

Adapting to the Digital Pulpit: Social Media Strategy of a Peruvian Church Amidst COVID-19

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Abstract

This study analyzed the digital communication strategy of the “Casa de Luz”, a local church in Lima, Peru, during the COVID-19 pandemic using a mixed-methods design. From February 2020 to November 2021, 470 posts from the church's Facebook (287) and Instagram (183) accounts were examined through virtual ethnography and content analysis. Additionally, two in-depth interviews with congregation leaders and three focus groups with different age groups (totaling 18 participants from a congregation of 187 members) were conducted. The results showed a significant shift in the church's digital content, including increased live broadcasts and the introduction of Instagram reels, which enhanced engagement. Motivational content, especially financial and health testimonies, saw a notable rise. The church effectively adapted to digital platforms, fostering a supportive online community and continuing its mission despite the pandemic's challenges. This approach demonstrated the church's resilience and ability to maintain and expand its community through innovative digital strategies.

Keywords: *Mixed Methods, Online Religion, Digital Communication, Social Media, Peru*

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) described the 2020 pandemic as a scenario feared by the public health community for decades. It took the virus 3 months from its genesis in Wuhan, China, on December 31, 2019 (WHO, 2020) to the first recorded COVID-19 in Peru on March 6, 2020 (Gestión, 2021). In response, the Peruvian government immediately decreed a state of emergency and a national quarantine that was initially planned to last for a fortnight. As the restrictions dragged on, Religious organizations were among the last to resume in-person activities, permitted only to conduct activities deemed essential, with limited attendance starting November 2, 2020 (El Peruano, 2020a; 2020b). Although this measure theoretically allowed churches to resume regular activities with sanitary adaptations, it is crucial to note that this gradual reopening came after an 8-month hiatus. During this period, some local churches were unable to survive the transition back to in-person gatherings whilst others had to reinvent themselves (Barrera, 2020).

The former means that these churches were compelled to shift their activities to online spaces in a mediatization process (Ess, 2020), which is central to the lives of communities that need to facilitate a sense of connectedness among a diaspora of people (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). Some organizations had already started to acquire an online presence through social media, such as the 'Christian and Missionary Alliance' and the 'Worldwide Missionary Movement' which employed audiovisual tools to record services and facilitate access to messages, allowing congregants to relive these experiences (Arca, 2014). Pérez (2016) highlights that the mediatization efforts of urban evangelical churches also aimed to enhance visibility and establish public legitimacy, paving the way politically, religiously, and through the media. They followed a model described by both Christopher Helland (2005) and Heidi Campbell (2012) as “religion online”, which provided information but lacked interaction with believers. Campbell would then argue that technology shapes religious and social communications, and, that the pandemic created a “distanced church” (2020), alluding to the unplanned, swift, and often uncomfortable transitions towards technologically driven forms of religious gathering.

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In this context, the following research focuses on “Casa de Luz” [House of Light], a Christian church in the District of “San Juan de Miraflores” that belongs to the Peruvian capital. Founded in 2010, Casa de Luz had over 400 members when the state of emergency and national quarantine were declared. Although the church's digital presence was primarily informational, the lockdown prompted a shift in its digital strategy. They continued their Sunday services and other congregational activities without interruption. The objective of this paper is to analyze the digital communication strategies this place of worship employed to strengthen their community's spiritual bonds during the COVID-19 pandemic.

By contrasting the communication strategies and the community's perceptions, this research aims to guide other local or Latin American churches regarding potential communication strategies. Additionally, it seeks to expand the understanding of the pandemic's effect on these institutions in Metropolitan Lima, particularly in the context of religious mediatization, an area not extensively studied nationally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Swift Shift to Online Holy Communion

Before the pandemic, some congregations had already adopted streaming technologies, although these capabilities were unevenly distributed. Roso (2023) found that Catholic congregations and Protestant congregations with more enthusiastic worship styles were more likely to have pre-existing streaming systems. This was not solely due to economic resources but also to cultural beliefs and practices that favored technological integration. This pre-adaptation provided these congregations with a crucial advantage when the pandemic necessitated a sudden shift to online services.

As the pandemic unfolded, religious communities worldwide adapted to the new reality by employing media platforms such as Zoom, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube (Kgatle, 2020) to continue worship during lockdowns. This adaptation was effective but also brought challenges, such as technological barriers and the need for new forms of pastoral care. Live-streaming served multiple audiences, including those with accessibility needs, the unchurched, and “burned” ex-churchgoers seeking connection. This allowed the public to meet and promote healthy discourse, despite the challenges of maintaining organizational mission and avoiding social disconnection (Anderson, 2023). This doesn't mean that online gatherings fully replaced the religious experience per se, as presence and participation in virtual religious settings need to be understood in a nuanced manner, not simply as a pragmatic solution to a social and spiritual need or experience (Samosir, 2023).

