migrated decades ago, which facilitates the planning of their migration project.

Likewise, online social media provide support in the migratory journey, acting as virtual travel journals, where migrants share photographs and videos “posted on Facebook walls”, thus shaping their experience and leaving traces of their migratory crossing. Another common practice is the posting of comments that reflect their feelings and moods, where they also receive emotional support in real time from relatives who have already migrated (Charmarkeh, 2013). All these practices are made possible by prior knowledge of the various social media applications. Furthermore, migrants have greater opportunities to communicate with the “there”, which is made possible by the “polymedia regime” (Madianou & Miller, 2012), which affords them new forms of co-presence with the family nucleus and allows them to resume the social and family life they left behind (e.g., birthdays, weddings, national holidays, etc.). In this way, online interaction with the “there” strengthens the bonding social capital of the migrant, reinforcing affective bonds immediately (Ortiz Cobo & Bianco, 2018) and allowing them to be part of the other’s life and vice versa.

With regard to the new migration strategies mediated by social media, novel virtual interaction with diaspora communities is observed on Facebook (Jeri Levano & Ortiz Cobo, 2022), consolidating itself as a valuable

support network for future migrants. These practices have reinforced and reconfigured the migrant's bonding social capital, since virtual communities in Peruvian diaspora offer access to relevant and up-to-date information, such as new routes for their migratory journeys, knowledge of the job market, opportunities to access a rental property or accommodation, and guidance on immigration legal paperwork, among others.

Similarly, migrants who arrived six years ago are more likely to maintain close ties and constant interaction, both in the virtual sphere and face to face with their compatriots who have lived for longer in Italy and Spain. This makes it possible for them to expand their network of contacts, thus offering valuable bonding social capital that increases their chances of employment, information on legal procedures and paperwork, and even allowing them to maintain their cultural customs. Likewise, these practices are reproduced in the virtual communities of the Peruvian diaspora, from which relevant information about the destination country can be obtained in an extensive way. In particular, the virtual communities present on Facebook have become an important means to stay connected and support each other.

Another aspect to highlight is that Peruvian migrants who arrived six years ago have few opportunities to establish contact with native-born residents in the host country due not only to language barriers (in the case of Peruvians living in Italy) but also to the prejudices and stereotypes of the host society that mediate relationships in contexts of cultural diversity. Although there is a certain social distance with the native-born population, bonds of friendship and mutual support are established with other individuals who are also migrants (documented or undocumented) from other Latin American countries. This bridging social capital is often built through participation in migrant associations, which seek to support integration in the destination society and promote cultural exchange.

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