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Editorial

En Currently, communication processes are undergoing profound transformations stemming from digitalization and the need to develop critical skills to navigate increasingly complex media environments effectively, responsibly, and safely. In this context, this issue of *MLS Communication Journal* presents research that explores the educational potential of audiovisual media, media literacy, digital narratives, communication skills in professional settings, and social media positioning strategies. Therefore, the studies in this issue contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary communication processes and their impact on various social, educational, and professional spheres.

The first article, titled “Learning Palestinian Narrative: A Comparative Study of Documentaries and Instagram Videos as Media Literacy Tools for Communication Students,” and developed by Tamara Abu Laban (University of Huelva), Victoria García-Prieto (University of Seville), and Begoña Mora-Jaureguialde (University of Huelva), analyzes the educational potential of different audiovisual formats for teaching Palestinian narrative at the university level. Using a mixed-methods approach, combining pre- and post-tests with focus groups, a structured pedagogical intervention is developed, consisting of several phases of viewing and critical reflection. The results show that documentaries foster a deeper and more contextualized understanding of historical processes, while Instagram content stands out for its accessibility and ability to generate emotional engagement. The study underscores the importance of strengthening critical media literacy so that students can recognize algorithmic biases and interpret digital content reflectively.

In the second publication, “Teacher Narratives on Contemporary School Reality on the Mexican Border” by Lizette Chávez Segura and Vanessa Ledezma-López (National Pedagogical University of the State of Chihuahua), the perceptions of elementary school teachers working in Ciudad Juárez are examined. From a qualitative, biographical-narrative perspective, the study analyzes teachers' accounts to understand how human mobility, multiculturalism, and institutional dynamics shape teaching practice in border contexts. The findings show that the teaching experience is influenced by phenomena such as cultural diversity in the classroom, administrative demands, and difficulties in articulating different levels of the education system, demonstrating how social transformations resulting from migration processes reshape teaching methods.

The third study, titled “Correlation between training in bibliographic research and media and information literacy (MIL), and the quality of investigative journalism reports: A comparative study in the central region of Bolivia,” conducted by Edgar Dávila-Navarro (Franz Tamayo University), analyzes the relationship between journalists' specialized training and the quality of investigative reports. Through surveys, interviews, and content analysis, the study identifies significant training gaps, especially in media and information literacy. The results suggest that mastery of documentary research techniques contributes significantly to the rigor, quality, and credibility of journalistic work.

The following manuscript, “Communicative Competencies in Dental Education in Chile: Some Curricular Keys,” by Marisol Díaz-Fernández (Ibero-American International University) and Jorge Osorio (Catholic University of the Holy Conception), addresses the incorporation of communicative skills into dental training programs at various Chilean universities. Through a documentary analysis of graduate profiles and curricula, the research examines how competencies such as clinical communication, empathy, and assertiveness are addressed within the study plans. The results reveal the heterogeneous integration of these skills, with significant differences between institutions in terms of the level of detail, development, and evaluation. The study highlights the need to strengthen the explicit and assessable teaching of these competencies in clinical settings, in order to contribute to more humanized and effective care.

Finally, the article “Digital marketing strategies in creative personal brands: The case of photographer Marcos Alberca on Instagram and TikTok”, by Gustavo Paul Cabrera Aldaz, Franklin Gustavo Santín Picoita and Carlos Antonio Granda Cruz (University).

Dra. Mónica Bonilla del Río
Editora Jefe / Editor in chief / Editora Chefe

Learning the Palestinian Narrative: A Comparative Study of Documentary Films and Instagram Videos as Educommunicative Tools among Media Students

Aprendizaje de la narrativa palestina: estudio comparativo de documentales y vídeos de Instagram como herramientas de educomunicación entre los estudiantes de Comunicación

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Educommunication, Palestinian Narrative, Media Literacy, Digital Resistance, Generation Z

This study focuses on the comparative effectiveness of documentary films and Instagram videos as educommunicative tools for teaching the Palestinian narrative in the university setting. In a context marked by digital saturation and the hegemony of algorithms that act as “gatekeepers” of information, the study examines how different media logics shape knowledge acquisition, perceptions of credibility, and the historical memory of Generation Z. The research integrates educommunication, informal learning, and postcolonial theory to examine the transition from cinematic “archives of resistance” to the “floating digital homes” of social media, including the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Using a mixed-methods approach, a pedagogical intervention for media studies undergraduates is designed, structured into three phases: pre-viewing, comparative viewing, and post-viewing activities. To capture measurable quantitative and qualitative data, pre- and post-test instruments are designed, as well as focus groups, offering a replicable pedagogical model for using media as laboratories for social justice and political empowerment. The educational proposal’s approach allows for an in-depth analysis of the educommunicative potential of two contrasting formats: documentary films—which provide superior contextual depth and narrative coherence—and Instagram videos—which foster high emotional engagement and immediate accessibility, despite risking historical fragmentation. Ultimately, the study

underscores that developing critical media literacy is essential for students to identify algorithmic biases and protect narrative sovereignty against colonial erasure.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Educomunicación, narrativa palestina, alfabetización mediática, resistencia digital, Generación Z

Este estudio pone el foco en la eficacia de documentales y vídeos de Instagram como herramientas educomunicativas para la enseñanza de la narrativa palestina en la universidad. En un contexto marcado por la saturación digital y la hegemonía de algoritmos que actúan como “guardianes” de la información, el estudio examina cómo las lógicas mediáticas configuran la adquisición de conocimientos, percepciones de credibilidad y memoria histórica de la Generación Z. La investigación integra educomunicación, aprendizaje informal y teoría postcolonial para examinar la transición de los "archivos de resistencia" cinematográficos hacia los "hogares digitales flotantes" de las redes sociales, incluyendo el impacto de la Inteligencia Artificial (IA). Bajo un enfoque metodológico mixto, se diseña una intervención pedagógica para estudiantes universitarios de Comunicación, estructurada en tres fases: pre-visionado, visionado comparativo y actividades de post-visionado. Para recopilar datos medibles tanto cuantitativos como cualitativos, se diseñan instrumentos de pre y post-test, así como grupos focales, ofreciendo un modelo pedagógico replicable para el uso de los medios como laboratorios de justicia social y empoderamiento político. El enfoque de la propuesta educativa permite un análisis profundo del potencial educomunicativo de dos formatos contrapuestos: el cine documental —que aporta mayor profundidad contextual y coherencia narrativa— y los videos de Instagram —que fomentan un alto compromiso emocional y accesibilidad inmediata, a pesar del riesgo de fragmentar el conocimiento histórico—. El estudio subraya que el desarrollo de una alfabetización mediática crítica es esencial para que los estudiantes identifiquen los sesgos algorítmicos y protejan la soberanía narrativa frente al borrado colonial.

Introduction

The Palestinian narrative has long been shaped and preserved through diverse forms of storytelling, ranging from oral histories to documentary cinema and, more recently, digital media platforms. Storytelling functions not only as cultural expression but also as a form of resistance, identity construction, and historical preservation in the absence of formal state archives. In the contemporary digital era, platforms such as Instagram have introduced new modes of narrative production characterized by immediacy, interactivity, and accessibility.

Despite the growing visibility of Palestinian narratives across both traditional and digital media platforms, the comparative effectiveness of these media forms in educating students about the Palestinian issue remains insufficiently examined in academic literature. Documentary films, by virtue of their structured production process, rigorous research foundations, and narrative coherence, have long been regarded as credible vehicles for historical education (Nichols, 2010). In contrast, Instagram videos are characterized by brevity, fragmentation, and algorithmic accessibility, qualities that afford wide reach but may compromise contextual depth and analytical rigor (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). While scholarship has explored the tension between long-form and short-form media in terms of narrative depth, audience engagement, and content dissemination (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013), the educational impact of these media forms on defined audience groups — particularly media students — remains largely undertheorized.

This gap acquires particular urgency when examined through the lens of Generation Z, a cohort born between 1997 and 2012 that has come of age in conditions of pervasive digital immersion (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). Unlike preceding generations, Gen Z learners demonstrate a pronounced preference for short-form visual content, exhibit platform-native information-seeking behaviors, and increasingly rely on social media as their primary source of news and current affairs (Pew Research Center, 2022). These characteristics are not merely behavioral but epistemic: the algorithmically curated environments in which Gen Z consumes information actively shape not only what this cohort learns but how it interprets, contextualizes, and retains knowledge (Selwyn, 2019). As Prensky (2001) observed in his conceptualization of digital natives, immersion in digital environments from birth produces qualitatively different cognitive and learning orientations (Bennett et al., 2008).

In addition, this research also interrogates the epistemic implications of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and algorithmic search engines into academic practices. Acting as “gatekeepers”, these tools reshape information through computational synthesis and opaque curation (Noble, 2018), inevitably modulating the framing of the Palestinian narrative. This study posits that such “information distillation” may result in a sanitized engagement with historical realities, potentially diminishing students' critical interpretive capacity. By examining the spectrum of AI usage — from fact-checking to holistic research — this inquiry seeks to delineate the nexus between algorithmic curation, pedagogical outcomes, and the sociopolitical interpretation of contested narratives.

Compounding this challenge is the limited scholarly attention devoted to the information-seeking practices of students engaging specifically with Palestinian history. It remains largely unknown whether such students rely predominantly on documentary films, social media content, academic publications, AI-powered search tools, or hybrid combinations thereof when constructing their historical understanding (Floridi et al.,

2018). This absence of empirical data is significant, as information-seeking behavior is not a neutral process but is shaped by platform logics, algorithmic gatekeeping, and the epistemic affordances of different media environments (Stanford History Education Group, 2016). Understanding these patterns is therefore essential not only for evaluating the pedagogical utility of different media forms but for developing media literacy frameworks capable of equipping students to critically navigate the increasingly complex information ecosystems (Hobbs & Friesem, 2025).

Based on these premises, this article is framed as a methodological proposal and pedagogical design. Following the Design-Based Research (DBR) (McKenney & Reeves, 2018), the primary contribution of this work lies in the construction of a replicable pedagogical intervention model. The current inquiry focuses on the conceptual architecture and the operationalization of media literacy tools tailored for the analysis of contested narratives. The study is particularly relevant for media educators at university and similar academic institutions, as well as for curriculum designers seeking to integrate media literacy into educational frameworks.

Theoretical Framework

Palestinian Narrative and Media Representation

The Palestinian narrative occupies a unique and contested space within global media discourse. Scholars have long argued that the representation of Palestinian history, identity, and resistance is not merely a journalistic or cultural concern but a deeply political one. Pappé (2024) contends that the telling — and silencing — of Palestinian stories constitutes a form of historical violence that operates alongside physical displacement.

The study of the Palestinian narrative is grounded in a multidisciplinary framework that integrates Historical Narrative Theory, where storytelling serves as an assertion of presence and political resistance against colonial erasure (Khalidi, 2016), and Media Theory (McLuhan, 1964; Manovich, 2001), which posits that the medium fundamentally shapes meaning. This perspective enables an analysis of how storytellers exercise agency through narrative coherence. The framework further incorporates Cultural Memory Theory (Assmann, 2011), viewing Palestinian memory as a public and performative act, and Postcolonial Theory (Said, 1978), which provides the foundation to critique Orientalist constructions. Complementing these, decolonial approaches emphasize centering indigenous voices against epistemic violence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Within this context, Awad et al. (2025) demonstrate that oral histories maintain cohesion despite displacement, reinforcing identity across both cinematic and digital media.

Within this context, media representation is never neutral. Hall (1997) established that meaning is not inherent in images or texts but is constructed through cultural codes and power relations. Applied to the Palestinian context, this means that how the narrative is framed — whether through the lens of resistance, victimhood, or *sumud* (steadfastness) — fundamentally shapes the audience's understanding (Philo & Berry, 2011). The rise of digital platforms has not resolved this tension but has complicated it further, introducing new actors, new gatekeepers, and new possibilities for both narrative amplification and distortion (Loader & Mercea, 2011). This dynamic has been further sharpened in the post-October 2023 context, where Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (2025) documents how digital platforms became active battlegrounds for narrative control, with visual rhetoric deployed as a strategic weapon to shape international public opinion and contest Palestinian accounts of events.

In the realm of cinema, documentary films have historically served as one of the most powerful vehicles for preserving and transmitting this narrative, particularly in the absence of formal state institutions capable of maintaining collective memory. Alawadhi (2013) views this medium as an “archive of resistance” that contests Zionist historiographies, while Pappé (2024) situates these works as a defense against archival erasure. Specific visual strategies are highlighted by Ginsberg (2016), who emphasizes temporal layering to represent trauma, and Rastegar (2024), who explores the visual economy of the Nakba to render visible the emotional dimensions of dispossession.

Furthermore, Abu-Remaileh (2008) illustrates how the cinema of Elia Suleiman utilizes irony and fragmentation to challenge dominant representations. In this regard, films such as *Divine Intervention* (Suleiman, 2002) have demonstrated how documentary and semi-documentary forms can function simultaneously as artistic expression, political testimony, and educational resource (Gertz & Khleifi, 2008).

Shifting to the digital ecosystem, platforms introduce algorithmic logics and ‘database narratives’ that restructure memory formation and user interaction (Nashif, 2024). Digital resistance emerges as a key pillar, involving the strategic use of these spaces to challenge dominant discourses and build transnational solidarities (Daniele & Kelsch, 2025; Gallant-Turner, 2026). Despite censorship, this resistance embodies a ‘radical imagination’ (Burris, 2019) within mediated environments.

In this sphere, Abu-Ayyash (2024) examines how digital platforms recontextualize symbols like the *keffiyeh*, while Nashif (2024) introduces the “digital floating homeland”, where virtual spaces provide sovereignty against geographic fragmentation. Similarly, El-Mansi (2024) analyzes platforms like the *PreOccupation Podcast*, which foster participatory memory and indigenous sovereignty (*Siyada Asliya Falastiniya*), and social media hashtags are shown to mobilize global action, transforming localized struggles into international movements (Daniele & Kelsch, 2025; Gallant-Turner, 2026).

At the level of student practice specifically, Abudheir et al. (2025) provide empirical evidence that Palestinian media students actively use social media to promote the Palestinian narrative to international audiences, though they face significant obstacles including content moderation policies, language barriers, and limited international networks.

Educommunication and Informal Learning

The concept of educommunication — the intersection of education and communication — provides a productive theoretical framework for this study. In this framework, media is not simply a tool for transmitting information but a pedagogical space in which learners engage critically with content, negotiate meaning, and develop their own interpretive frameworks (Aparici & Marín-Mateos, 2010).

This understanding has been extended in recent scholarship to incorporate the role of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in shaping educommunicative practices. Santos Albardía et al. (2025) argue that technology not only expands access to information but also carries the potential to motivate the development of critical thinking, provided it is embedded within an ethical and reflective pedagogical framework — a precondition that current AI-driven media environments do not always satisfy.

Informal learning theory, as developed by Livingstone (2002), complements this approach by recognizing that significant learning occurs outside formal educational institutions — in everyday encounters with media, culture, and community. For Palestinian students, informal learning through media consumption is particularly

significant given the limitations of formal curricula, which may not fully address the complexity of Palestinian history and identity (Pappé, 2024). Documentary films and social media content therefore function not merely as entertainment or information but as informal educational resources that shape historical consciousness (Erstad & Sefton-Green, 2013).

The urgency of this informal learning context has been recognized at the institutional level: a 2025 University of Rhode Island initiative, led by Hobbs and Friesem, engaged Palestinian educators and youth in a media literacy program explicitly designed for an AI-saturated information environment, acknowledging that young Palestinians face a particular vulnerability to misinformation and propaganda during periods of political instability (Hobbs & Friesem, 2025).

Documentary Film as an Educational Tool

Documentary films have a well-established history as an educational medium. From Grierson's (1933) early formulation of documentary as “the creative treatment of actuality” to contemporary participatory and reflexive modes of documentary practice, the form has consistently been used to educate audiences about social, political, and historical realities. Hobbs (2017) demonstrated that documentary films can be highly effective in promoting empathy, critical thinking, and historical understanding, particularly when viewed in structured educational settings.

In the Palestinian context specifically, documentary film has served a dual function: it preserves testimonies and historical records that might otherwise be lost, and it communicates these realities to both local and international audiences. Films such as *5 Broken Cameras* (Burnat & Davidi, 2011) and *The Wanted 18* (Budour & Masharawi, 2014) have reached global audiences and generated significant public awareness. For media students, engagement with such films offers not only historical knowledge but also insights into documentary craft, narrative construction, and the ethics of representation (Aufderheide, 2007).

However, documentary films also carry limitations as educational tools. Their length, production values, and distribution channels may restrict access, particularly for younger audiences accustomed to shorter and more immediately accessible content (Clinton et al., 2009). Furthermore, the authority that documentary films project may discourage critical engagement, positioning students as passive recipients of a constructed narrative rather than active interrogators of it (Nichols, 2010).

Social Media and Instagram as Sites of Learning

The emergence of social media platforms as primary information environments for young people has fundamentally altered the landscape of informal learning. Particularly, Instagram has become a significant site for the production and consumption of political and historical content. Its visual-first architecture, combined with features such as Stories, Reels, and hashtag aggregation, enables the rapid dissemination of content related to the Palestinian narrative to vast and diverse audiences (Highfield & Leaver, 2016).

Research on social media and learning suggests that platforms like Instagram can facilitate what Clinton et al. (2009) describe as “participatory culture” — environments in which users are not merely consumers but active contributors to the production and circulation of knowledge. In the Palestinian context, this has manifested in grassroots digital activism, citizen journalism, and the viral spread of eyewitness accounts that traditional media has often failed to adequately cover (Loader & Mercea, 2011). The

hashtag activism surrounding Palestinian causes has demonstrated the extraordinary reach of social media as a vehicle for narrative dissemination (Theocharis et al., 2015).

From a pedagogical and social perspective, Hamouda (2023) shows how digital storytelling aids identity formation and resilience, while Dajani and Meier (2022) highlight its potential to build transnational empathy. Gender also intersects with national identity in this educational and creative process, as Stern (2022) demonstrate how women filmmakers use domestic spheres as vital sites of resistance.

Nevertheless, social media learning is not without its significant limitations. The brevity of Instagram content — particularly Reels — necessarily constrains the depth of historical and contextual information that can be conveyed (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013). Algorithmic curation further complicates this picture, as content is surfaced not according to its educational value or historical accuracy but according to engagement metrics (Pariser, 2011). Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) offer a particularly relevant framework of information disorder — distinguishing between misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation — as social media environments are vulnerable to all three categories.

Generation Z, Digital Literacy, and Information Verification

Generation Z — broadly defined as those born between 1997 and 2012 — has grown up in an environment of information abundance, algorithmic curation, and platform-mediated social interaction (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). This cohort exhibits distinctive patterns of media consumption and information-seeking behavior that set it apart from previous generations. Recent data found that 51% of Gen Z now turn to social media as their first source of information, officially surpassing the traditional search engines (Sprout Social, 2026).

However, digital nativity does not automatically translate into digital literacy. The Stanford History Education Group (2016) demonstrated that Gen Z learners, despite their fluency in digital environments, often struggle to evaluate source credibility, distinguish between opinion and fact, and recognize algorithmically generated bias. This paradox — high digital fluency combined with limited critical evaluation skills — has significant implications for how this cohort engages with contested narratives such as the Palestinian one (Hobbs, 2017).

The growing integration of AI tools into student research practices adds a further layer of complexity. Floridi et al. (2018) argue that AI systems now function as epistemic intermediaries between users and information, synthesizing and presenting knowledge in ways that inevitably reflect the biases and limitations of their training data. For the Palestinian narrative specifically, this raises urgent questions about whose sources are privileged, whose voices are marginalized, and how the boundaries of legitimate knowledge are algorithmically drawn (Noble, 2018). This study therefore positions AI literacy and algorithmic awareness as essential dimensions of contemporary media education, particularly for a generation whose epistemic practices are increasingly shaped by computational systems they neither see nor fully understand (Selwyn, 2019).

Aims and Research Questions

This study is motivated by the following main research question: How do documentary films and Instagram videos differ in their effectiveness as educational tools

for teaching media students about the Palestinian issue? This main research question is broken down into the following specific sub-questions:

1. To what extent do documentary films contribute to students' understanding of Palestinian history and identity?
2. To what extent do Instagram reels contribute to students' understanding of the same topics?
3. Which medium do students perceive as more credible, engaging, and informative?
4. What sources do media students use when seeking information about specific events in Palestinian history?
5. How does media consumption influence students' knowledge and awareness of the Palestinian narrative?

With this in mind, the study has set the following objectives:

1. To design a pedagogical intervention that evaluates the comparative effectiveness of documentary films and Instagram videos in shaping media students' understanding of the Palestinian narrative.
2. To establish an educational framework for examining students' media preferences and information-seeking behaviors when researching historical events related to Palestinian resistance.
3. To investigate Generation Z's learning patterns and verification practices, specifically focusing on how they navigate between cinematic archives, social media content, and algorithmic tools to validate historical knowledge.
4. To assess the potential of media as an educommunicative resource in shaping knowledge, awareness, and critical understanding.

Methodology

Research Design

This study is grounded in the design of a pedagogical intervention (McKenney & Reeves, 2018) within the framework of educommunication. To achieve the proposed objectives, the research is structured into different complementary methodological phases that directly link the scientific literature review with the educational intervention designed. Adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis, the study includes the design of pre- and post-test instruments alongside focus group discussion guides to collect measurable and triable data.

In the first phase, a literature review was conducted, focusing on the representation of Palestinian identity within the complex documentary ecosystem of the digital age. This analysis allowed for the identification of similarities, distinctions, and complementarities between traditional media productions and the emerging dynamics of social media. In the second phase, the findings derived from the theoretical review served as an empirical basis for the design of a pedagogical intervention specifically aimed at media university students. This proposal is grounded in an educommunicative approach, designed to foster critical thinking and media literacy, and integrates active learning principles to place the student at the center of the process.

The pedagogical sequence was structured into three distinct stages: 1) a participatory pre-viewing dynamic, aimed at activating prior knowledge and contextualizing the Palestinian reality; 2) the group viewing of selected materials in the

classroom to promote a shared aesthetic and reflective experience; and 3) a post-viewing phase, consisting of a series of consecutive and interconnected activities oriented toward the promotion of critical thinking and the collective discussion of conclusions.

Methodological Protocol: Target Population, Media and Data collection methods

This pedagogical design is specifically tailored for media undergraduate students. This specific cohort is particularly relevant due to their academic background and engagement with media production and analysis. To ensure the methodological rigor of the prospective implementation, a series of preliminary inclusion and exclusion criteria have been established to define the target student profile.

The inclusion criteria defined for participation are: (1) being actively enrolled in media communication programs during the academic year of the intervention; (2) belonging to the Generation Z cohort (born between 1997 and 2012) to ensure consistency with the theoretical framework of digital natives; and (3) possessing fluent proficiency in social media usage, specifically Instagram. As exclusion criteria, students who do not complete all phases of the pedagogical sequence (pre-test, viewing, and post-test) or those who have prior professional ties to the analyzed audiovisual productions will be dismissed to avoid bias in perceptions of credibility and learning.

For the purposes of this study, three documentary films have been selected as primary texts, each representing a distinct mode of Palestinian documentary storytelling. The first, *Fertile Memory* (Khleifi, 1980), is a foundational work in Palestinian cinema that follows two Palestinian women — one under occupation in the West Bank and one displaced within Israel — weaving personal testimony and daily life into a pioneering document of Palestinian feminine experience and national identity. The second, *The Wanted 18* (Shomali & Cowan, 2014), combines animation, archival footage, and testimony to reconstruct a remarkable episode of First Intifada civil resistance, its blend of humor and political seriousness offering a productive formal counterpoint to conventional historical documentary. The third, *Fears, Tears and Dreams* (Masri, 2001), centers Palestinian voices and emotional testimonies around displacement and longing, adding an affective and interior dimension that complements the more overtly political registers of the other two films. Together, these three works constitute a deliberately varied documentary sample, spanning different historical periods, formal approaches, and thematic emphases.

On the other hand, Instagram content will be drawn from three selected accounts that represent distinct registers of Palestinian digital storytelling. The account @eye.on.palestine exemplifies the educational-archival mode, combining historical photography, infographics, and short video narratives to construct a coherent counter-memory of Palestinian experience. In contrast, @wizard_bisan — the account of trained Palestinian journalist and filmmaker Bisan Owda — represents the professional short-form journalistic mode, in which media literacy and platform fluency are deployed in service of documentary witnessing. Finally, @untoldpalestine embodies the historical-narrative mode, dedicated to surfacing lesser-known stories, testimonies, and archival material from Palestinian history that mainstream media has systematically overlooked.

To ensure a rigorous and multidimensional data collection process, the proposal adopts a mixed-methods design. This approach allows for the triangulation of information by combining quantitative and qualitative instruments, ensuring a holistic view of the intervention's impact.

On one hand, the quantitative dimension of this teaching proposal is articulated through a pre-test and post-test design, utilizing structured instruments specifically operationalized to measure three key variables:

1. Knowledge Acquisition: Measured through a thematic battery of several items covering history, culture, and socioeconomics. This variable is operationalized by calculating the normalized gain score (Hake's g) between the pre-test and post-test to determine the actual pedagogical impact of the intervention.
2. Perception of Media Credibility: Assessed using an adapted version of the Self-Reported Media Credibility Scale (Appelman & Sundar, 2016). Participants rate the "accuracy", "trustworthiness", and "bias" of documentary versus digital content on a 5-point Likert scale.
3. Algorithmic Literacy and Epistemic Trust: This variable is operationalized through a Likert scale regarding AI-mediated information. It measures the students' ability to detect omissions and their level of critical trust in AI-generated historical narratives.

On the other hand, the qualitative aspect is addressed through group reflection dynamics and focus groups, structured around the Critical Media Literacy (CML) Framework (Kellner & Share, 2019), focusing on dimensions of "Power and Ideology" and "Social Activism". This mixed-methods approach ensures that the information distillation mentioned in the theoretical framework is empirically tracked through both statistical shifts and student discourse analysis.

Three ad hoc instruments have been designed for data collection: a pre-test questionnaire, a post-test, and a focus group discussion guide. To ensure ethical compliance, the pedagogical design incorporates informed consent, guaranteed anonymity, and data protection through alphanumeric coding. Participation is strictly voluntary, and students may withdraw at any stage without academic penalty. Furthermore, audiovisual materials are selected based on their educational relevance and thematic currency, ensuring the content remains timely and appropriate at the point of implementation. These instruments are presented in their pre-validation stage, accompanied by a formal expert judgment protocol—a mandatory step prior to their final implementation. Designed in alignment with the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, the preliminary versions of these tools are available at: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.32435004>

Results: Design and Structure of the Educommunicative Intervention

Conceptual pillars for pedagogical implementation

The findings from the literature review identified a series of key conceptual pillars for pedagogical implementation. The deconstruction of the Orientalist gaze (Said, 1978) serves as the foundational pillar for Session 1, moving from theoretical critique to the practical mapping of digital images. Similarly, the concept of memory as a performative act (Khalidi, 2016; Assmann, 2011) justifies the comparative structure of Session 2, where students contrast the "stasis" of traditional archives with the "living" nature of digital platforms. Finally, the strategic focus on transnational solidarity and radical imagination (Daniele & Kelsch, 2025; Burriss, 2019) provides the methodological basis for Session 3, transforming students from passive consumers into active agents of narrative sovereignty. Session 3 also incorporates a module on Algorithmic Bias Literacy. This

activity requires students to perform a comparative analysis between AI-generated outputs and primary documentary sources.

By synthesizing these specific theoretical pillars into actionable learning phases, the study ensures that information distillation is critically addressed. These elements form the foundation of the educational intervention proposal, aimed at fostering students' critical analysis through the following points:

1. The Medium as the Message Shaper (Media Literacy): Understanding how narratives are transformed according to the platform and its technical logics (McLuhan/Manovich).
2. Dismantling Stereotypes (Critique of Orientalism): Identifying and challenging 'Orientalist' constructions that portray Palestinians as passive subjects (Said).
3. Digital Resistance and Virtual Sovereignty: Exploring the concept of the "digital floating homeland" (Nashif) and the assertion of indigenous sovereignty (El-Mansi).
4. Symbolism and Cultural Recontextualization: Analyzing the use of traditional symbols (*keffiyeh*, *thobe*) as tools of resistance within modern digital environments (Abu-Ayyash).
5. Memory as a Political and Public Act: Recognizing memory not merely as a recollection of the past, but as an active assertion of presence and belonging (Khalidi/Assmann).
6. Gender and Identity in Resistance: Highlighting the role of women and the domestic sphere as sites of political resistance (Stern).
7. Radical Imagination and Alternative Futures: Studying media as creative laboratories for envisioning a post-occupation future (Burris).
8. Transnational Solidarity and Global Action: Analyzing how local struggles are transformed into international movements through the strategic use of hashtags (Daniele & Kelsch/Gallant-Turner).

Table 1.

Theoretical frameworks and their application in the pedagogical design

Phase / Session	Theoretical Pillar	Media / Tools	Key Activity	Learning Outcome
Session 1: Pre-viewing	Orientalism (Said) & Media Logic (McLuhan/Manovich)	Digital Images & Search Engines	Diagnostic Pre-test & Image Traceability Mapping	Deconstruction of stereotypes and "otherness".
Session 2: Viewing	Memory & Identity (Khalidi/Assmann)	Documentary Film vs. Instagram Reels/Videos	Comparative viewing & thematic block analysis	Differentiation between "Auteur" and "Ephemeral" narratives.
Session 3: Post-viewing	Radical Imagination (Burris) & <i>Siyada Asliya</i>	AI Models (Audit) & Social Media Campaign	Algorithmic Bias Audit & Creative Workshop	Development of digital agency and narrative sovereignty.

Note. Own elaboration based on the proposed research framework.

Design of the Intervention: Sessions and Pedagogical Actions

Session 1: Pre-viewing – Deconstructing the Gaze

Focus: Orientalism and Media Literacy.

- Diagnostic Pre-test: An initial questionnaire is administered to assess students' prior knowledge regarding the Palestinian reality. The survey is structured into

key thematic blocks: history and politics, essential services (education and healthcare), socio-economic structure, culture and religion, as well as gender, diversity, and information-seeking habits.

- Theoretical Introduction: A brief lecture on Edward Said's Orientalism and McLuhan's "the medium is the message". We critically discuss how Western media has historically portrayed Palestinians as passive subjects or through a lens of "otherness".
- Active Dynamic: Students conduct a directed online search for images related to Palestine. Once they identify images representing diverse perspectives, they must perform a traceability exercise: investigating the original source, the dissemination platform, and the geographic location of origin.
- Discussion and Initial Reflection: A collective analysis on how framing changes based on the image source. Is the Palestinian subject perceived as an active or passive agent? This debate serves as a foundation for introducing the concept of dismantling stereotypes.

Session 2: Viewing – The Cinematic vs. The Digital

Focus: Similarities and divergences in the representation of Palestinian identity.

- Part A: The Documentary (Auteur Narrative): Screening of a selected Palestinian documentary.
 - Observation Goal: Identification and description of the representation of Palestine according to the same analytical blocks as the initial questionnaire: history, politics, essential services, economy, culture, religion, gender, and diversity.
- Part B: The Digital Feed (Ephemeral Narrative): Exploration of a curated set of Instagram Reels and videos.
 - Observation Goal: Analysis of the use of identity symbols (such as the *keffiyeh* and *thobe*) and how platforms construct a "digital floating homeland" (Nashif) for the diaspora. As in Part A, students will record the representation of Palestine based on the initial thematic blocks.
- Part C: Comparative Analysis: A guided debate on the narrative convergences and divergences between documentary cinema and digital content. Reflection will focus on how these audiovisual formats shape identity, culture, and memory, functioning as tools for resistance and as means of constructing sovereignty (*homeland*) for the Palestinian people.

Session 3: Post-viewing – Algorithmic Auditing and Narrative Sovereignty

Focus: Digital Resistance and Information Seeking.

Building on the reflections from previous sessions, this final phase consists of a sequence of linked activities designed for active learning and deep understanding.

- Information-Seeking Task: Students must research a specific event (e.g., the Sheikh Jarrah protests) and track its transition from a local hashtag to a global movement (Daniele & Kelsch/Gallant-Turner). They must verify source credibility and identify elements of *Siyada Asliya* (indigenous sovereignty) within the narrative.
- AI and Disinformation (Algorithmic Bias): Students must enter exactly the same thematic categories (history, gender, economics...) into an LLM (ChatGPT, Claude, etc.). They must compare the AI's response with the information from the documentary/Instagram content and note which facts are omitted or downplayed by the algorithm. They are encouraged to use neutral prompts to accurately assess

these biases. Furthermore, students must cross-reference AI-generated information to detect inaccuracies and overlooked perspectives.

- **Radical Imagination Workshop:** Based on Burris (2019), students will work in groups to design a brief social media campaign for a “post-occupation future”. This task moves beyond documenting trauma toward articulating aspirational visions of justice.
- **Final Reflection and Creative Output:** To contextualize the project within Media Studies, students will present their conclusions in their preferred format: a short video essay, a podcast pilot, or a reflective digital thread. These will be showcased to the class as the culmination of the proposal.
- **Post-test:** After the dynamics, a final questionnaire will be administered to determine if the pedagogical proposal enabled a deeper understanding of the social and cultural complexity of the Palestinian people. The post-test also measures changes in students’ critical perception of AI as an epistemic intermediary.
- **Focus Group:** To collect in-depth qualitative data, the class will participate in focus groups to develop broader and more nuanced responses regarding their learning process.

Upon completion, all quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed and cross-referenced through methodological triangulation to measure the impact of the educational intervention.

Discussion and Conclusions

This article presents a methodological proposal and a pedagogical framework designed for undergraduate media students. The educational design addresses a question at the intersection of media education, digital culture, and political memory: how do different media forms shape what young people know and feel about the Palestinian narrative? By comparing documentary films and Instagram videos as educommunicative tools, the research moves beyond questions of representation to focus on the learner — their reception, interpretation, and information-seeking behavior in a digitally saturated environment.

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond the Palestinian context. At a moment when short-form digital content increasingly competes with — and often displaces — long-form structured media (Sprout Social, 2026), understanding the pedagogical implications of this shift is essential for media educators globally. However, the Palestinian narrative carries particular weight in this regard, as it is a story simultaneously contested, fragmented, and actively suppressed across many information ecosystems, including algorithmically curated ones. Studying how media students in Palestine themselves engage with this narrative through different platforms offers a uniquely grounded and authentic perspective.

The educational proposal developed in this research, including the data collection and evaluation tools, serves as a critical bridge between theoretical decolonial frameworks and the practical training of future media professionals. By proposing a three-stage pedagogical sequence — pre-viewing, viewing, and post-viewing — the intervention design moves beyond passive content consumption to foster a radical imagination (Burris, 2019). The inclusion of activities such as identifying algorithmic bias

in AI and tracking the evolution of hashtags and trends (Daniele & Kelsch, 2025) allows students to navigate the complexities of the digital era.

By integrating documentary films as “archive of resistance” (Alawadhi, 2013) as well as digital platforms into the university curriculum, this pedagogical design reaffirms the importance of centering indigenous voices and protecting narrative sovereignty and offers a replicable methodological framework for using media as a laboratory of political affirmation and social justice.

The proposal’s strength lies in developing three core competencies: first, a technical and theoretical grasp of media logic (Manovich, 2001) and its role in shaping collective memory; second, a heightened historical awareness that views memory as a “public and performative act” (Assmann, 2011) rather than a static record; and finally, the cultivation of digital agency (Gallant-Turner, 2026), enabling students to understand and participate in the construction of transnational solidarity through strategic digital resistance. Ultimately, this approach is based on media literacy not merely as a technical skill, but as a vital tool for dismantling Orientalist stereotypes and recognizing the “digital floating homeland” (Nashif, 2024) as a legitimate space of sovereignty and resistance.

The mixed-methods design proposed here is well-suited to capturing both quantifiable learning outcomes and the interpretive experiences of the participants. The design of the pre- and post-tests, as well as the focus group guide, draws not only on the theory of edumunication but also on practical debates regarding curriculum design, media literacy pedagogy, and the role of digital platforms in fostering historical awareness among Generation Z.

However, this study acknowledges certain limitations that delineate its scope. Firstly, the study addresses the design of an educational proposal, as well as various assessment tools, but without actual implementation. Furthermore, the proposed program is focused on university media students, a choice that prioritizes depth over broad representation. The audiovisual content is also restricted to a specific selection of case studies, comprising documentary films and a curated set of Instagram content, which may not capture the full diversity of Palestinian media production. Consequently, the findings may not be strictly generalizable to all academic or cultural settings, although these observations serve as a critical foundation for future comparative research and offer a replicable model for studying media literacy and narrative resistance in other contested or subaltern contexts.

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Teacher Narratives on Contemporary School Reality in Mexican Border Contexts

Narrativas docentes sobre la realidad escolar contemporánea en la frontera Mexicana

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Abstract

Keywords:

Teacher narratives; human mobility; multiculturalism; teaching work; border schools.

The present study aimed to analyze the experiences and meanings constructed by teachers regarding contemporary school experiences in educational contexts along the northern border of Mexico. The research emerged from the interest in understanding how migration processes, cultural diversity, and institutional dynamics influence current ways of practicing teaching in border school settings.

The study was developed from a qualitative approach with an interpretative orientation and was supported by a biographical-narrative perspective with thematic-interpretative analysis. Six basic education teachers from public schools in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, participated in the research. Information was produced through semi-structured interviews focused on recovering experiences related to school life, working conditions, and institutional dynamics present in border schools. The analysis was conducted through an interpretative reading of the narratives constructed by the participants.

The findings show that teaching experience in northern Mexican border contexts is shaped by human mobility, multiculturalism, administrative overload, and institutional fragmentation. Participants described classrooms composed of students from different regions of the country and from international migratory contexts, as well as bureaucratic demands and communication difficulties between schools and the administrative structures of the educational system.

The findings allow for problematizing the institutional and socio-emotional tensions present in contemporary border schools, showing how transformations derived from human mobility and multiculturalism reconfigure the ways teaching is experienced and practiced. It is concluded that contemporary border schools constitute spaces traversed by social and institutional transformations that increase the complexity of educational practice and modify the everyday conditions of teaching work.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Narrativas docentes; movilidad humana; multiculturalidad; trabajo docente; escuelas fronterizas.

La presente investigación tuvo como propósito analizar las experiencias y significados construidos por docentes sobre la realidad escolar contemporánea en contextos educativos de la frontera norte de México. El estudio parte del interés por comprender cómo los procesos migratorios, la diversidad cultural y las dinámicas institucionales influyen en las formas actuales de ejercer la docencia en escenarios escolares fronterizos.

La investigación se desarrolló desde un enfoque cualitativo con orientación interpretativa y se apoyó en una perspectiva biográfico-narrativa con análisis temático-interpretativo. Participaron seis docentes de educación básica pertenecientes a instituciones públicas de Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. La producción de información se realizó mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas orientadas a recuperar experiencias relacionadas con la vida escolar, las condiciones laborales y las dinámicas institucionales presentes en las escuelas fronterizas. El análisis se efectuó a partir de una lectura interpretativa de los relatos construidos por las y los participantes.

Los resultados muestran que la experiencia docente en la frontera norte de México se encuentra marcada por movilidad humana, multiculturalidad, sobrecarga administrativa y fragmentación institucional. Las y los participantes describieron aulas conformadas por estudiantes provenientes de distintos estados del país y de contextos migratorios internacionales, así como exigencias burocráticas y dificultades de comunicación entre las escuelas y las estructuras rectoras del sistema educativo.

Los hallazgos permiten problematizar las tensiones institucionales y socioemocionales presentes en las escuelas fronterizas contemporáneas, evidenciando cómo las transformaciones derivadas de la movilidad humana y la multiculturalidad reconfiguran las formas de ejercer la docencia. Se concluye que la escuela fronteriza contemporánea constituye un espacio atravesado por transformaciones sociales e institucionales que complejizan la práctica educativa y modifican las condiciones cotidianas del trabajo docente.

Introduction

Contemporary schools are undergoing institutional transformations, facing administrative demands, and navigating social dynamics that are constantly reshaping the experience of teachers. Beyond pedagogical processes, school life involves everyday forms of interaction, communication, and coexistence that influence how teachers interpret their work and make sense of the educational reality they experience on a daily basis. In border contexts, these dynamics take on particular complexity due to phenomena associated with human mobility, cultural diversity, and social inequality—factors that directly impact the ways schools are organized and the experiences shaped within educational institutions (Pérez Gómez, 2000; Sacristán, 1981).

In various international contexts, recent research has shown that migration patterns and the growing multiculturalism in schools have significantly transformed contemporary educational dynamics. Studies conducted in border regions and contexts of human mobility indicate that schools currently face challenges related to cultural integration, linguistic diversity, social-emotional support, and institutional adaptation in the face of increasingly diverse student populations (Walsh, 2013; Dietz and Mateos, 2011). Furthermore, international organizations have warned that contemporary migration patterns are placing new demands on education systems, particularly in regions where social vulnerability, economic inequality, and constant population movement converge. This research helps us understand that the contemporary school can no longer be viewed solely as a homogeneous educational space, but rather as a setting shaped by cultural tensions, migratory processes, and complex forms of institutional interaction.

In cities like Ciudad Juárez, located on Mexico's northern border, schools have become places where students from different states across the country come together, and in recent years, migrant children and adolescents from countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, Honduras, and Colombia. This cultural and social diversity transforms the dynamics within the classroom and places new demands on teachers, who face school environments marked by constant mobility, educational disparities, adaptation processes, and social needs that go beyond the roles traditionally associated with teaching. In this sense, the border school can be understood as a space where multiple cultures and social realities converge, constantly reshaping school dynamics (González, 1994).

Recent research conducted in educational settings characterized by migration and cultural diversity has shown that schools face growing challenges related to educational inclusion, intercultural coexistence, and the socio-emotional well-being of migrant students. Studies conducted in Chile, Ecuador, and Mexico indicate that multiculturalism in schools transforms teaching practices and requires new forms of institutional and teacher support in contexts characterized by constant population mobility and social vulnerability (Stang-Alva et al., 2021; Pérez, 2025; Ramírez-Iñiguez, 2025). It has also been noted that many educational institutions continue to operate under organizational structures that are inadequate to address the complexities arising from contemporary migration processes (Zavala, 2025).

From a sociocultural perspective, educational institutions serve not only as settings for the transmission of knowledge, but also as spaces where symbolic relationships, forms of interaction, and shared understandings of the educational process are constructed. School culture is manifested through practices, traditions, unwritten rules, and ways of interacting that guide the behavior of members of the school community. Various authors have noted that these cultural dynamics tend to operate in a naturalized manner within

schools, influencing the integration, recognition, and participation of teachers and students in school life (Bolívar, 1996; Elías, 2015). Consequently, understanding the reality of today's schools requires analyzing not only pedagogical or administrative aspects, but also the social and cultural relationships that shape the day-to-day functioning of educational institutions.

In addition to these conditions, there are processes of institutional bureaucratization and administrative fragmentation that are also part of the reality of contemporary schools. Teachers face not only pedagogical challenges related to diversity in the classroom, but also administrative demands, excessive workloads, and difficulties communicating with the governing bodies of the education system. Various studies on contemporary teaching practice have shown that policies related to evaluation, accountability, and institutional oversight have increased teachers' administrative workload and altered the day-to-day conditions of educational work (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996; Day and Gu, 2015). Recent research also warns that bureaucratic and administrative demands affect professional well-being, lead to emotional burnout, and limit opportunities for educational support within schools, especially in complex educational settings characterized by social vulnerability and high student turnover. In many cases, these conditions lead to feelings of burnout, institutional disorganization, and a lack of support in addressing the real needs of school settings.

The complexity of today's schools has also led to changes in traditional teaching methods. Currently, teachers are involved not only in teaching and learning processes, but also in activities related to social-emotional support, conflict mediation, family support, and the cultural integration of students. In contexts characterized by population mobility and social diversity, these functions take on particular importance because schools serve as spaces where a wide range of social and community issues converge. As Tardif and Lesard (2014) point out, teaching is a profession deeply intertwined with human relationships, social interactions, and emotional processes that go beyond the purely pedagogical dimension.

In this context, giving teachers a voice again allows us to gain insight into aspects of the school experience that are difficult to discern from institutional indicators or official discourse on education. The narratives constructed by teachers do not merely describe events; they also express ways of interpreting school life, explaining everyday tensions, and making sense of the conditions under which educational work takes place. As Larrosa (2006) argues, experience gains meaning through what individuals construct and interpret from their lived experiences. From this perspective, telling the story of the school also involves interpreting its dynamics, relationships, and contradictions.

The construction of meanings regarding the teaching profession is also closely linked to life experiences and personal references that influence how teachers view their educational practice. A teacher's professional identity is shaped not only by technical or academic knowledge, but also by emotional, cultural, and social factors that are developed throughout their personal and professional journey. From a biographical-narrative perspective, lived experiences are fundamental to understanding the ways in which individuals construct meaning regarding their practice and the institutional contexts in which they carry out their educational work (Bolívar, Domingo, and Fernández, 2001).

In recent years, various studies have examined the teaching experience in relation to professional integration processes, identity formation, and institutional dynamics within the school environment. In the context of Mexico's northern border, recent studies have shown how certain cultural and organizational conditions influence teachers' work experiences and the ways in which they engage with the school environment (Chávez Segura and Cangas Arreola, 2024; Chávez Segura and Segura Lazcano, 2026). These studies have

led to the recognition that schools function as complex spaces where professional relationships, forms of recognition, and institutional dynamics converge and shape teachers' day-to-day experiences.

However, there are still few studies specifically focused on analyzing the narratives through which teachers construct meanings about contemporary school life in border contexts characterized by human mobility, cultural diversity, and institutional tensions. Much of the research in education has focused on structural, administrative, or policy-related aspects, while the ways in which teachers interpret and discursively represent the issues encountered in everyday school life have been relegated to the background. Although there has been recent research on the educational inclusion of migrant students and intercultural coexistence in Latin American school settings, there are still few studies that focus specifically on teachers' narratives in border regions of northern Mexico.

Furthermore, the existing literature on border schools has often focused on institutional perspectives or structural analyses, while studies centered on teachers' subjective experiences and the meanings they construct regarding the tensions that shape contemporary school life remain scarce. From a sociocultural perspective, schools function as spaces where practices, meanings, and forms of interaction—historically constructed within each educational community—converge (Elías, 2015). In this regard, understanding teachers' narratives provides insight into the symbolic and relational dimensions that help explain the current changes taking place in schools.

Similarly, narratives about teaching help us understand how contemporary social changes have altered traditional approaches to teaching. The constant presence of students from different backgrounds, economic inequalities, linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as changes in family and community dynamics, present new challenges for schools and for those who work in education within them. In this context, teachers not only impart academic knowledge but also play a role in providing emotional support, fostering social integration, and addressing issues that reflect the complexities of today's border environment.

From this perspective, this study aims to contribute to our understanding of contemporary changes in border schools by examining the narratives constructed by elementary school teachers, focusing on how they interpret the cultural, institutional, and workplace tensions present in their daily experiences.

Specifically, the study focuses on understanding how contemporary changes in the teaching experience at the border are interpreted by teachers through narratives related to human mobility, cultural diversity, and institutional dynamics present in today's schools. From this perspective, teachers' narratives provide a window into the meanings that emerge within schools and into the ways in which educators explain the complexities of their professional practice in educational settings undergoing constant social and cultural change. The aim of the research was to analyze the narratives through which teachers interpret contemporary changes in the school experience in Mexican border contexts, particularly those related to human mobility, cultural diversity, administrative overload, and institutional fragmentation.

Method

Research Design

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach with an interpretive focus, driven by an interest in understanding how teachers construct narratives about contemporary school life in educational settings along Mexico's northern border. Qualitative research is based on the recognition that social phenomena cannot be understood solely

through quantifiable measurements or linear causal relationships, since human experiences are shaped by meanings, interpretations, emotions, and specific sociocultural contexts. From this perspective, social reality is understood as a dynamic construct shaped by individuals through their daily interactions and experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2012).

The qualitative approach made it possible to explore teachers' experiences from the perspective of those directly involved in school life. Rather than identifying variables or making universal generalizations, the focus was on understanding how teachers interpret institutional dynamics, changes taking place in schools, and the social conditions that shape their professional practice. In this regard, the study draws on Geertz's (2003) interpretive framework, which posits that social analysis seeks to understand the "webs of meaning" culturally constructed by individuals within their life contexts.

The interpretive approach was deemed appropriate because the study focused on understanding the meanings constructed by teachers regarding their daily school experiences. From this epistemological perspective, the teaching experience is not understood as an isolated objective fact, but rather as a symbolic and social construct shaped by processes of interaction, language, and interpretation. For this reason, the stories shared by the participants were understood as ways of representing and explaining the realities experienced within border school settings.

The study drew on a biographical-narrative approach focused on a thematic-interpretive analysis of teaching experiences. From this perspective, the narratives made it possible to uncover the meanings constructed by the participants regarding contemporary school life, while the analytical process was carried out by identifying and interpreting recurring themes in the stories. This approach made it possible to gain insight into the lived experience through the voices of those directly involved and to understand how teachers interpret the changes taking place in border school settings.

As Bolívar, Domingo, and Fernández (2001) point out, the biographical-narrative approach makes it possible to understand the meanings that people attribute to their life stories within specific historical, social, and institutional contexts. Through storytelling, individuals organize events, recall meaningful experiences, and construct interpretations of the realities they encounter in their professional and personal lives. From this perspective, the experiences described served as the primary analytical tool for understanding how teachers interpret the reality of today's schools.

Teachers' narratives were understood not merely as descriptive accounts, but as discursive constructions through which participants make sense of their experiences within the school. Ricoeur (2006) argues that narrative allows us to give a temporal structure to human experience, organizing events and generating interpretations of what has been lived. Based on this logic, the narratives analyzed made it possible to identify forms of representation related to human mobility, multiculturalism, institutional bureaucratization, and school communication dynamics present in border educational contexts.

Furthermore, the biographical-narrative method made it possible to uncover the emotional, cultural, and relational dimensions present in the participants' professional trajectories. Goodson (2010) notes that life stories are an important way to understand the relationship between individual experiences and broader social structures. Consequently, the teachers' narratives made it possible to interpret how institutional, cultural, and administrative conditions influence the ways in which teachers construct meaning about their work and about contemporary school realities.

Participants and Context

The research was conducted in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, located on Mexico's northern border. This context is characterized by constant human mobility, cultural diversity, and

complex social dynamics that directly impact students' school experiences and the ways in which schools are organized. The choice of the border context stemmed from an interest in understanding how these social conditions contribute to the construction of teachers' narratives about the contemporary educational landscape.

Six teachers from public elementary and secondary schools affiliated with the state and federal education systems participated. The participants worked at the preschool, elementary, and secondary levels and had diverse career backgrounds within the education system. Some participants had recently begun their teaching careers, while others had been working in schools for a longer period of time, a situation that allowed for the gathering of diverse perspectives on contemporary educational dynamics.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. This type of sampling is used in qualitative research when the primary focus is not on statistical representativeness, but rather on the ability to capture meaningful experiences related to the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002). In this case, the selection criteria included willingness to participate, experience in a border school setting, and the ability to share detailed accounts of their teaching careers and the conditions of everyday school life.

Initial contact with the participants was made through direct outreach at educational institutions and professional networks related to the field of education. The academic purpose of the study was then explained, and those who met the established criteria were invited to participate on a voluntary basis. Once their participation was confirmed, dates, times, and locations were set for the interviews.

In order to better understand the contextual characteristics of the sample, general information regarding the participants' educational background, professional experience, and institutional affiliation was compiled, while strictly adhering to ethical standards of confidentiality and the protection of identity.

Table 1

General characteristics of the study participants

Informant	Educational level	Antiquity	Subsystem
D1	Preschool	3 years	State-owned
D2	Elementary School	6 years	Federal
D3	Middle School	10 years	State-owned
D4	Elementary School	4 years	Federal
D5	Middle School	8 years	State-owned
D6	Preschool	12 years	Federal

Note. Compiled by the author based on information provided by the participants.

Ethical Considerations

Participation by the teachers was voluntary, and the academic purpose of the research was explained to them in advance. In addition, permission was requested to record the interviews and to use the information solely for investigative purposes. Six elementary school teachers from public schools in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, participated in the program; they were assigned to different grade levels and school subsystems.

To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, alphanumeric codes (D1, D2, D3...) were used during the analysis and presentation of results. Similarly, the names of individuals, institutions, and other identifying information were omitted. The recovered testimonies were used solely for academic and research purposes.

In addition, we sought to maintain an ethical approach based on respect for the experiences shared by the participants, recognizing that teachers' narratives contain personal, emotional, and professional dimensions linked to their career paths. As Eisner (1998) argues, educational research requires ethical sensitivity to the voices of those involved in it, particularly when it involves experiences related to institutional tensions or complex working conditions.

Finally, assurances were given that the information obtained would not be used to pass judgment on educational institutions or specific individuals within the school system, but solely for the purpose of understanding and academically interpreting the realities described by the participating teachers.

Information Production

Semi-structured interviews with a narrative focus were used to gather data. This technique made it possible to facilitate open discussions aimed at exploring experiences related to professional development, institutional dynamics, school relationships, and ways of interpreting the contemporary educational landscape. Kvale (2011) notes that qualitative interviews seek to understand the world from the perspective of the participants, prioritizing interpretive depth over obtaining closed-ended or standardized responses.

The interviews were conducted between September and October 2024 at locations previously agreed upon with each participant. Some meetings took place within educational institutions, while others were held at external locations chosen by the teachers in order to foster an atmosphere of trust, privacy, and comfort during the conversation.

Although an initial set of guiding questions was provided, the interviews were conducted in a flexible manner to encourage more detailed accounts of the teaching experience. The guide covered topics related to career paths, entry into the education system, school experiences, institutional dynamics, human mobility, multiculturalism, and communication within schools. However, the narrative approach allowed participants to freely explore the events and experiences they considered most significant in their professional practice. The guiding questions used during the interviews included: How would you describe the current state of schools within your educational context? What experiences related to human mobility and cultural diversity have influenced your teaching practice? How do you view the dynamics of communication and institutional support within schools? And what situations do you find most challenging in today's teaching practice in border regions?

Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. With the prior consent of the participants, the conversations were recorded in audio format using digital devices, with the aim of fully capturing the narratives shared during the research process.

Transcription and Analysis of the Information

The interviews were then transcribed manually, preserving the participants' original words. The transcription process was a key phase of the research because it provided an initial analytical approach to the teachers' narratives. During this stage, expressions, pauses, and narrative styles relevant to the interpretation of the meanings constructed by the teachers were preserved.

Once transcribed, the interviews were organized and categorized for interpretive analysis. The analytical process was carried out through repeated readings aimed at identifying recurring themes, representations of the school, and shared experiences among the participants. According to Coffey and Atkinson (2003), qualitative analysis involves a continuous process of interpreting, organizing, and reconstructing data with the aim of generating a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The analysis was conducted in a gradual and thoughtful manner. Initially, an exploratory review of the transcripts was conducted with the aim of identifying significant experiences related to the contemporary school environment. Subsequently, an initial coding process was carried out by identifying narrative fragments related to experiences of human mobility, multiculturalism, institutional dynamics, bureaucratization, and school communication.

In a second stage, the identified codes were grouped into interpretive categories based on recurring themes found in the teachers' accounts. This process made it possible to identify connections between shared experiences, modes of interpretation, and meanings constructed by the participants regarding the conditions found in today's border schools.

Although the research draws on accounts related to teachers' career paths and experiences from a biographical-narrative perspective, the analysis was conducted through a thematic and interpretive organization of recurring themes present in the narratives constructed by the participants. This approach made it possible to link individual experiences with common challenges related to human mobility, multiculturalism, and institutional dynamics in today's border schools.

This process gave rise to categories related to human mobility, cultural diversity, bureaucratization of schools, intensification of labor, institutional communication, and organizational fragmentation. These categories made it possible to organize and interpret the experiences shared by teachers regarding the conditions found in today's border schools.

Finally, the analysis sought to identify both common elements in teachers' experiences and specific situations linked to their personal backgrounds and particular school contexts. Based on this reasoning, the narratives that were identified were understood as social and cultural constructs that shed light on the ways in which teachers experience, explain, and interpret contemporary changes in schools.

In order to enhance the study's credibility and interpretive consistency, the interviews were read repeatedly, and the emerging categories were cross-checked against the original narrative excerpts. Furthermore, a reflective approach was maintained throughout the interpretation process, recognizing the importance of critically examining the researchers' subjective implications in the analytical construction of the findings.

Results

The experiences shared by the participating teachers highlighted the fact that the current reality of schools in educational settings along Mexico's northern border is shaped by social, institutional, and cultural dynamics that directly impact the day-to-day practice of teaching. Through their accounts, the teachers described a school shaped by population mobility, cultural diversity, administrative demands, and social issues that are constantly transforming the ways in which the school community interacts and is organized. In this regard, the teaching experience in border areas is linked not only to instruction but also to processes of social adaptation, emotional support, and addressing the diverse needs present within educational institutions.

The narratives that emerged also revealed that many of the changes taking place in today's schools are perceived by teachers as rapid-paced processes to which educational institutions do not always have adequate mechanisms to respond. Some teachers noted that they feel constantly forced to adapt to new school dynamics, administrative demands, and social issues that are changing traditional teaching practices. From the teachers' perspective, the contemporary border school is characterized by uncertainty, constant change, and the ongoing reorganization of institutional dynamics.

Based on an interpretive analysis of teachers’ narratives, the emerging categories were understood as interrelated dimensions of contemporary changes in the teaching experience in border school settings. These categories made it possible to organize the meanings constructed by the participants regarding the social, cultural, and institutional dynamics present in today’s school environment.

Table 2

Interpretive Dimensions of the Teaching Experience in Border Regions

Interpretive Dimensions of the Teaching Experience in Border Regions	Identified issues
Human mobility	Professional adjustment, student transition, and school restructuring
Cultural diversity	Multiculturalism, integration, and social-emotional support
Administrative burden	Bureaucratization in schools, workplace burnout, and increased workload for teachers
Institutional fragmentation	Limited communication and administrative distance

Note. Compiled by the author based on the stories shared by the participants.

The Border and the Teaching Experience in Contexts of Mobility

One of the most common themes in the teachers’ experiences was the constant turnover that characterizes educational settings in border regions. Several participants described adaptation processes related to moving to a new city, commuting to work, and reorganizing their family dynamics following their entry into the educational system in Ciudad Juárez. Some teachers reported having moved from other parts of the state to join the education system on the northern border, a situation that required them to adapt to new circumstances related to housing, being far from family, and new school dynamics.

A preschool teacher said:

“When I arrived in Ciudad Juárez, it was very difficult because I was far from my family and didn’t really know how the schools worked here.” “At first, I felt a lot of uncertainty and fear because everything was new to me” (Preschool teacher, personal communication, September 26, 2024).

Similarly, another participant described how they began working at the border during the pandemic, a situation that significantly altered their experience of entering the teaching profession and building relationships with the school community:

“I entered the education system right in the middle of the pandemic, and that made it even harder for me to adjust.” “A lot of the time, we didn’t know how to interact with students and colleagues because everything changed so quickly” (High school teacher, personal communication, October 20, 2024).

These experiences show that the border is not merely a geographical space, but a social arena marked by constant movement, human mobility, and the reshaping of personal and professional paths. From an educator’s perspective, working in border contexts means operating in environments characterized by constant change and diverse forms of social interaction.

In addition, some participants noted that student mobility also affects classroom dynamics due to the constant influx and departure of students within groups. This situation creates challenges related to academic continuity, school adjustment, and educational support, particularly in contexts where population mobility is a part of daily life in border communities.

A high school teacher noted:

“In several groups, there were students who were constantly coming and going.” “Some came from other states or even other countries, which made it difficult to track their learning progress” (High school teacher, personal communication, October 17, 2024).

The narratives show that human mobility affects not only students’ educational trajectories but also the ways in which teachers organize their daily practice, build school-based relationships, and interpret the dynamics within border educational institutions.

Cultural Diversity and New Realities in the Classroom

Another significant aspect identified in the teachers’ experiences was the growing cultural diversity within border schools. The participants described school groups made up of students from different regions of the country and, more recently, of migrant children and adolescents from Latin American countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, and Honduras.

From the teachers’ perspective, this diversity significantly alters school dynamics and creates new pedagogical and socio-emotional challenges. Some teachers reported facing challenges related to cultural differences, educational gaps, and adjustment issues stemming from the constant movement of students.

One of the participating teachers explained:

“There were students in the classroom with very different backgrounds.” Some came from other countries and had trouble integrating or adjusting to the school environment. “Often, it was necessary to focus more on the emotional aspects than on the academic ones” (Elementary school teacher, personal communication, October 19, 2024).

Similarly, another participant noted:

“There were very complex family and social situations that could not be resolved through school activities alone.” “Many students arrived with difficult experiences related to migration or financial problems” (Elementary school teacher, personal communication, October 25, 2024).

In several accounts, participants noted that many schools lack sufficient institutional resources to address contexts characterized by multiculturalism and population mobility. Similarly, some teachers noted that the diversity found in classrooms requires educators to develop integration and support strategies that were not previously central to teaching practice.

The shared experiences also show that teachers perceive a growing need for training related to addressing cultural diversity and providing social-emotional support to migrant students. Although some teachers recognized multiculturalism as a learning opportunity, they also said they felt overwhelmed by social issues that go beyond the traditional scope of their work as educators.

These experiences show that cultural diversity not only transforms the demographic makeup of classrooms, but also the nature of pedagogical relationships and the emotional demands placed on teachers in contemporary border contexts. From an educational perspective, multiculturalism is linked to ongoing processes of institutional adaptation and socio-emotional support that add complexity to everyday school dynamics.

Administrative Overload and Daily Burnout

The experiences shared by teachers revealed a consistent perception of administrative overload in today's school environment. Several participants noted that a significant portion of their professional time is spent on paperwork, documentation, digital platforms, and institutional activities that limit their teaching work in the classroom.

In various accounts, faculty members stated that administrative demands have increased significantly in recent years, forcing them to juggle academic, institutional, and social responsibilities simultaneously.

A preschool teacher said: "We often spent more time filling out forms or uploading documentation than planning activities for the children." "I felt that administrative tasks took up a large part of our work" (Preschool teacher, personal communication, October 8, 2024).

Similarly, another participant noted: "Teachers currently have too many responsibilities." "Teachers don't just teach; they also have to deal with administrative, family, and emotional issues at school" (High school teacher, personal communication, October 20, 2024). In addition, some participants expressed feelings of burnout stemming from the constant accumulation of institutional responsibilities. Teachers noted that, in addition to teaching, they often have to deal with issues related to school administration, students' family problems, interpersonal conflicts, and administrative requirements that go beyond their traditional teaching duties.

The accounts gathered show that teacher burnout is not solely related to the amount of work, but also to the perception of a lack of institutional recognition and the feeling that many bureaucratic requirements are out of touch with the actual needs of schools in border areas.

Teachers' accounts reveal that the current intensification of work is not limited to an increase in administrative tasks, but also reflects broader changes in the responsibilities socially and institutionally assigned to teachers. In this context, participants view bureaucratic requirements as factors that affect their professional well-being and the opportunities for pedagogical support within schools.

Institutional Fragmentation and Lack of Communication

Another recurring theme identified in teachers' experiences was the perception of a disconnect between the actual needs of schools and the decisions made by the administrative structures of the education system. The participants noted that many of the issues facing schools are not heard or addressed in a timely manner by the governing bodies, leading to feelings of uncertainty and institutional disorganization.

Several accounts mentioned the idea that administrative decisions are often made in settings far removed from the day-to-day reality of schools. Some participants described experiences involving poor communication between departments, conflicting guidance, and a lack of institutional support in addressing issues within school communities.

One of the participating teachers recounted: "When I tried to enroll in the school system, no one clearly explained the procedures." "The information varied from place to place, and that was very frustrating for me because I even missed out on a job opportunity" (High school teacher, personal communication, October 17, 2024).

Similarly, another participant said: "At first, I felt like I didn't have any support." "We often learned about administrative procedures through conversations with colleagues because official information arrived late or was confusing" (Elementary school teacher, personal communication, October 19, 2024).

Several teachers also noted that much of the institutional information is shared through casual conversations among colleagues rather than through formal communication channels. This situation creates confusion and uncertainty, particularly during processes related to school placement, administrative changes, and school organization.

From the teachers' perspective, institutional fragmentation is also reflected in the limited support available to address issues related to school violence, educational disparities, and students' social-emotional needs. In this regard, the experiences reviewed show that many border schools face complex challenges without sufficient institutional support mechanisms.

The experiences shared show that institutional communication difficulties are not merely isolated administrative problems, but rather manifestations of broader processes of organizational fragmentation within contemporary education systems. From the teachers' perspective, these dynamics create uncertainty, disorganization, and a sense of detachment from the governing structures of the education system.

Discussion

The experiences shared by the participating teachers reveal that contemporary schools along Mexico's northern border are undergoing social, cultural, and institutional transformations that are significantly altering the way teaching is carried out. Through their accounts, teachers describe school settings characterized by population mobility, multiculturalism, administrative demands, and social issues that complicate day-to-day dynamics within educational institutions. In this context, teaching practice is linked not only to the instruction of academic content but also to processes of emotional support, social integration, and addressing situations of vulnerability that arise in everyday school life.

The study's findings reveal that border schools currently serve as places where students from diverse cultural and regional backgrounds are constantly arriving and passing through. Teachers' accounts show that human mobility profoundly alters school dynamics due to the ongoing influx of students with diverse educational backgrounds, complex migration experiences, and needs for social and academic adjustment. Based on teachers' experience, these conditions call for more flexible approaches to teaching and new strategies for fostering a positive classroom environment.

These findings are consistent with recent research conducted in educational settings involving migrant populations in Latin America and the United States, which has shown that human mobility transforms the ways schools are organized and places greater socio-emotional demands on teachers (Stang-Alva et al., 2021; Zavala, 2025). Furthermore, studies on intercultural education have shown that contemporary schools face growing challenges related to linguistic diversity, educational inclusion, and institutional adaptation in the face of increasingly heterogeneous student populations (Walsh, 2013; Dietz and Mateos, 2011).

Beyond describing processes of cultural diversity within schools, the findings highlight how multiculturalism transforms traditional forms of pedagogical interaction and redefines the roles assigned to teachers in border educational contexts. From this perspective, teachers' accounts reveal that contemporary schools function as spaces where social, cultural, and institutional tensions converge, extending beyond strictly curricular dimensions. The multiculturalism found in border schools is not merely a demographic characteristic, but also a factor that shapes the ways in which people interact, coexist, and construct meaning within educational settings.

Teachers' accounts also show that the diversity found in classrooms represents both an opportunity for learning and a constant source of professional challenges. Participants noted that they often felt overwhelmed by issues related to educational disparities, cultural differences, and the social-emotional needs of migrant students. Some teachers felt that many schools continue to operate under organizational structures that do not fully address the social realities of today's border regions.

In this regard, the insights gained allow us to examine the institutional limitations that currently exist in addressing educational contexts characterized by constant mobility and cultural diversity. Recent research on migrant education indicates that many school systems continue to operate under homogeneous teaching models that hinder the development of truly intercultural and inclusive practices (Ramírez-Iñiguez, 2025; Pérez, 2025). According to this logic, the challenges described by teachers reflect not only pedagogical difficulties, but also broader issues of inequality, institutional fragmentation, and insufficient professional support.

Another key finding identified in the study was the persistent perception of increasing workloads among teachers. The participants noted that administrative and bureaucratic tasks currently take up a significant portion of their work time, limiting the development of educational processes and leading to emotional burnout. From the perspective of educators, contemporary institutional demands have profoundly transformed the day-to-day conditions of educational work.

The narratives collected show that teachers simultaneously face pedagogical, administrative, and social responsibilities that go beyond the roles traditionally associated with teaching. Some participants described feelings of exhaustion stemming from the constant accumulation of tasks related to institutional platforms, administrative paperwork, dealing with family issues, and resolving school conflicts. These findings are consistent with the observations of Day and Gu (2015), who note that contemporary changes in education systems have increased work-related pressures on teachers and altered the ways in which teachers achieve professional well-being and stability.

In this regard, the increased workload described by the participants can be understood as part of contemporary processes of institutional reorganization that have progressively expanded teachers' pedagogical, emotional, and administrative responsibilities. The recovered narratives show that contemporary teaching is increasingly shaped by a multitude of social and institutional demands.

Furthermore, these findings align with international research on *emotional labor* and teacher burnout, which indicates that today's teachers face increasing emotional demands stemming from complex school environments and ongoing processes of institutional adaptation (Hargreaves, 2001; Zembylas, 2022). From this perspective, teacher burnout cannot be understood solely as the result of an accumulation of administrative tasks, but also as a consequence of emotional stress, institutional uncertainty, and a lack of professional recognition within contemporary education systems.

Similarly, the experiences shared help us recognize that teacher burnout is not solely related to the amount of work, but also to the perception of insufficient institutional support in addressing the challenges faced within schools. Some participants expressed feelings of uncertainty and institutional disarray stemming from unclear administrative processes and limited communication between school leadership and school communities.

Several accounts also noted the perception that many institutional decisions continue to be made in settings that are out of touch with the actual conditions in border educational contexts. From an educational perspective, this institutional gap makes it difficult to address issues related to educational disparities, school violence, social-emotional support, and student mobility. As Vaillant and Marcelo (2021) point out, contemporary education policies need to promote more hands-on and collaborative forms of professional support that acknowledge the actual conditions under which teachers carry out their daily work. These rediscovered experiences also provide an opportunity to reflect on the contemporary changes in the roles historically attributed to schools. Educational narratives show that educational institutions currently face challenges related to social inequality, family

vulnerability, population mobility, and community fragmentation—situations that significantly expand the responsibilities assigned to teachers. From this perspective, it can be argued that the contemporary school functions as a space where multiple social demands converge, demands that often exceed the available institutional capacity.

Another key finding from the research concerns the importance of teachers' narratives as a means of understanding the contemporary educational landscape. The experiences shared by the participants show that giving teachers a voice again brings to light aspects of school life that are often overlooked in institutional discourse on education. The narratives recovered not only describe everyday events; they also express ways of interpreting tensions in schools, making sense of teaching practices, and explaining the changes taking place within educational institutions.

In this regard, the experiences examined align with the perspectives of Contreras and Pérez de Lara (2010), who argue that teachers' narratives help us understand the human dimension of the educational experience and recognize teachers as producers of pedagogical and social knowledge. From this perspective, listening to teachers' voices also means recognizing the importance of their lived experiences as a legitimate source for interpreting the challenges facing contemporary schools.

Finally, the findings show that institutional communication issues are a significant factor contributing to the tensions present in border school settings. Participants noted that much of the institutional information is disseminated in a fragmented, ambiguous, or delayed manner, creating uncertainty within school communities. As Kaplún (2002) points out, communication within educational settings is essential for building relationships, fostering participation, and supporting institutional organization. Consequently, these insights help us recognize that communication difficulties are also part of the processes of institutional fragmentation present in contemporary schools.

Taken together, these findings suggest that contemporary changes in border schools cannot be understood solely through the lens of isolated administrative or pedagogical factors, but rather as complex processes in which human mobility, multiculturalism, bureaucratization, and institutional tensions converge, constantly reshaping the ways in which teaching is practiced and school experiences are shaped in Mexican border contexts.

Conclusions

The study's findings suggest that the current state of education along Mexico's northern border is characterized by increasing complexity stemming from social, cultural, and institutional changes that directly impact current teaching practices. Shared experiences show that border schools serve as spaces shaped by human mobility, multiculturalism, institutional bureaucratization, and social demands that are constantly reshaping school dynamics.

The teachers' accounts reveal that educators carry out their professional practice in environments characterized by uncertainty, constant adaptation, and an expanding range of professional and socio-emotional responsibilities. In this context, teaching goes far beyond the mere transmission of curricular content; it involves processes of cultural integration, emotional support, conflict mediation, and addressing the complex social issues present within border school communities.

Furthermore, the study shows that many educational institutions continue to face challenges related to professional support, institutional communication, and addressing contexts characterized by population mobility and cultural diversity. From the teachers' perspective, administrative demands and organizational fragmentation lead to emotional

burnout and hinder the development of teaching methods that are more closely aligned with students' actual needs.

From an academic perspective, this research provides insights into how teachers construct meanings regarding contemporary changes in schools based on their everyday experiences within border educational contexts. By drawing on teachers' narratives, it became possible to shed light on emotional, cultural, and institutional dimensions that are often overlooked in approaches focused exclusively on administrative or structural indicators of the education system.

The study's contribution lies in reclaiming teachers' narratives as a lens through which to interpret contemporary changes in border schools, bringing to light institutional, emotional, and cultural dimensions that are often overlooked in approaches focused exclusively on structural indicators of the education system.

Among the study's limitations are the contextual nature of the experiences analyzed and the small number of participants; therefore, the findings pertain specifically to the realities of the border context under study. Nevertheless, these recovered narratives offer insight into the challenges faced by many schools located in educational settings characterized by human mobility and cultural diversity.

Finally, it is considered appropriate to continue conducting research focused on analyzing teachers' experiences in border school settings, particularly those related to multiculturalism, professional well-being, institutional bureaucratization, and socio-emotional support for teachers. Similarly, it is important to promote research that focuses on teachers' perspectives and the ways in which they interpret the complexities of the contemporary school environment.

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Correlation between training in bibliographic research and media and information literacy (mil), and the quality of investigative journalism reports: a comparative study in the main axis of Bolivia

Correlación entre la formación en investigación bibliográfica y Alfabetización Mediática Informativa (AMI), y la calidad del reportaje de periodismo de investigación: Un estudio comparativo en el eje troncal de Bolivia

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Journalism education, bibliographic research, media and information literacy, investigative journalism, journalistic quality, source verification.

This research aims to analyze the correlation between training in bibliographic research, both in physical archives and online, and Media and Information Literacy (MIL) on the practices of journalists who published investigative reports in the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz between February and May 2026. The study employs a mixed-methods, descriptive-correlational, and content analysis design. One hundred and fifty journalists (50 per city) were surveyed to measure their self-perceived technical skills. Twelve investigative editors (four per city) were interviewed, and thirty investigative journalism reports published during the study period were audited. The analysis cross-referenced the variables of training level with the technical quality, ethics, and documentary diversity of the final product. The findings show that 37% of the journalists interviewed received specific training. Forty-five percent stated that they received training in investigative journalism; however, 27% of that percentage acknowledged that the training was inadequate. Regarding media literacy, more than 90% of the journalists surveyed stated that they had not received any training in this area. It is concluded that integrating bibliographic research skills is vital for quality journalistic transposition, enabling professionals to confront the infodemic and regain credibility through the application of scientific rigor to journalism.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Journalistic training, bibliographic research, media and information

La investigación busca analizar la correlación de la formación en investigación bibliográfica, tanto en archivos físicos como en web, y la Alfabetización Mediática e Informativa (AMI) en la práctica de periodistas, que publicaron reportajes de investigación, en las ciudades

literacy, investigative journalism, journalistic quality, source verification.

de La Paz, Cochabamba y Santa Cruz, entre febrero y mayo de 2026. El estudio propone un diseño mixto, descriptivo-correlacional y de análisis de contenido. Se encuestó a 150 periodistas (50 por ciudad), para medir la autopercepción de competencias técnicas. Se entrevistó a 12 editores de investigación (4 por ciudad) y se auditaron 30 reportajes periodísticos de investigación publicados durante el cuatrimestre de estudio. El análisis cruzó las variables de nivel de formación frente a la calidad técnica, ética y diversidad documental del producto final. Los hallazgos muestran que el 37% de los periodistas entrevistados recibieron formación específica. El 45% afirmó que se formó en el área de investigación periodística; aunque, el 27%, de ese porcentaje, reconoció que la formación fue deficitaria. En lo que se refiere a la AMI, más del 90% de los periodistas encuestados aseguraron que no recibieron formación alguna al respecto. Se concluye que integrar competencias de investigación bibliográfica fue vital para la transposición periodística de calidad, permitiendo al profesional enfrentar la infodemia y recuperar la credibilidad, mediante el rigor científico aplicado al periodismo.

Introduction

The Investigative Journalism Ecosystem in Bolivia's Central Region

Contemporary investigative journalism in Bolivia operates in an environment of high informational complexity, characterized by an infodemic, a structural crisis in the profession, and the volatility of digital data. In the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz (the country's main hub), journalism faces the urgent need to go beyond the surface of the web to craft stories characterized by documentary depth, social responsibility, and ethical rigor (Matienzo-López, 2019).

However, the existing literature highlights a critical mismatch between university curricula and the demands of the labor market; technical training in digital production tools is often prioritized over theoretical, analytical, and in-depth research skills (López-Martín & Córdova-Cabús, 2020; Acharqui, 2023).

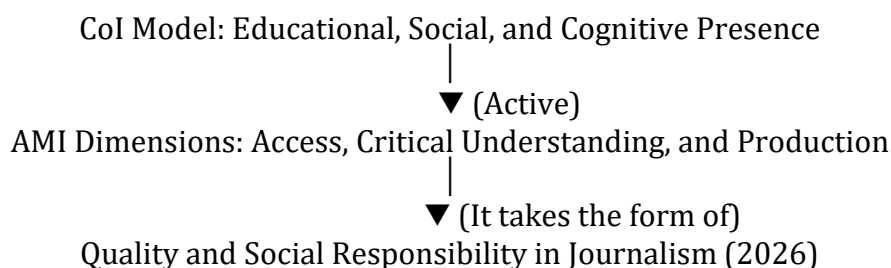
This imbalance highlights a gap in the scientific literature that this study aims to address: to assess whether proficiency in Media and Information Literacy (MIL) and training in bibliographic research serve as determining factors in the final quality of the report.

Thus, the study is based on the hypothesis that these two independent variables are not complementary, but rather necessary prerequisites for ensuring that journalistic products demonstrate factual accuracy and social responsibility in the current Bolivian context.

Journalism Education as a Community of Inquiry (CoI) and Its Connection to Access Skills

To understand how these skills are acquired, journalism education must be viewed as a comprehensive educational process that trains professionals in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of accurate information, combining ethical and humanistic principles with multimedia practice (Alonso-Betancourt et al., 2020).

This process is effectively grounded in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model, which posits that the construction of advanced knowledge depends on the dialectical interplay between three dimensions: pedagogical, social, and cognitive (Garrison et al., 2000; Cruz et al., 2020).



From this perspective, teaching requires that educators act as designers of collaborative environments that expose students to the rigors of research and the technical aspects of the field (García-Galera et al., 2021; Mesa, 2023). By integrating social engagement—which humanizes learning through two-way, empathetic communication—dropout rates are reduced and the acquisition of complex skills is facilitated, such as navigating out-of-print historical archives or engaging in critical curation on the deep web (Rodríguez-Pallares & Segado-Boj, 2020; Hunter, 2026).

Finally, cognitive presence fosters critical thinking and problem-solving through practical dilemmas (Cuesta & Chacón, 2017; Rodríguez et al., 2023). In the field of media management and education, it is this cognitive presence that directly activates the dimension of access to and use of media literacy skills proposed by Pérez-Tornero and Varis (2012). In other words, a journalist exposed to high cognitive demands not only uses basic technical tools but also acquires the practical knowledge to utilize Boolean operators, audit government databases, and retrieve information that has been deleted from the internet (Pérez-Tornero & Varis, 2012; UNESCO, 2025).

Literature Review and MIL: The Filter of Critical Understanding

Literature and documentary research in archives and on the web is a systematic process of searching for, locating, and analyzing existing physical and digital data (Nazakat & KAS Media Program for Asia, 2018). This method provides journalists with a diachronic perspective on the current state of knowledge, enabling them to identify information gaps and formulate more incisive research questions (Hunter, 2013; Anchante & Angulo-Giraldo, 2024). However, in the age of digital misinformation, this methodological effort is insufficient unless it is combined with Media and Information Literacy (MIL).

The AMI equips journalists with the critical skills needed to evaluate, deconstruct, and act ethically in the face of information overload (DW Akademie, 2021; Aguaded, Jaramillo-Dent & Ponce, 2021). By aligning with the dimension of critical understanding outlined by Pérez-Tornero and Varis (2012)—which requires personal autonomy, ideological interpretation, and an assessment of intentions—MIL transforms literature review into a mechanism for factual quality control (Bureau & Cedeño, 2026). Journalists are no longer passive recipients but rather become critics who question the media environment as a social construct (Pérez-Rodríguez et al., 2015; Sibrian & Maureira, 2024).

This skill is essential for implementing methodological triangulation, requiring the researcher to compare testimonies from living sources with documents, contracts, and pre-existing laws, thereby exposing lies, contradictions, or algorithmic biases (García-Ruiz et al., 2014; Marta-Lazo et al., 2020; Hunter, 2026).

Quality and Social Responsibility in Investigative Journalism as a Product of Factual Accuracy

Investigative journalism is not merely an in-depth news story; it is a patient, thorough, and systematic process that seeks to shed light on an issue of significant public interest by uncovering facts that are being kept secret (Rivera, 2021; Ressa, 2023; Roger & Olivier, 2024). Therefore, the technical quality and social responsibility of this genre are reflected in the third dimension of media literacy: communication and creative production (Pérez-Tornero and Varis, 2012).

This productive dimension requires journalists not only to master transmedia aesthetics in order to adapt stories to various formats (audio, short video, streaming), but also to act as facilitators of public debate and media educators for a prosumer audience (UNESCO, 2025; Casas-Moreno & López-Paredes, 2025). Social responsibility also involves managing digital resilience and psychological safety to process sensitive content without losing empathy (Hunter, 2026), as well as the ability to work within collaborative leadership networks (Roger & Olivier, 2024).

Ultimately, the ethics and credibility of journalism rest on its ability to serve as a mechanism for checks and balances and accountability that compels institutions to be transparent (Lima da Rocha & Rufino de Sousa, 2023). By upholding the right to information enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, investigative

journalism strengthens democracy and often becomes the only avenue to social justice for marginalized groups (Cruz & García, 2024; Roger & Olivier, 2024).

Consequently, this study empirically examines how the combination of solid training in literature review and high levels of AMI correlates with the production of reports that meet these quality standards in Bolivia’s central region during the 2026 administration.

Method

Research Approach, Type, and Design

This study is based on a mixed-methods approach using a concurrent triangulation design (DITRIAC). This model allows for the simultaneous collection, analysis, and comparison of quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by combining the power of statistical generalization with the depth of narrative analysis.

This is a descriptive-correlational study. It is descriptive because it characterizes the current state of competencies in documentary and web-based bibliographic research, as well as Media and Information Literacy (MIL), in Bolivia’s core regions (La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz). It is a correlational study because it seeks to statistically determine the degree of relationship and dependence between that level of training (independent variable) and the technical and ethical quality of the final journalistic product (dependent variable).

The study design is non-experimental, ex post facto, and cross-sectional, with data collection conducted strictly between February and May 2026.

Population, Sample, and Selection Criteria

The study population was geographically defined as the central region of Bolivia, encompassing the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz. Due to the lack of an official, up-to-date census of active investigative journalists in the country, a non-probabilistic convenience sample was used, structured into three distinct units of analysis to ensure the traceability of the triangulation:

- Journalists (n = 150): Fifty (50) active journalists in each city along the main corridor, dedicated to producing in-depth investigative reports in print, television, or digital media.
- Editors (n = 12):** Four (4) editors of investigative units per city, selected based on professional qualifications (at least 5 years in the position and a track record in coordinating complex journalistic projects).
- Reports (n = 30): Ten (10) published investigative journalism reports, focusing on Bolivia: La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, in both digital and traditional settings during the four-month period under study (February–May 2026).

Operationalization of Variables

To ensure the study’s analytical validity, the macro variables were broken down into specific dimensions, indicators, and measurement scales, as shown in the following table:

Table 1
Dimensions, indicators, and specific measurement scales

Variable	Dimension	Indicators / Items	Scale / Instrument
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Independent Variable (IV): Training in Bibliographic Research and AMI	Access and Technical Use	Use of Boolean operators, navigating the <i>deep web</i> , open data mining, and management of physical and historical archives.	Rating from 1 to 5 (Likert scale) Questionnaire
	Critical Thinking	Assessing the source's intentions, deconstructing media biases, fact-checking (<i>fact-checking</i>).	Rating from 1 to 5 (Likert scale) Questionnaire
Dependent Variable (DV): Technical Quality/Ethics of Journalism	Documentary Rigor and Hybridization	Source diversity index (ratio of analog to digital sources), traceability of evidence, accuracy of statistical data.	Observation Form (Frequency and Compliance Metrics)
	Ethics and Responsibility	Respect for the right of reply, consistency in the use of citations (formal stylistic criteria), and the absence of unintentional plagiarism or ideological bias.	Observation Form (Dichotomous Scale or Quality Rubric)

Note. Created by the author.

Data Collection Tools

Three specific instruments were designed and administered, and were subjected to rigorous validity and reliability checks:

- Competency Self-Assessment Questionnaire (quantitative): Consisting of 22 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1: Strongly disagree, 5: I completely agree).
- Semi-structured interview guide for editors (qualitative): Focused on exploring the cognitive presence of the CoI model and the resolution of real-world ethical dilemmas in newsrooms.
- Literature review and content analysis (quantitative/qualitative) worksheet: A matrix applied to the 30 reports to assess the formal rigor of citations, the traceability of documentary evidence, and the integration of archives.

Validation and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure the validity of the content, the three tools were evaluated by a panel of five expert judges (two PhDs in research methodology, two AMI specialists, and an investigative journalism editor with an international track record). The Aiken V-coefficient was calculated, yielding an average value of $V = 0.89$, which confirmed the appropriateness, clarity, and relevance of the instruments.

The reliability of the self-perception questionnaire was determined through a pilot study conducted with 15 journalists who were not part of the final sample, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84, indicating high internal consistency.

To eliminate evaluator bias in the Bibliographic Audit Form, the analysis of the 30 reports was conducted by two independent coders using a double-blind method. The inter-rater reliability index was calculated using Cohen's Kappa (κ), yielding a kappa value of 0.78, which is considered highly reliable for content analysis methodologies.

Data Analysis and Bias Control Procedures

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software (version 26). To minimize methodological bias and ensure the validity of the inferences, the following sequential analytical protocol was implemented:

Quantitative and inferential phase:

- Normality test: Before performing the correlation analysis, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (suitable for $n > 50$) was applied. Since the variables derived from the sum scores of the Likert scales did not deviate significantly from a normal distribution ($p > 0.05$), the use of parametric statistics was justified.

- **Correlation of Variables:** Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between the Level of Training (VI) and the Quality of Reporting (VD). The effect size was interpreted according to Cohen's thresholds, with the level of statistical significance set at a critical p -value of <0.05 .
- **Analysis of Variance (ANOVA):** For the comparative study between La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz, a one-way ANOVA was used to identify significant differences in skill levels among the three geographic regions along the main corridor.

Qualitative phase and triangulation: The data from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic content analysis with the assistance of ATLAS.ti software. The categories were constructed using a combination of methods (deductive, based on the CoI model, and inductive, based on the testimonies).

Qualitative bias was controlled for through theoretical saturation and data triangulation. The journalists' statements (self-perception) were directly compared with the editors' structural assessments (interviews) and the empirical evidence gathered from print and digital texts (literature review), thereby creating a matrix of absolute traceability that validates the study's final conclusions.

Results

The following section presents the results, which summarize the findings obtained after administering the data collection instruments along Bolivia's main highway: La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz.

Assessment of the Academic Offerings and the Current State of Training in Bibliographic Research and MIL

A review of the curricula at core journalism training institutions revealed that the systematic teaching of bibliographic research is a marginal component: only two technical institutes and two private universities explicitly include this subject in their curricula.

With regard to the sample of journalists surveyed ($N = 150$), the distribution of their educational background yielded the following quantitative data. With regard to specific training, 37.3% ($n = 56$) received formal instruction in literature review (both physical and digital). In general training, 44.7% ($n = 67$) did not receive specific bibliographic instruction, but rather generic training in journalistic research. Within this subgroup, 26.8% ($n = 18$) described this training as "inadequate" in practical terms.

When considering additional training by market, 35.3% ($n = 53$) were required to take postgraduate programs or external technical workshops after completing their bachelor's degree in order to meet the practical demands of the media.

In the area of Media and Information Literacy (MIL), the shortfall is severe: 92.0% ($n = 138$) of respondents stated that they had not received any kind of theoretical or practical training. Only 8% ($n = 12$) were able to identify the direct relationship between AMI and media literacy, and just 5.3% ($n = 8$) demonstrated a practical understanding of the dimensions of access and use.

When asked about the conceptual components of AMI proposed by UNESCO, 56% ($n = 84$) of the journalists distinguished between critical sense and critical thinking. The basis for this distinction was distributed as follows:

Table 2

The difference between a critical sense and critical thinking

Percentage of Journalists	Characterization of Critical Sense and Critical Thinking
38% (n = 57)	He defined critical thinking strictly as a receptive attitude of skepticism or distrust toward the primary flow of information.
18% (n = 27)	He defined critical thinking as the structured intellectual process of analyzing, verifying, and contextualizing the data gathered.

Note. Created by the author.

Journalists' Self-Perception of Their Technical and Digital Skills

The survey data (N = 150) reveal a disparity between basic web navigation skills and the use of advanced methodological tools:

Table 3

The gap between overall digital agility and operational technical rigor (N = 150)

Feature	Percentage
General Web Search (Highly Responsive)	85% (n=128)
Understanding Boolean Operators/Thesauri	12% (n=18)
Resistance to Access to Physical Files	68% (n=102)

Note. Created by the author.

With regard to access to analog information, 68% (n = 102) expressed reluctance to work in newspaper archives and physical archives. In response to a multiple-choice question, the participants cited the following reasons: 56% (n = 84) stated that in-person consultations take up too much time, which conflicts with the dynamics of newsrooms. 46% (n = 69) described the protocols of the historical archives as outdated and inefficient.

In light of these shortcomings, 76.7% (n = 115) sought out additional training on their own through online resources. The adoption of specialized technology had a direct impact: self-reported confidence in using document management software rose to 74.0% in this subgroup, reducing information processing times. 52% (n = 78) of the total sample identified Zotero as the most efficient open-source tool for automating citations and structuring databases (Zotero is a free, open-source reference manager designed to help researchers and scholars collect, organize, cite, and share information sources). It allows you to automatically save documents from your browser (such as Chrome or Firefox) and automatically generate bibliographies in word processors like Word, Google Docs, or LibreOffice (Silvera, 2023).

An Evaluative Perspective on Newsroom Leadership

In-depth interviews with news editors (N = 12) made it possible to compare journalists' self-perceptions with the evaluation of their work within the newsrooms. The editors reported an increase in their teams' cognitive engagement, marked by a critical methodological shift. Regarding this shift in investigative practices, an editor in La Paz noted: "*We've noticed the team has come a long way. We've gone from reporters who were simply looking for a phone call to confirm what they already believed, to investigators who dig into the glaring contradictions between statements and documents.*"

Despite this progress, 100% of those interviewed agreed that structural vulnerabilities persist due to a lack of basic training in verification. An editor from Santa Cruz said: "*We still find fundamental and serious flaws in investigative reports. There is a*

blind trust in copying information from websites or social media accounts without even bothering to verify the source of the information."

To illustrate the ethical and legal risks of this practice, the 12 editors cited the event of July 22, 2025, as a turning point, when multiple media outlets widely circulated a false report about the irrevocable resignation of Óscar Hassenteufel, then president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE). The lack of cross-checking of documents led to instability in the electoral process at that time. An editor from Cochabamba said: "*Most journalists published their investigative reports based on a social media post that showed a letter on letterhead, without verifying the information*".

The editors unanimously concluded (100%) that the strict application of bibliographic audit methodologies reduces requests for corrections and the risk of criminal defamation lawsuits to nearly zero. They also noted that journalists who work using systematic methods experience lower levels of stress in the face of the infodemic, as they have analytical filters to cope with information overload. "*Newsrooms are no longer overwhelmed by waves of anxiety or uncertainty due to the sheer volume of information coming in. The process has been handled much better, and that has required and demonstrated an improvement in their media skills,*" said an editor from La Paz.

Literature Review and Factual Accuracy of the Report

To determine the actual impact of the training on the quality of the news content, an analytical audit was conducted on 30 in-depth investigative reports published in the main section. Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was applied to assess the association between the author's level of methodological training and the rigor of the report.

The statistical analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.78, p < 0.05$) between the level of training in documentary research and the factual quality index (measured in terms of data handling, source diversity, and verification).

The Media and Information Literacy (MIL) variable had to be excluded from the linear correlation model because the journalists' scores were uniformly close to zero

(reflecting the complete lack of training reported in the first section), which eliminated the variance required for the Pearson correlation calculation.

When the 30 audited reports were divided into two groups—authors with low/empirical training (n = 15) and those with high/specialized training (n = 15)—significant disparities were observed in the technical quality of the text:

Table 4.

Quality indicators for the report, by level of training in documentary production (N = 30)

Factual and ethical evaluation criteria	Reports with low education levels (n=15)	Reports with advanced training (n=15)
Using archival (analog) sources (Newspaper archives, notary offices, official registries)	10%	45%
Source traceability (deep web) (Indexed databases, public repositories)	15%	60%
Accuracy in citations (correct use of APA 7 guidelines)	25%	90%
Inclusion of multiple perspectives (Cross-checking accounts and the right of reply)	40%	85%

Note. Data obtained using double-blind coding with an inter-rater reliability coefficient of kappa = 0.78.

The reports by the group of highly trained professionals revealed a phenomenon of robust documentary hybridization, characterized by the integration of historical records on physical media with structured digital databases in 2026. This technical approach expanded the temporal and factual depth of the news story.

Interregional Comparative Analysis (Statistical Significance of the Correlation)

To assess whether geographic factors influence the quality of investigative journalism in the country, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted across the three capital cities under evaluation.

The results showed that there are no significant differences between the reports from La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz regarding the relationship between training and technical quality (p > 0.05).

This mathematical finding confirms that the actual quality of investigative reporting in the current Bolivian context does not depend on local contextual or geographic variables specific to each city, but rather on two controllable cross-cutting factors: the development of methodological skills in the individual and technical access to document and information repositories.

Discussion and Conclusions

The discussion and conclusions of the study are presented below.

Structural Educational Deficit in Bolivia's Central Region

The findings point to a troubling convergence with the assessment made by López-Martín and Córdova-Cabús (2020) and Acharqui (2023) regarding the disconnect between university curricula and the demands of the journalism profession. The fact that only 37.3% of the sample has received formal training in bibliographic research, and that an alarming 92.0% lacks any understanding of Media and Information Literacy (MIL), reveals that higher education institutions in Bolivia’s central region continue to prioritize instrumental training and technical immediacy over fundamental analytical skills.

This structural gap supports the assumptions of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) model proposed by Garrison et al. (2000), who argues that the development of advanced critical thinking (cognitive presence) does not emerge spontaneously, but rather requires deliberate instructional planning. Empirical findings confirm that the lack of such planning at the undergraduate level forces more than a third of professionals (35.3%) to seek additional training at the graduate level, driven by the need to survive in a job market increasingly shaped by the infodemic.

The Digital Paradox and the Emergence of Documentary Hybridization

One of the most significant contributions of this study lies in its debunking of the supposed "digital native" status of the new generations of journalists. While 85% of the participants consider themselves highly capable of conducting general web searches, only 12% have a working knowledge of Boolean operators and thesauri. This finding is directly consistent with Pérez-Tornero and Varis's (2012) theory of media literacy, providing empirical evidence that journalists are stuck at the most basic level of access and technical use, lacking the complex tools required for the dimension of evaluation and critical understanding.

Furthermore, the initial reluctance of 68% of the sample to consult newspaper archives and physical archives—citing obsolescence or a waste of time—is consistent with the trend of moving away from analog sources described in the international literature. However, the data from the literature review reveal a critical nuance: journalists with advanced training demonstrated a significantly higher rate of use of analog archives (45%) compared to those with little training (10%).

This trend contradicts the assumption that the digital environment is irreversibly replacing physical media. On the contrary, it shows that when there is a strong educational presence in the learning environment (García-Galera et al., 2021), journalists perceive the historical archive as a vector of factual truth that is indispensable for counterbalancing the volatility of digital information, thereby achieving the documentary hybridization proposed by Nazakat and the KAS Media Program for Asia (2018).

Correlational Rigor and Methodological Gaps in the MIL

The key finding of the quantitative phase—the strong positive correlation ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.05$) between documentary evidence and the factual quality of the report—provides strong empirical support for the arguments put forward by Hunter (2013) and Anchante and Angulo-Giraldo (2024). However, methodological rigor requires that we clarify the scope of this inference: since this is a descriptive-correlational and cross-sectional study, this result establishes a strong statistical association but does not support a linear or deterministic causal relationship. It cannot be categorically stated that training "leads to" quality; rather, the two variables co-evolve harmoniously in the sample studied.

A critical methodological issue that warrants discussion is the forced exclusion of the AMI variable from the calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient. Unlike the provisions of UNESCO's theoretical framework (2025), in which AMI is presented as the central pillar of media ethics, in the case of Bolivia's core framework, the variance of this variable was zero due to the respondents' almost complete lack of familiarity (92.0%) with the concept.

This statistical zero is a finding in its own right: it indicates that AMI is currently an invisible construct in Bolivian journalism in 2026. Consequently, the high quality observed in 15% of the reports produced by the group with advanced training is attributable solely to their skills in traditional bibliographic research and empirical triangulation of sources, and not to a structured awareness of global media competencies.

Interregional Consistency and Risk Mitigation

Finally, the absence of significant differences between La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz ($p > 0.05$) in the ANOVA analysis suggests that the dynamics of investigative journalism in Bolivia exhibit a structurally homogeneous pattern. Vulnerability to the infodemic and the commission of factual errors are not determined by geographical factors or local editorial cultures, but rather by access to documentary repositories and the researcher's methodological competence.

This cross-cutting approach lends credibility to the qualitative observations of the editors, who unanimously linked bibliographic rigor to a reduction in requests for corrections and to the legal certainty of the medium. The collective recollection of the media crisis of July 22, 2025 (the false resignation of the TSE president) serves in this discussion as empirical evidence of the institutional consequences resulting from the lack of systematic document verification protocols in the country's newsrooms.

Final Conclusions

In this regard, the study draws the following conclusions:

- It was determined that systematic training in literature review and Media and Information Literacy (MIL) is critically lacking in Bolivia's core curriculum. It is characterized by a marginal presence in university curricula and a lack of conceptual understanding of AMI, which affects 92.0% of the active journalists surveyed.
- There is a significant gap between journalists' self-perception of their overall digital agility (85%) and their actual technical proficiency in advanced information retrieval. Only 12% demonstrated the ability to use Boolean operators and thesauri to navigate the deep web.
- A strong and statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.78, p < 0.05$) was found between the level of training in documentary research and the factual quality index of investigative reports. Authors with specialized training performed better on key indicators such as citation accuracy according to APA 7 guidelines (90%), traceability of sources in the deep web (60%), and integration with analog archives (45%).
- The interregional comparative analysis, using ANOVA, confirmed the homogeneity of the phenomenon along Bolivia's main corridor, finding that there are no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) in the relationship between education and quality among the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz.
- From the qualitative perspective of newsroom management, the adoption of systematic literature review methods not only enhances the robustness of reporting but also directly helps mitigate legal risks related to defamation and contributes to reducing the work-related stress associated with managing the infodemic in newsrooms.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

With regard to the methodological limitations of this study, it should first be noted that the sampling was non-probabilistic and based on convenience, which limits the generalizability of the results to the entire population of journalists in Bolivia. Second, the excessive bureaucracy and lack of digitization observed in government offices in Cochabamba and Santa Cruz hindered consistent access to analog records during the audit phase.

Finally, the four-month time frame (February–May 2026) provided a snapshot of the state of the reporting, but it is insufficient to assess whether investigative practices have taken root or whether reporters' technical resilience is sustainable in the long term.

For future research, we recommend:

- Reproduce the analytical model in small and medium-sized cities and rural areas of Bolivia to assess how the digital connectivity gap affects the application of the literature review.
- Conduct experimental or quasi-experimental studies to measure the causal impact of specific MIL intervention programs on the actual quality of local journalism.
- Develop quantitative methodologies designed to measure audience perception, assessing whether increased bibliographic rigor and transparency in citing documentary sources effectively translate into greater public trust in the media.

The study recommends revising academic curricula to provide urgent training for journalists in MIL, with a focus on producing high-quality, responsible investigative reports.

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Communicative Skills in Dental Training in Chile: Some Key Curriculum Points

Las competencias comunicativas en la formación odontológica en Chile: algunas claves curriculares

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Communication skills, dental
education, empathy, assertiveness

Communication skills and interpersonal skills are fundamental in dental training, especially in clinical contexts where the professional-patient relationship directly affects the quality of care. The objective of this study was to comparatively analyze the incorporation of communication and key factors such as empathy and assertiveness in the dentistry programs of eight Chilean universities. This study corresponds to the qualitative phase of a larger mixed-methods research project, which included a quantitative stage and is aimed at designing an educational resource to strengthen communication skills in the dentist-patient relationship. A qualitative documentary study was developed using thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke. In order to identify the main training dimensions, according to the stated curriculum, publicly available graduate profiles and curricula were reviewed. The results show a heterogeneous incorporation of communication skills in the programs analyzed. Some universities have explicit training strategies aimed at developing clinical communication, empathy, and qualitative feedback in practical contexts, while others address these dimensions implicitly or in a less systematic way. Convergences in training intentions were identified, along with significant divergences in the degree of curricular operationalization. The comparative analysis identified opportunities for improvement to strengthen the explicit and assessable integration of communication skills in dental training, providing relevant input for the enhancement of explicit teaching of interpersonal communication strategies in a clinical context.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Competencias comunicativas, formación odontológica, empatía, asertividad

Las competencias comunicativas y las habilidades interpersonales son fundamentales en la formación odontológica, especialmente en contextos clínicos donde la relación profesional-paciente incide directamente en la calidad de la atención. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar comparativamente la incorporación de la comunicación, y factores clave como la empatía y la asertividad, en los programas de odontología de ocho universidades chilenas. Este estudio corresponde a la fase cualitativa de una investigación mayor de enfoque mixto, que incluyó una etapa cuantitativa y que se orienta al diseño de un recurso educativo destinado a fortalecer las habilidades comunicativas en la relación odontólogo-paciente. Se desarrolló un estudio cualitativo de tipo documental mediante análisis temático, siguiendo el enfoque propuesto por Braun y Clarke. Con el objetivo de identificar las principales dimensiones formativas, según el currículo declarado, se revisaron perfiles de egreso y mallas curriculares disponibles públicamente. Los resultados evidencian una incorporación heterogénea de las competencias comunicativas en los programas analizados. Algunas universidades presentan estrategias formativas explícitas orientadas al desarrollo de la comunicación clínica, la empatía y la retroalimentación cualitativa en contextos prácticos, mientras que otras abordan estas dimensiones de forma implícita o poco sistematizada. Se identificaron convergencias en la intencionalidad formativa, junto con divergencias relevantes en el grado de operacionalización curricular. El análisis comparativo permitió identificar oportunidades de mejora para fortalecer la integración explícita y evaluable de las competencias comunicativas en la formación odontológica, aportando insumos relevantes para la puesta en valor de la enseñanza explícita de estrategias de comunicación interpersonal en contexto clínico.

Introduction

Effective communication between healthcare professionals and patients has become increasingly important in recent decades, particularly in clinical fields such as dentistry, where interpersonal interaction directly affects the quality of care, treatment adherence, and patient satisfaction. In this context, various academic and professional organizations have advocated for the explicit inclusion of communication skills in the graduate profiles and curricula of dental programs, recognizing them as an essential component of professional training (Palomares et al., 2021).

The literature in the field of healthcare has shown that communication skills—both verbal and nonverbal—play a central role in building trust, empathy, and a strong therapeutic relationship (Knapp & Hall, 2020; Burgoon et al., 2017). In dentistry, the dentist–patient relationship has been approached through various models of clinical interaction, incorporating aspects specific to professional practice, such as the provision of information, informed consent, and behavior modification strategies (González et al., 2015; Yamalik, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Pizzi de Parra, 2014). These approaches agree that communication goes beyond the mere transmission of technical information and is a cornerstone of quality healthcare.

Within this framework, assertive communication is recognized as a key competency for the development of empathetic, ethical, and patient-centered clinical practices (Orsini & Jerez, 2014; Morchón, 2018; Rodas, 2023). The literature has described various communication styles, such as assertive, passive, and aggressive, and has emphasized the importance of promoting assertive behavior through specific training strategies applicable to the dental setting (Caballo, 2009; Castanyer, 2014; García-Grau et al., 2019). In this way, assertiveness emerges as a cross-cutting skill that integrates the relational, pedagogical, and ethical dimensions of professional practice.

However, several studies point to persistent weaknesses in the communication skills of dental students, as well as inconsistent integration of these skills into curricula, which has led to the development of programs and approaches aimed at strengthening them (Palomares et al., 2021). In this regard, conceptual frameworks related to communication for behavior change, communication for development, and health promotion have gained prominence, as they emphasize participatory and educational approaches in health education (Lie, 2008). These approaches are combined with active methodologies, such as modeling, feedback, and positive reinforcement, for teaching communication skills in clinical settings (Rodas, 2023).

Despite these advances, there remains limited comparative evidence regarding how communication skills are articulated and implemented in the learning outcomes and curricula of dental programs, particularly in Latin American contexts. In response to this gap, this study—which forms part of the qualitative phase of a doctoral research project—aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the integration of communication, empathy, and assertiveness into the dentistry programs at eight Chilean universities, with the goal of generating relevant insights for the design of educational proposals aimed at strengthening specific training regarding the dentist–patient relationship.

Method

Study Design

A qualitative, documentary, and comparative study was conducted as part of the qualitative phase of a mixed-methods research project. The study was designed to analyze

the integration of communication and interpersonal skills into dental programs at Chilean universities through a systematic review of official institutional documents.

Documentary Corpus and Units of Analysis

The corpus consisted of public and official documents from eight Chilean universities that offer a degree program in dentistry: Finis Terrae University, Universidad del Desarrollo, University of Concepción, Andrés Bello University, Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, University of Chile, University of La Frontera, and University of Santiago de Chile. These universities were selected because they currently offer undergraduate programs in dentistry and have officially approved curriculum documents publicly available on their institutional websites, thereby ensuring comparability and traceability of the documents.

The corpus of documents analyzed is as follows:

- *UNAB Educational Model* (Andrés Bello University, 2024)
- *Dentistry* [Admissions Brochure] (University of Chile, 2024)
- *UdeC 2024 Institutional Educational Model* (University of Concepción, 2025)
- *UDD Santiago Dentistry Curriculum*. (University of Development, 2025)
- *Finis Transforma Educational Model* (Finis Terrae University, 2025)
- *USACH Institutional Educational Model* (University of Santiago de Chile, 2014)
- *UC Dentistry Curriculum* (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, 2025)
- *Curriculum and Course Catalog for the Dentistry Program* (Universidad de la Frontera, 2025)

Two complementary units of analysis were defined:

- a) graduate profiles, which are considered formal expressions of the competencies and educational hallmarks established by each institution; and
- b) educational pathways (curriculum frameworks).

Analysis Procedure

The documents were examined using thematic analysis, following the approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2021), adapted to the comparative purpose of the study. This procedure was applied differently to each unit of analysis, while maintaining common criteria of consistency and comparability.

Analysis of Training Pathways

During an initial phase of familiarization with the data, we conducted a thorough review of the educational curricula of the eight universities included in the study, with the aim of identifying references related to the development of communication skills, empathy, assertiveness, and qualitative assessment in dental education.

Subsequently, initial codes were generated based on categories defined in advance according to the research objectives: graduate profile, empathy, assertiveness, and qualitative assessment. For each category, operational indicators were established, such as courses, clinical modules, professional practice opportunities, and clinical rotations, incorporating synonyms or equivalent terms identified during the preliminary review.

During the search, review, and topic-definition phases, relevant text excerpts were identified, the internal consistency of the codes was verified, and the dimensions were redefined using an operational approach focused on comparative analysis across institutions.

Analysis of Graduate Profiles

The specific thematic analysis of the graduate profiles of the participating institutions began with a familiarization phase, which made it possible to identify preliminary similarities and differences in the educational approaches stated by each institution.

Based on a systematic review of the literature, a set of recurring initial codes emerged, including: ethics and professionalism; teamwork and interdisciplinarity;

management and administration; communication; health prevention and promotion; social and community engagement; research and innovation; and comprehensive and continuing education.

These codes were grouped into preliminary cross-institutional themes, which were reviewed and cross-checked against the original data to ensure internal consistency and differentiation among universities. Finally, five key comparative themes were identified: science and evidence as a foundation; ethics, leadership, and professionalism; social and community engagement; management of professional practice; and research and innovation in dentistry.

Summary and Organization of Information

The coded data was organized into comparative matrices, which made it possible to systematize the findings across the universities analyzed, prioritizing concise descriptions based on verifiable documentary evidence. This process facilitated the subsequent identification of commonalities, differences, and opportunities for improvement in dental education.

Ethical Considerations

The study was based exclusively on the analysis of publicly available institutional documents, without involving human participants or sensitive data. For this reason, approval from an ethics committee was not required, and the responsible and academic use of the analyzed information was ensured at all times. It is important to note that Chilean institutions of higher education (HEIs) are governed by specific regulations regarding access to information, which must be made public, kept up to date, and verifiable. These requirements, among others, are overseen by the Superintendency of Higher Education (SES). Given this circumstance, this desk study did not require any special authorizations.

Regarding the use of generative artificial intelligence (gAI) models, the article was based on relevant sections of the lead author's doctoral dissertation, a study that utilized the *ChatGPT* software from *OpenAI* to collect, systematize, and organize the documentation, cross-referencing it with the original digital versions obtained from institutional websites. However, for this publication, the data used was extracted from Microsoft Excel spreadsheets created for this purpose.

Results

The analysis identified five cross-cutting themes that underpin the reported dental education curriculum: research and innovation, social and community engagement, ethics and professional leadership, practice management, and holistic education.

Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of the graduate profiles of the universities included in the study. This table highlights significant differences in the stated educational priorities and in the degree to which communication skills are explicitly addressed.

Based on this initial descriptive analysis, Table 2 provides a comparative summary of the main educational priorities identified across the board, highlighting the similarities and differences among the institutions analyzed.

Using the information obtained during the coding process of the document analysis, Table 1 was created, which summarizes the main elements identified in the graduate profiles of the universities analyzed. The information was organized into three analytical columns: *university*, *graduate profile*, and *categories for analyzing the graduate profile*. Each row corresponds to an institution and includes a brief description of the graduate profile as stated in the institution's documents, along with an analytical characterization based on the categories defined for the study.

The included descriptions prioritize information explicitly contained in the reviewed sources, with the aim of maintaining traceability between the analyzed documents and the interpretation provided. In this regard, the table is presented as an original compilation, with the aim of highlighting the interpretive nature of the analysis, which is based on documentary evidence.

This procedure made it possible to construct a systematic comparative matrix, grounded in the methodological rigor of thematic analysis, which facilitates the identification of similarities and differences in the educational emphases present in the graduate profiles of the dental programs reviewed.

Table 1

Qualitative analysis of the graduate profiles of the dentistry programs at the universities studied

No.	University	Graduate Profile	Categories of graduate profile analysis
1	U. Finis Terrae	A dentist from Finis Terrae University is a professional whose evidence-based scientific and technical training enables them to address common oral health issues affecting individuals and communities by demonstrating leadership and creativity. It carries out initiatives to promote, protect, and restore health within its area of jurisdiction. He is prepared to work with other healthcare professionals, demonstrating strong communication skills, sound ethical principles, and unwavering respect for applicable legal, biosafety, and environmental regulations.	<p>Focus: The program is evidence-based and focuses on science and technology, with an emphasis on individual and community oral health.</p> <p>Skills: It fosters leadership skills, creativity, and teamwork with other healthcare professionals. It emphasizes ethics, compliance with regulations, and biosafety.</p> <p>Vision: Focused on promoting and restoring health, as well as respecting legal and environmental frameworks.</p>
2	University of Development (UDD)	<p>The graduate profile for dentists is expressed in terms of competencies that combine attributes related to knowledge, understanding, practical skills, and personal qualities, all of which enable graduates to perform the duties inherent to the profession. These competencies are categorized as general and specific.</p> <p>By acquiring the competencies outlined in this graduate profile, our graduates will be independent professionals with an innovative, comprehensive, and up-to-date perspective on dentistry, backed by a solid scientific foundation. They will be focused on promotion and prevention, equipped with problem-solving skills applicable to both individual and group settings through work in multidisciplinary teams, and will demonstrate a commitment to social issues and a sense of responsibility for the health of the community.</p> <p>Contributes to the generation of new knowledge by conducting or participating in research projects. In addition, it manages human, material, and</p>	<p>Focus: A comprehensive education that combines scientific knowledge with practical skills applicable in a variety of contexts, using an innovative and up-to-date approach.</p> <p>Skills: Emphasis is placed on autonomy, problem-solving at both the individual and group levels, and working in multidisciplinary teams.</p> <p>Vision: It promotes social commitment and responsibility for the health of the community.</p> <p>Focus: It strengthens knowledge generation and research, with a focus on</p>

3	University of Concepción	technological resources with the aim of continuously improving the quality of dental care.	improving the quality of dental care.
4	Andrés Bello University (UNAB)	<p>Dental surgeons from Andrés Bello University are professionals with a solid scientific, clinical, and ethical foundation that enables them to engage in health promotion, prevention, and diagnosis of diseases and conditions affecting the stomatognathic system, as well as to treat and rehabilitate the most common complications found in the general population, based on available scientific evidence.</p> <p>Manages and oversees their professional practice to provide high-quality clinical care and applies scientific methods to help resolve health issues.</p>	<p>Skills: Skills in resource management and applied research in the field of dentistry.</p> <p>Vision: Focused on innovation and the continuous improvement of clinical practice through research.</p> <p>Focus: A solid foundation in scientific, clinical, and ethical training, with a strong focus on health promotion and the treatment of common conditions.</p> <p>Skills: It emphasizes the management and administration of professional practice based on scientific evidence.</p> <p>Vision: It offers a well-rounded education that balances clinical care with the resolution of health issues through an ethical approach.</p>
5	Pontifical Catholic University of Chile (PUC)	<p>Graduates must also possess strong communication and leadership skills, be committed to continuing their education, and uphold firm ethical and moral principles. Their professional work will be centered on patients, their families, the community, and the nation's health needs, grounded in evidence and the University's values.</p> <p>Domains</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UC Identity. • Critical thinking. • Professionalism and ethics. • Communication. • Health promotion. • Administration and management. • Basic and biomedical sciences. • Clinical knowledge and skills. 	<p>Focus: Comprehensive training that focuses not only on technical skills, but also on leadership, ethics, and a commitment to public health.</p> <p>Skills: Communication skills, critical thinking, professionalism, and ethics, with a strong emphasis on health promotion and administration.</p> <p>Vision: Focused on the patient, their family, and the community, with an emphasis on improving public health and a strong ethical framework.</p>
6	University of Chile	<p>The Graduate Profile for Dental Surgeons at the University of Chile (Title VI. Article 46 states that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A healthcare professional with training in science, technology, and the humanities • Demonstrate competencies in promoting health, preventing, diagnosing, and treating 	<p>Focus: An education in science, technology, and the humanities, with a clear commitment to society and the community.</p> <p>Skills: Skills in diagnosing and treating common diseases, as</p>

7	University of La Frontera	<p>common oral and maxillofacial diseases in the population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please notify the appropriate office where you are assigned• Manage and run your professional practice• It helps address the country's health issues and needs at the individual, family, and community levels by applying the biopsychosocial model• Works in interdisciplinary teams	<p>well as working in interdisciplinary teams.</p> <p>Vision: A comprehensive approach, applying a biopsychosocial model and contributing to the resolution of health issues at the national level.</p>
		<p>The purpose of the Dentistry program at the University of La Frontera is to prepare professionals with a solid scientific foundation and a strong ethical and humanistic background, enabling them to play an active role within the healthcare team and to carry out preventive care, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of common problems of the stomatognathic system, both in individuals and in the community.</p> <p>They must be a professional capable of working as part of a general healthcare team and leading an oral health team.</p> <p>Dental surgeons will incorporate a strong community focus into their practice, particularly in the areas of preventive care for the stomatognathic system and community education.</p> <p>Dental surgeons who graduate from the Universidad de la Frontera must possess a strong and consistent ability to engage in continuous self-education and, at the same time, demonstrate a commitment to education in all their actions. Graduates should understand human and social behavior so that they can balance technical and human considerations in their individual professional practice and within the healthcare team, all within an ethical framework.</p>	<p>Focus: Scientific and ethical training with a strong community focus, centered on oral health prevention and education.</p> <p>Skills: Development of skills in continuous self-directed learning and leadership within healthcare teams.</p> <p>Vision: A focus on prevention and community education, striking a balance between technical and human aspects.</p>
8	University of Santiago, Chile (USACH)	<p>He or she is a healthcare professional with training in science, technology, and the humanities. Demonstrate the skills needed to promote health, prevent, diagnose, and treat common oral and maxillofacial diseases in the population. Please notify your supervisor accordingly.</p>	<p>Focus: A well-rounded education that encompasses science, technology, and the humanities.</p> <p>Skills: Expertise in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of oral and maxillofacial diseases, with an emphasis on effective communication.</p> <p>Vision: Aligned with public health and focused on addressing prevalent problems at the population level.</p>

Note: Compiled by the author based on a review of institutional graduate profiles, 2025

Table 2 provides a comparative overview of these educational focuses, grouping universities according to the aspects that are most prominent in their graduate profiles.

In order to identify the main educational orientations present in the dental programs analyzed, a qualitative comparison was conducted of the graduate profiles stated by the universities included in the study. This analysis made it possible to identify similarities and differences in the educational priorities that each institution outlines regarding the professional training of dentists.

Based on a review of these profiles, five analytical dimensions were identified that underpin the main educational priorities: a focus on research, social engagement, ethics and leadership, professional practice and management, and holistic education. These dimensions emerge from an interpretive analysis of institutional documents and make it possible to summarize the pedagogical principles that guide dental education at various universities.

Table 2

General Qualitative Comparison of University Graduation Profiles

Focus on Research	Social Commitment	Ethics and Leadership	Professional Practice and Management	Comprehensive Training
<p>UDEC and the University of Chile:</p> <p>They are distinguished by their emphasis on research and the generation of new knowledge.</p>	<p>UDD and U. de la Frontera:</p> <p>They have a greater focus on community work and social responsibility.</p>	<p>PUC:</p> <p>It places a strong emphasis on ethical principles and leadership skills.</p>	<p>UNAB and USACH</p> <p>They highlight the importance of administration and management in dental practice.</p>	<p>FINIS TERRAE UNIVERSITY, THE PUC, AND THE UNIVERSITY OF CHILE:</p> <p>They offer a comprehensive educational approach that combines scientific, humanistic, and ethical perspectives.</p>

Note: Compiled by the author based on the study's findings (2025).

A comparative analysis of the graduate profiles reveals differences in educational focus among the universities examined, although certain points of convergence are also identified regarding the comprehensive training of dentists. In particular, some institutions are known for their focus on scientific research and knowledge generation, while others prioritize social engagement and community service as central pillars of their educational mission. In addition, there are programs that place greater emphasis on the development of ethical principles and leadership skills, as well as programs that explicitly incorporate competencies related to management and administration in dental practice. Taken together, these findings reflect the diversity of pedagogical approaches in dental education in Chile, highlighting different ways of integrating scientific, social, ethical, and professional dimensions into the graduate profiles of the programs analyzed.

Analysis of Educational Pathways (Curriculum Frameworks)

In the analysis of the training programs presented in Table 3, we examined the presence of communication skills related to the development of interpersonal skills relevant to clinical practice, particularly empathy and assertiveness. These competencies were identified as key analytical categories due to their recognized contribution to the quality

of the professional–patient relationship and the effectiveness of communication in healthcare settings.

In order to determine how these skills are incorporated into undergraduate dental education, we reviewed the educational curriculum—that is, the sequence (structure) of curricular activities that make up the program—as well as the course descriptions from the eight selected universities. The analysis made it possible to identify those curricular components, courses, modules, or training activities in which the development of these communication skills is explicitly stated or implied.

Table 3 provides a summary of the results of this analysis, indicating for each university the curricular components that promote the development of empathy and assertiveness within the educational program.

Table 3

Analysis of educational pathways in relation to the development of empathy and assertiveness in dental programs

No.	University	Empathy	Assertiveness
1	Finis Terrae University	The Finis Terrae curriculum emphasizes public health and effective communication from the very first semesters, with courses such as "Public Health I" and "Effective Communication." These subjects help students understand the socioeconomic and cultural context of their patients, fostering empathy during treatment	The development of assertiveness is incorporated through integrated modules and clinical simulations that require students to interact with real and simulated scenarios. "Integration Module I" includes communication components that reinforce these skills
2	University of Development (UDD)	UDD includes courses such as "Clinical Psychology" and "Oral Communication" to develop interpersonal skills, which are essential for empathy in the doctor-patient relationship. In addition, students participate in early clinical activities that connect them with the community and foster an understanding of patients' emotions	Courses such as "Critical Thinking" and "Critical Reading" provide students with the tools to make informed decisions, which helps them interact with patients more assertively
3	University of Concepción	"Community Dentistry" and public health courses provide opportunities for students to interact with different communities, fostering greater sensitivity to patients' individual and collective needs and promoting empathy	The UdeC promotes assertiveness through clinical activities with adolescents and adults, particularly at the "Integrated Adolescent Clinic," where students must be direct yet sensitive in their interactions with adolescent patients
4	Andrés Bello University (UNAB)	UNAB emphasizes the development of empathy through courses such as "Ethics and Psychology" and "Health Promotion and Education," which prepare students to better understand the emotional and social needs of their patients, fostering an empathetic relationship	The courses "Critical Thinking" and "Public Health II" promote effective decision-making and clear communication skills, while strengthening assertiveness in both clinical and non-clinical settings
5	Pontifical Catholic	The PUC curriculum features public health courses starting in the early years, which encourage early engagement with the community. In addition, courses such as "Health Communication" emphasize	Training in critical thinking and clear communication is incorporated into clinical modules where students must make quick and effective decisions.

	University of Chile (PUC)	the importance of empathy when interacting with patients.	
6	University of Chile	The University of Chile promotes empathy through its public health courses and ethics workshops, where students learn about patients' social contexts and how these influence healthcare.	Assertiveness skills are developed through hands-on practice at the "Comprehensive Dental Clinic," where students must communicate directly with patients and their families in complex clinical situations.
7	University of La Frontera	The "Public Health and Well-being" course fosters empathy, preparing students to interact with diverse social groups and understand their patients' needs.	In the clinical setting, the practicum at "Clínica Integral" requires students to develop assertiveness when interacting with patients of all ages.
8	University of Santiago, Chile (USACH)	USACH places a strong emphasis on "Public Health" and "Health Communication," which fosters an empathetic understanding of patients from the very beginning.	Courses in management and leadership incorporated into the curriculum reinforce assertive decision-making and the ability to communicate clearly with patients.

An analysis of educational pathways shows that communication skills related to empathy and assertiveness are incorporated into dental programs through various curricular strategies. In some cases, these skills are developed through courses focused on public health and clinical communication, while in others they are integrated into clinical modules, simulation activities, or interdisciplinary training sessions. These findings suggest that, while there is growing recognition of the importance of communication skills in dental education, their integration into the curriculum varies in terms of how explicitly and systematically they are addressed across the institutions analyzed.

Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the qualitative analysis provide deeper insight into how communication skills are integrated into dental education at the institutional level, revealing a varied degree of incorporation across the dental programs analyzed. These findings are consistent with previous research, which has highlighted significant differences among institutions in terms of curriculum design, teaching strategies, and assessment methods related to clinical communication (Palomares et al., 2021).

The consistent presence of values such as empathy, respect, and assertiveness in graduate profiles confirms the views expressed by various authors regarding the central role of communication in the dentist–patient relationship (Yamalík, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; González et al., 2015). However, the results of this study show that this value statement.

From a communication perspective, the emphasis placed on empathy and interpersonal communication is consistent with the findings of Knapp and Hall (2020) and Burgoon et al. (2017), who highlight the role of verbal and nonverbal communication in building the therapeutic relationship. However, an analysis of graduate profiles reveals a mixed picture regarding these skills at the declarative level, suggesting that their integration into dental education may not be fully articulated or systematized. Since this study focused on a documentary review of the profiles rather than a detailed examination of the curricula or assessment strategies, these findings should be interpreted as indications of potential educational gaps that require specific curricular research.

With regard to assertiveness, the findings reinforce its nature as a cross-cutting competency that integrates ethical, relational, and professional dimensions of dental practice, as proposed by Orsini and Jerez (2014), Caballo (2009), and Castanyer (2014). However, the variability observed among institutions in terms of their educational integration underscores the need to move toward educational models that systematically incorporate active strategies, such as modeling, feedback, and behavioral training, in line with the recommendations of García-Grau et al. (2019) and Rodas (2023).

Furthermore, the diversity of institutional characteristics identified in the graduate profiles—with varying emphases on research, social engagement, management, or leadership—reflects the tension described in the literature between scientific and technical excellence and the social responsibility of health professionals (Lie, 2008). In this regard, clinical communication emerges as an integrating framework that allows these dimensions to be brought together, provided it is approached through explicit and context-specific pedagogical approaches.

This study provided a comparative analysis of the integration of communication skills into the dentistry programs at eight Chilean universities, using a qualitative documentary approach. The results show that, although communication, empathy, and assertiveness are widely recognized as key components of dental education, their integration into the curriculum varies significantly, with marked differences in the degree to which they are explicitly addressed, systematized, and assessed across the institutions analyzed.

An analysis of graduate profiles revealed that communication skills are often cited as educational values, but they are not always accompanied by specific teaching strategies or assessment tools to ensure their progressive development in clinical settings. This gap between educational objectives and their implementation in the curriculum is a significant finding, as it limits students' actual opportunities to acquire and develop communication skills in their professional practice.

Furthermore, the diversity of institutional approaches—each with a distinct emphasis on research, social engagement, management, or leadership—influences how clinical communication is addressed within these programs, underscoring the need to move toward educational approaches that coherently integrate the technical, relational, and ethical dimensions of dental practice.

As for the curricula that make up the dentistry program at these same eight Chilean universities, empathy and assertiveness are typically addressed explicitly through courses in public health and health communication, as well as through integrative modules and clinical rotations that include feedback. The most common training methods for empathy include introductory communication courses and early engagement with the community; for assertiveness, clinical simulations, integrated modules, and activities that require decision-making in real-world contexts are particularly effective.

In general terms, the study's findings indicate that training in communication skills in dentistry in the Chilean context lacks consistent and explicit integration into the curriculum. While there is widespread recognition of their importance, challenges remain in defining clear training guidelines and implementing systematic pedagogical strategies that will strengthen these skills in a way that is both measurable and contextually relevant.

From this perspective, the study provides relevant empirical evidence supporting the need to design and implement educational resources aimed at strengthening communication skills in dental education, with a particular focus on the dentist–patient relationship and the current demands of professional practice.

One of the main limitations of the study is its exclusive reliance on publicly available institutional documents, which prevents the reported information from being compared with the training practices actually implemented in the classroom and in clinical settings. Furthermore, the analysis is limited to a specific group of Chilean universities, which restricts the generalizability of the results to other educational contexts.

As part of our ongoing efforts, we propose to supplement the literature review with empirical studies that incorporate the perspectives of students and teachers, as well as direct evaluations of teaching strategies aimed at developing communication skills. Similarly, future studies could examine in greater depth the impact of specific educational resources on the quality of clinical communication and the dentist-patient relationship at different levels of training.

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Digital Marketing Strategies in Creative Personal Brands: The Case of Photographer Marcos Alberca on Instagram and TikTok

Estrategias de marketing digital en marcas personales creativas: el caso del fotógrafo marcos alberca en Instagram y TikTok

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Digital Marketing, Social Media,
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branding, Creativa industries

This study analyzes the digital marketing strategies employed by creative personal brands to optimize their positioning and connect with audiences in digital ecosystems. The research is based on an exploratory-descriptive, cross-sectional design with a mixed-methods approach. The sample, selected through non-probability convenience sampling, focuses on the case of the renowned Spanish photographer Marcos Alberca and his presence on Instagram and TikTok. Data collection triangulated systematic observation, content analysis, and semi-structured interviews with digital marketing experts. The results reveal that the predominant organic strategies are SEO, Content Marketing, and Social Selling, which effectively consolidate his digital identity. A marked format adaptation was identified: Instagram integrates audiovisual resources, extended texts, and links to foster interaction, while TikTok is dominated by fast-consumption videos. Significantly, it was shown that content based on intimate and emotional narratives concentrates the highest engagement rates compared to purely promotional content. It is concluded that the success of this personal brand is based on the integration of organic content and affective resources. As a main contribution, this study empirically demonstrates that algorithmic effectiveness and audience retention rely not only on posting frequency but on the structuring of transmedia narratives. However, it highlights the need to diversify formats and adopt paid strategies (SEM) to avoid audience saturation and ensure long-term communicative sustainability, thus serving as a strategic guide for other creators in the creative industry.

RESUMEN

Palabras clave:

Marketing Digital, Redes Sociales, Comunicación Estratégica, Marcas personales, Industrias Creativas.

Este estudio analiza las estrategias de marketing digital empleadas por marcas personales creativas para optimizar su posicionamiento y conexión con la audiencia en ecosistemas digitales. La investigación se fundamenta en un diseño exploratorio-descriptivo, de corte transversal y enfoque mixto. La muestra, seleccionada mediante muestreo no probabilístico por conveniencia, se centra en el caso del reconocido fotógrafo español Marcos Alberca y su presencia en Instagram y TikTok. La recolección de datos trianguló técnicas de observación sistemática, análisis de contenido y entrevistas semiestructuradas a expertos en marketing digital. Los resultados revelan que las estrategias orgánicas predominantes son el SEO, el *Content Marketing* y el *Social Selling*, las cuales consolidan de forma efectiva su identidad digital. Se identificó una marcada adaptación de formatos: en Instagram convergen recursos audiovisuales, textos extendidos y enlaces para fomentar la interacción, mientras que en TikTok prevalecen videos orientados al consumo rápido. De manera significativa, se evidenció que el contenido fundamentado en narrativas íntimas y emocionales concentra los mayores índices de *engagement* frente al contenido netamente promocional. Se concluye que el éxito de esta marca personal se sustenta en la integración de contenidos orgánicos y recursos afectivos. Como contribución principal, este estudio demuestra empíricamente que la eficacia algorítmica y la retención del público no residen solo en la frecuencia de publicación, sino en la estructuración de narrativas transmedia. No obstante, se evidencia la necesidad de diversificar formatos y adoptar estrategias pagadas (SEM) para evitar la saturación de la audiencia y asegurar la sostenibilidad comunicativa a largo plazo, sirviendo así como guía estratégica para otros creadores de la industria creativa.

Introduction

Digitalization is one of the key processes driving contemporary transformation, as it involves the systematic integration of digital technologies that optimize both tangible and intangible processes in terms of efficiency, accessibility, and speed. From a functional perspective, this phenomenon has reshaped many aspects of social life, including business, commercial transactions, and communication, giving rise to new dynamics of social and economic interaction (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 2013; Rodrigues, 2017; Taşçı and Taşlibeyaz, 2021).

In this context, marketing has undergone a significant transformation, particularly as brands and professionals have shifted from traditional models to digital environments. Social media has established itself as a key platform for interaction between brands and their audiences, serving as a prime venue for building visibility, identity, and symbolic presence. Recent studies show that a high percentage of the population with Internet access interacts on social media daily, spending between one and one and a half hours consuming digital content, which underscores its strategic importance for contemporary communication practices (Sicilia *et al.*, 2022).

In this context, influencer marketing has emerged as a high-impact industry of growing importance for businesses—especially in the B2C sector—and has become standard practice in sectors such as fashion, beauty, tourism, and food through visual platforms like Instagram and TikTok (Haenlein *et al.*, 2020), characterized by their global reach and their ability to generate high levels of interaction and *engagement*. Various studies have highlighted the role of digital marketing in the positioning and performance of creative and professional initiatives, as it enables an effective integration of visibility, interaction, and resource optimization (Jung and Shegai, 2023). Furthermore, the importance of approaches such as *branded content* and *transmedia storytelling* in fostering emotional connections and building trust between brands and audiences has been demonstrated (Gómez Arroyo, 2023; Núñez-Gómez *et al.*, 2022; Nicolaou, 2022).

However, despite growing academic interest, there remains a lack of systematic research on creative personal brands in the field of photography and their strategic application in digital marketing on visual social media platforms. In response to this gap, this study analyzes the digital marketing strategies employed by Spanish photographer Marcos Alberca on Instagram and TikTok, viewing these platforms as key spaces for building a creative personal brand and engaging with the audience. The significance of this study lies in its empirical contribution to the fields of communication and digital marketing, as well as in its potential applicability to other creative professionals interested in strengthening their presence in digital environments.

From a conceptual perspective, marketing has been defined as a process aimed at creating value by satisfying consumer needs and desires, moving beyond approaches focused exclusively on sales volume (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001). In environments characterized by increasing competition and constant shifts in consumer behavior, brands are compelled to adopt adaptive approaches that respond to new market dynamics, thereby remaining relevant and securing sustainable competitive advantages (Ferrer, 2018; Bilovodska *et al.*, 2022).

In this context, digital marketing emerges as an extension and adaptation of traditional marketing to the online environment, incorporating digital media to promote products, services, and brands. According to Campo and Solé (2020), it enables the establishment of direct, personalized, and measurable relationships with consumers, while Viteri *et al.* (2018) note that strategies from the *offline* world are adapted and

enhanced through technological tools that facilitate closer and more strategic communication. In this vein, digital marketing is a process that facilitates value creation, interaction, and positioning in digital environments (Díaz Landero *et al.*, 2024), where personal branding gains relevance as a strategy aimed at intentionally managing identity and communicating knowledge, skills, values, and distinctive attributes to generate recognition among audiences (Rachmad, 2024).

Similarly, influencer marketing is emerging as a strategic tool that expands the reach and credibility of personal brands through the influence that certain content creators exert over their digital communities (Pan *et al.*, 2025). The effectiveness of these strategies is enhanced by the incorporation of emotional marketing, defined as the creation of emotional bonds between brands and audiences through experiences, narratives, and messages that resonate with their emotions and values (Granda-Cruz, 2026). Consequently, the convergence of digital marketing, personal branding, influencer marketing, and emotional marketing contributes to positioning, generating *engagement*, and strengthening sustainable relationships between content creators and their audiences in contemporary digital ecosystems.

Among the most significant communication strategies in digital marketing, *branded content* stands out. This refers to the creation of informative, educational, or entertaining content designed to convey brand values and identity, rather than directly promoting products or services (Gómez Arroyo, 2023). This approach aims to foster closeness, trust, and lasting relationships with the audience, promoting virality and emotional engagement among users (Núñez-Gómez *et al.*, 2022). In this context, brands and companies have taken on an active role as social actors on digital networks, relying on influencers to amplify their messages and build credibility among their peers (Castillo-Abdul *et al.*, 2021).

Communication strategies in digital marketing include a diverse set of techniques aimed at positioning and engagement in digital environments, such as content marketing, email marketing, and *social selling* (Viteri *et al.*, 2018). In addition, strategies such as SEO and SEM play a key role in digital visibility. SEO focuses on the organic ranking of content through search engine and social media optimization techniques (Martín, 2018), while SEM relies on paid promotion, enabling audience segmentation and expanding the reach of content (Rojas *et al.*, 2021).

From the perspective of the uses and gratifications theory, social media platforms serve as spaces where users manage their identities, build relationships, and satisfy various communication needs (Katz, 1959; Lee and Ma, 2012). Recent research has incorporated approaches focused on human interactions to analyze user behavior on digital platforms (Duffy and Ling, 2019). In this ecosystem, Instagram and TikTok stand out for their visual nature and their ability to integrate multimedia content that combines text, images, video, and sound, facilitating creative expression and the immediate consumption of content (Fondevila-Gascón *et al.*, 2020; Marinas, 2019; Doval-Fernández and Sánchez-Amboage, 2021).

Multimedia content has thus become a central element of contemporary digital communication, as it enables active audience interaction and the creation of meaningful communicative experiences (González, 2020; Acevedo, 2018; Toscano and López, 2019). The case of photographer Marcos Alberca is relevant to the analysis of digital marketing strategies for creative personal brands, given his professional background and established presence on digital platforms, which allows for an empirical examination of the interplay between communication strategies, personal narrative, and brand positioning on social media.

The case study of Marcos Alberca serves as an empirical benchmark that demonstrates how the convergence of personal narrative, multimedia content, and digital marketing strategies contributes to the construction of a coherent and recognizable brand identity in highly competitive digital environments, thereby providing the fields of communication and digital marketing with a deeper understanding of the processes of interaction, *engagement*, and positioning within the visual social media ecosystem.

Research Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to analyze the digital marketing strategies employed by photographer Marcos Alberca on Instagram and TikTok during the period from July to October 2023. To this end, three specific objectives have been set:

- Identify the most commonly used digital marketing strategies on both platforms.
- Describe the photographer's digital presence in terms of formats and types of content.
- Demonstrate the connection and level of engagement between followers and the published content.

Method

This research was conducted on the Instagram and TikTok platforms of Spanish photographer Marcos Alberca, treating these spaces as the primary focus of analysis for the study of digital marketing strategies used in the development and positioning of creative personal brands. In this regard, the study falls within the field of digital marketing, with a specific focus on the communication strategies used by the photographer to achieve high levels of visibility, interaction, and engagement on these social media platforms.

From a methodological standpoint, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating qualitative and quantitative components, which made it possible to collect and analyze both numerical data and interpretive information, thereby fostering a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. The use of this approach made it possible to compare previously established theoretical concepts with the empirical evidence obtained, in line with the findings of Hernández and Mendoza (2018), who emphasize that mixed-methods research strengthens the validity of the results by combining different analytical techniques.

The study design was descriptive-analytical, cross-sectional, and non-experimental, since no variables were manipulated; instead, the phenomena were observed and analyzed in their natural context. This type of design made it possible to describe and examine the characteristics, strategies, and communication dynamics present in the digital accounts of the subject of study, taking into account their specific features and behavioral patterns (Mousalli-Kayat, 2015). The study spanned a four-month period, from July to October 2023, which made it possible to analyze the photographer's digital behavior over a specific, defined timeframe.

Three types of structured matrices were created in Excel for data processing and analysis. The first matrix focused on categorizing the account's *digital presence* (classifying the format as text, images, videos, links, etc.); the second was designed to measure the frequency of application of predefined *digital marketing strategies* —*SEO, SEM, Content Marketing, Social Selling, Email Marketing, and Link Building*—; and the third was intended to evaluate connectivity by directly recording user interactions —likes, comments, shares, and saves— (Escobar-Pérez and Cuervo-Martínez, 2008).

The data sheets made it possible to systematically collect information on the previously operationalized categories of analysis, facilitating the individual assessment of each dimension of the study and its subsequent comparative interpretation. In addition, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals specializing in digital marketing and communication: Ms. Tatiana León and Ms. Daniela Gallardo. The interview guide consisted of seven open-ended questions designed to explore four key themes in depth: the impact of visual platforms on consumer behavior, the design and effectiveness of strategies (such as SEO and content marketing), the evaluation of performance metrics, and common mistakes made when positioning a brand.

Throughout this research, compliance with the ethical principles applicable to studies conducted in digital environments was ensured. The quantitative data collection was based exclusively on publicly available and open-access data from social media, ensuring that users who commented were anonymized to protect the privacy of third parties. In addition, the two professionals interviewed provided their explicit informed consent for the recording, transcription, and use of their comments for academic purposes.

The descriptive nature of the research addressed the need to independently measure and analyze the study variables and categories, allowing for their subsequent interpretation in light of the stated objectives. In addition, a deductive approach was employed, which facilitated the understanding, systematization, and verification of the research questions based on the reviewed theoretical framework (Hernández and Mendoza, 2018).

As for the cross-sectional design, it allowed us to describe the phenomenon at a specific point in time, highlighting the observable characteristics of the subject of study without attempting to establish causal relationships. As Mousalli-Kayat (2015) points out, this type of design is well-suited for research that seeks to characterize social and communicational phenomena in specific contexts.

With regard to the target audience, the digital platforms Instagram and TikTok were considered the reference universe; these social media platforms have millions of users worldwide and serve as strategic spaces for personal branding and the implementation of digital marketing strategies. In this context, a non-probabilistic, purposive or convenience sample was selected, a method that allowed for the identification of a representative case study based on previously defined characteristics (Hernández and Carpio, 2019; Otzen and Manterola, 2017).

As a result, Marcos Alberca, a Spanish photographer with a strong and established presence on both platforms, was selected. The choice of this influencer is empirically justified by their significant influence and leadership in the industry: they have 2.24 million subscribers on their YouTube channel (making it the most-subscribed Spanish-language photography channel), 1.3 million followers on TikTok, and over 933,000 followers on Instagram. These metrics establish him as an ideal and highly representative case study for analyzing the dynamics of positioning in creative personal branding. In addition, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with digital marketing experts who have more than five years of professional experience in areas related to digital branding, strategic social media management, and online positioning; their insights helped to strengthen the interpretation of the results and the methodological triangulation of the research.

Results

This paper presents the results obtained from a content analysis of photographer Marcos Alberca’s Instagram and TikTok accounts during the period from July to October 2023, as well as from a qualitative analysis of interviews with digital marketing experts.

Digital Marketing Strategies Used on Instagram and TikTok

Table 1
Breakdown of digital marketing strategies by platform

Strategy	Instagram (%)	TikTok (%)
Content Marketing	30	29
Social Selling	28	29
SEO	23	29
Link Building	19	12
SEM	0	0
Email Marketing	0	0

Quantitative analysis of the posts revealed a clear predominance of organic digital marketing strategies on both platforms. On Instagram, content marketing accounted for 30% of all identified strategies, followed by social selling (28%) and SEO (23%). Link building accounted for 19%, while there was no use of SEM or email marketing.

On TikTok, the distribution was more balanced: content marketing, SEO, and social selling each accounted for 29% of the strategies analyzed, while link building dropped to 12%. As with Instagram, no SEM or email marketing strategies were identified.

These results demonstrate a strategic focus on organic visibility, community building, and direct engagement with the audience, prioritizing algorithmic ranking and relationship-building over paid advertising.

Marcos Alberca's Digital Presence by Content Format

Table 2
Content Types by Platform

Content type	Instagram (%)	TikTok (%)
Text	27	33
Video	19	33
Links	19	13
Images	10	0
Promotional	8	7
Moving	8	7
Humor	2	7
Interactive (surveys)	6	0
Educational	0	0
Events	0	0

With regard to digital presence, significant differences were observed in the types of content depending on the platform. Text-based content dominated on Instagram (27%), followed by videos and links (19% each). Images accounted for only 10%, while promotional and emotional content each accounted for 8%. Interactive content, such as surveys or questions, was limited (6%), and no educational or event-related content was identified.

On TikTok, content was primarily focused on videos (33%) and text (33%), with links being used less frequently (13%). Promotional, emotional, and humorous content each accounted for 7%. No use of images, interactive content, or educational content was recorded.

These results indicate a partial adaptation to the technical and narrative characteristics of each platform, although they also reveal limited diversification of

formats, especially on TikTok, where the absence of educational or informational content reduces the communicative scope of the personal brand analyzed.

Connectivity and Audience Engagement

Table 3

Instagram posts with the highest engagement

Publication	I like it (%)	Comments (%)
<i>OPPO Reno 10 – Beach</i>	2	2
<i>Smartgyro – Skateboard</i>	2	1
<i>OPPO Reno 10 – Portrait</i>	3	2
<i>Wondershare Democreator – Editor</i>	2	1
<i>Photos of Strangers – Blonde</i>	6	5
<i>Photos of strangers – Boy in a skirt</i>	22	31
<i>Change of appearance</i>	5	7
<i>Photos of strangers – People with their faces covered</i>	7	5
<i>Giving birth or party?</i>	20	13
<i>Birth</i>	13	16
<i>Frames</i>	8	2
<i>Our little one</i>	11	11
<i>27th Birthday</i>	0	4
<i>Rain frames</i>	0	2
Total	100	100

The connectivity analysis reveals an uneven concentration of interaction in a small number of posts, particularly those based on personal and emotional narratives. On Instagram, the post “Photos of Strangers – Boy in a Skirt” accounts for 31% of all comments and 22% of all “Likes,” making it the content most likely to generate both discursive and emotional engagement. Similarly, posts of a personal or family nature, such as “In Labor or at a Party?” and “Birth,” generate significant levels of engagement, although clearly lower than that of the dominant content, while promotional or everyday posts account for only a marginal share of the analyzed data.

Table 4

Posts with the highest engagement on TikTok

Publication	I like it (%)	Comments (%)	Shared (%)	Saved (%)
<i>OPPO Reno 10 Pro</i>	1	1	1	2
<i>Photos of strangers – Girl</i>	4	7	3	2
<i>Photos of strangers – Boy in a skirt</i>	55	84	85	58
<i>Photos of strangers – People with their faces covered</i>	33	7	5	36
<i>Childbirth or Party?</i>	6	2	6	2
Total	100	100	100	100

On TikTok, the concentration of user engagement is even more pronounced. The post “Photos of Strangers – Boy in a Skirt” accounted for 55% of the “Likes,” 84% of the comments, 85% of the shares, and 58% of the saves out of the total recorded during the study period. This distribution shows that a single piece of content accounts for the majority of audience engagement, far surpassing the rest of the posts, none of which come close to matching that level of engagement.

These results confirm a consistent association between emotional-personal content and high levels of engagement, as well as a highly concentrated interaction structure, in which a small number of posts monopolize the audience’s attention and participation. This dynamic suggests a significant reliance on specific narrative formats to generate communicative impact, raising important questions about the strategy’s sustainability in the medium and long term.

Table 5
Results of the qualitative analysis of interviews

Thematic category	Frequency	Interpretation
<i>The Importance of SEO</i>	Sign Up	The Key to Organic Visibility
<i>Emotional content marketing</i>	Sign Up	Builds trust and rapport
<i>The Need for SEM</i>	Average	Untapped strategy
<i>Risk of format overload</i>	Average	Possible loss of audience
<i>Adaptation by platform</i>	Sign Up	Limited implementation

The qualitative analysis of the interviews directly supports the quantitative findings. The two experts agreed that content marketing and SEO are cornerstones of organic search engine optimization. Ms. Tatiana León stated that 'SEO and content marketing are the most effective strategies [...] they create authentic and sustainable connections.' This finding is empirically corroborated by the content analysis (Table 1), where content marketing was the most prevalent on both Instagram (30%) and TikTok (29%), as were SEO and social selling.

Likewise, Ms. Daniela Gallardo emphasized that 'digital marketing offers the opportunity to stand out by connecting on an emotional level.' This assertion is clearly reflected in the engagement metrics (Tables 3 and 4): the intimate and personal post "Photos of Strangers – Boy in a Skirt" attracted a massive 84% of the comments on TikTok and 31% on Instagram, demonstrating the high short-term effectiveness of appealing to emotions. However, the experts also warned about common mistakes, pointing to "the repetition of formats." This aligns with the complete absence of paid strategies (0% SEM usage on both platforms) observed in the study, which, according to the interviewees, represents a missed opportunity to expand reach beyond organic search results

Discussion and Conclusions

Digital marketing is a strategic process that enables the establishment of effective relationships with audiences through technological tools designed to create value, foster interaction, and enhance positioning in digital environments (Díaz Landero *et al.*, 2024). In this context, personal branding becomes significant as a strategy for the intentional management of identity, aimed at communicating distinctive attributes and generating recognition among audiences (Rachmad, 2024), especially given that influencer marketing is emerging as a high-impact industry of growing importance for companies, particularly in the B2C sector (Haenlein *et al.*, 2020; Pan *et al.*, 2025). The findings show a clear predominance of organic strategies—particularly content marketing, social selling, and SEO—compared to the use of paid strategies such as SEM or email marketing. This approach is consistent with the findings of Campo and Solé (2020) and Viteri *et al.* (2018), who point out that contemporary digital marketing prioritizes the creation of symbolic value, a sense of connection, and sustained interaction with the audience. Furthermore, the results reflect the principles of emotional marketing, defined as the creation of emotional bonds between brands and their audiences through meaningful experiences and narratives (Granda-Cruz, 2026). In this regard, the case study confirms that creative personal brands tend to prioritize communication strategies that foster identity, trust, and community over immediate conversion.

However, while this focus on organic content is consistent with the principles of branded content and relationship marketing, the results also reveal an overreliance on a limited number of strategies, which may create a structural vulnerability to the algorithmic changes inherent in digital platforms. As Jung and Shegai (2023) point out, a

balanced mix of organic and paid strategies helps mitigate risks associated with content saturation and the loss of organic reach. In this regard, the complete absence of SEM identified on both platforms suggests an untapped strategic opportunity that could strengthen the positioning and sustainability of the personal brand in the medium term.

With regard to digital presence and content types, the results show a partial adaptation to the communication logic of each platform. On Instagram, the integration of text, video, and links reflects the platform's hybrid nature, which allows users to combine visual storytelling with detailed captions and external links. On TikTok, by contrast, there is a focus on video accompanied by brief text, consistent with the observations made by Doval-Fernández and Sánchez-Amboage (2021) regarding the centrality of audiovisual content and narrative immediacy on this social media platform.

However, the lack of educational, informational, or instructional content on both platforms—and particularly on TikTok—highlights a limited range of narratives. This finding is significant given that various authors highlight the value of educational content and transmedia storytelling as mechanisms for deepening the relationship with the audience and strengthening long-term brand building (Nicolaou, 2022; Freire, 2020). In this regard, while the current strategy has proven effective in terms of immediate engagement, it also exhibits a predominantly emotional focus that could limit the development of other equally valuable forms of communication.

One of the study's key findings concerns the analysis of the connectivity and distribution of engagement on both Instagram and TikTok. The results consistently show an uneven distribution of engagement, with a small number of posts accounting for the majority of reactions, comments, shares, and saves. In particular, the post "Photos of Strangers – Boy in a Skirt" stands out as the most prevalent content on both platforms, accounting for a significantly higher percentage than the rest of the posts analyzed.

This pattern empirically confirms the findings of Núñez-Gómez *et al.* (2022) and Gómez Arroyo (2023) regarding the power of emotional and experiential content to generate emotional engagement and active participation among the audience. Personal storytelling, the social aspect, and a direct appeal to human experience seem to act as catalysts for *engagement*, reinforcing the idea that digital audiences do not merely consume content but seek to identify emotionally with the stories presented to them.

The high concentration of engagement in a small number of posts, particularly those based on personal and emotional narratives, raises important questions about the long-term viability of the strategies analyzed. While this type of content is highly effective at generating engagement in the short term, repeated use of it can lead to an overreliance on specific formats, which increases the vulnerability of a personal brand to shifts in consumer behavior and changes in digital platform algorithms.

Several authors warn that the repeated use of successful narrative structures can lead to audience saturation and fatigue, gradually diminishing the content's ability to surprise and its emotional impact (Scolari, 2019). In this regard, reliance on a single narrative format—however effective it may be—can limit communicative innovation and restrict the exploration of new discursive styles that help diversify the relationship with the audience.

Furthermore, the central role of emotional content as the primary driver of engagement can create an imbalance between visibility and brand identity. When engagement is disproportionately concentrated on certain posts, there is a risk that the public perception of one's personal brand will become associated with a limited narrative, overshadowing other equally relevant professional, creative, or informational values. This phenomenon is particularly critical for creative personal brands, whose longevity

depends not only on popularity but also on the consistency and richness of their symbolic message.

From a strategic perspective, these findings suggest the need to view engagement not merely as an indicator of immediate success, but as a variable that must be managed in a balanced manner and with a long-term perspective. The gradual incorporation of alternative formats and complementary narratives would help reduce reliance on recurring emotional content, fostering communication that is more resilient and adaptable to changes in the digital landscape.

A comparative analysis of Instagram and TikTok reveals significant strategic differences in the distribution of engagement and in the communication logic of each platform. On TikTok, engagement is concentrated more intensely on a very small number of posts, suggesting a highly competitive environment shaped by recommendation algorithms that prioritize content with a strong and immediate emotional impact. This dynamic promotes short-term virality, but it also increases the volatility of reach and reliance on specific narrative formats.

In contrast, Instagram features a slightly more diverse distribution of engagement, allowing for greater coexistence of different types of content and a more gradual development of personal brand identity. The integration of text, images, video, and links expands narrative possibilities and facilitates more context-rich communication, aimed at both fostering interaction and building relationships over the medium term.

These differences show that the effectiveness of a digital marketing strategy does not depend solely on the type of content, but also on how well it aligns with consumer culture and the algorithmic logic specific to each platform. While TikTok emphasizes rapid visibility and immediate emotional response, Instagram fosters a more sustained and relational form of communication, allowing users to explore diverse forms of discourse without being entirely dependent on virality. From this perspective, the findings suggest that automatically replicating formats across platforms may limit the strategic potential of personal branding. A more specific and tailored adaptation of the content would optimize communication performance in each setting, reducing the risk of information overload and strengthening the coherence of the overall digital strategy.

However, this high concentration of engagement also raises critical questions about the sustainability of the communication model. As Scolari (2019) points out, repeatedly using the same narrative format can lead to audience saturation and fatigue, gradually reducing the effectiveness of the content. In the case under review, the reliance on a specific series to generate engagement suggests that communicative success is closely tied to a particular format, which could limit the personal brand's capacity for innovation and future adaptation.

From the perspective of uses and gratifications theory (Katz, 1959; Lee and Ma, 2012), the results suggest that followers find satisfaction in this type of content linked to personal identification, empathy, and social participation. However, the scarcity of content that appeals to cognitive rewards—such as learning or the acquisition of knowledge—highlights an imbalance in the range of content available, which could be strategically addressed to broaden the spectrum of motivations catered to.

The qualitative analysis of the interviews with experts reinforces these interpretations, repeatedly highlighting the importance of SEO and emotional content marketing as cornerstones of digital positioning, while also pointing out the need to incorporate complementary strategies and diversify formats. The alignment between empirical data and expert assessments reinforces the validity of the findings and underscores the importance of adopting more comprehensive and adaptive strategic approaches.

Taken together, the findings discussed here support the conclusion that Marcos Alberca's case clearly illustrates the current dynamics of digital marketing in the realm of creative personal brands: a strong focus on the emotional, high effectiveness in terms of immediate engagement, and a marked reliance on specific narrative formats. While these strategies have proven successful in the short term, empirical evidence suggests that it would be advisable to rethink the balance between narrative innovation, content diversification, and the combination of organic and paid strategies, in order to ensure the sustainability of communication in a digital environment characterized by competition, saturation, and constant change.

The findings of this research have important implications for the design and management of digital marketing strategies for creative personal brands, particularly in the fields of photography and the cultural industries. First and foremost, there is a clear need to balance the use of emotional narratives with other communication styles that help diversify the brand's symbolic value proposition. While personal content is highly effective at driving engagement, relying solely on it can limit your professional and creative growth in the long run.

In this regard, creative personal brands could benefit from strategic planning focused on narrative diversification, incorporating informative, educational, or reflective content that complements the prevailing emotional narratives. This combination would allow us to enhance the value we offer our audience and reinforce our reputation for expertise and professional credibility.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of adopting a strategic approach tailored to each platform. On TikTok, prioritizing content with a strong emotional impact can boost immediate visibility, while on Instagram, it makes sense to take advantage of the variety of available formats to build a more sustained and engaging communication strategy. Platform-specific adaptation therefore emerges as a key criterion for optimizing communication performance.

The lack of paid strategies such as SEM suggests an opportunity for improvement in the digital marketing planning of creative personal brands. A balanced integration of organic and paid strategies would make it possible to expand reach, reduce reliance on algorithms, and strengthen the sustainability of communication in highly competitive digital environments. Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the results. First, the study is based on a single case study, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to other creative personal brands or different cultural contexts. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design prevents us from observing changes over time in strategies and engagement, limiting the analysis to a specific period. Future research could incorporate longitudinal approaches that allow for an analysis of the sustainability of these strategies over time, as well as comparative studies of different creative personal brands.

As for future lines of research, it is suggested that the analysis be expanded to other sectors of the creative industries, and that experimental methodologies or big data analysis be incorporated to explore in greater depth the relationship between narrative, algorithms, and engagement. Similarly, it is worth exploring the impact of incorporating paid strategies and how they interact with organic marketing in the development of digital personal brands.

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