The pandemic challenged and significantly transformed religious practices worldwide, particularly in the realm of Christian worship. This revealed disparities in technological adoption and prompted new forms of religious expression. Along came the adoption of digital platforms, the new primary means of communication. Churches that adapted to this reality identified growth opportunities, utilizing digital tools to explore innovative communication methods and deliver impactful messages, such as through videoconferences that support diverse languages and face-to-face interactions in virtual spaces (Dyikuk, 2020). However, Elizalde (2019) notes that while the digital age and extreme mediatization have aided evangelistic activities, they also pose questions about the use and development of media power within churches.

A key challenge for churches was maintaining the spiritual bonds of their communities in an uncertain and fearful context without physical gatherings. This raised questions about whether a virtual church community could be akin to digital communities (Sanz, 2005) or if it was merely a congregation with virtual activities, and what the differences might be. Additionally, to provide hope during the pandemic, when many faced severe health and economic challenges, churches had to emphasize messages of hope, eternity, and divine goodness (Höhne, 2020).

The Forced Transition to Online Worship

The global and local responses to the pandemic demonstrated the resilience and adaptability of religious communities. For example, Duerst et al. (2022) presented narratives from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's global relief efforts, emphasizing the importance of local church involvement in addressing the pandemic's impacts and showcasing the effectiveness of localized responses in building resilience and

addressing injustice. Carney (2022) provided a broader perspective on global Catholicism, noting demographic shifts and the increasing significance of the Global South. The study emphasized the challenges of secularization, the rise of charismatic movements, and the intertwining of the Catholic Church with national identity and social services.

However, the transition to online worship was not without controversy. Hendricksen (2021) explored the reception of online services in Canada, explaining that while these services were generally well-received and increased outreach, they also sparked debates over digital Communion and the adequacy of virtual worship. Fuente-Cobo et al. (2023) researched the rise of Catholic YouTubers in Spanish-speaking countries, highlighting how these digital influencers have become modern evangelists but haven't replaced bishops or places of worship. This trend aligns with Kennedy's (2023) discussion on the Catholic Church's embrace of digital media to promote religious education and reinforce its mission.

In Latin America, Bandeira and Carranza (2020) discussed the political dimensions of religious responses to the pandemic. In Brazil, evangelical-pentecostal churches framed religious services as essential, influencing public debate and legitimizing governmental actions. This contrasts with other Latin American countries where churches adapted to social distancing by reinventing mediated religious practices. Similarly, Areiza-Padilla et al. (2022) studied the online Eucharist in Bogotá, Colombia, finding that despite low satisfaction levels, the cultural significance of the Eucharist motivated continued online participation.

Similarly, the Peruvian Israeli movement created a transnational network of religious counseling that illustrated how digital platforms facilitated religious expansion and adaptation in new environments (Villa Franco, 2022). In Argentina as well, the pandemic blurred the boundaries between personal and institutional religious practices, underlining the importance of home-based religious rituals and the emotional support provided by Catholic communities during the crisis (Giménez Béliveau, 2021).

Those experiences align with Norget's (2021) work on the "Señor de los Milagros" procession in Lima, an event held traditionally on Easter that had to be canceled (for the second time in history, the first being due to the war against Chile on 1882) and could not be televised or streamed until 2021. This aligns with Perez-Vela's (2023) analysis, which explores the mediatization of religious practices among urban believers in Lima, Peru, revealing how these practices reshape religious identities and interactions within broader social contexts beyond traditional institutional frameworks. Both Catholics and evangelicals negotiate their religious identities through mediated forms of engagement, creating new meanings and approaches to public religious expression. His findings align with Heidi Campbell's concept of "networked religion" (2012), which underscores the complex interplay between individual beliefs, community dynamics, and technological mediation in contemporary society. The study also underscores the significance of everyday life as a crucial arena for religious negotiation and identity construction, challenging conventional views of religious practice confined to institutional settings (Da Costa et al., 2017).

These works explore how technology shapes religious identity and authority, highlighting the broader impact of mediation and mediatization in contemporary faith, and emphasizing the importance of cultural, technological, and organizational factors. As congregations continue to navigate the post-pandemic landscape, ongoing research will be crucial in understanding the long-term impacts of these changes on religious life and community engagement. Future research should address how different platforms influence online worship experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed mixed-methods (Pereira, 2011; Mikkonen & Kyngäs, 2020) design to acquire multimodal data of a defined unit of study (Azuero, 2019; Guevara et al., 2020), then a population and sample based on the provided contextual data of the Casa de Luz Church, aiming to collect, analyze and triangulate the resulting data. First, the posts of the church's Facebook and Instagram accounts were approached through virtual ethnography (Lenihan & Kelly-Holmes, 2015) following a grounded theory approach for social media (Lai & To, 2015).

This helped to analyze the community's perception of the church's digital communication strategy and to identify categories, types of content, and interactions that took place. Subsequently, a content analysis allowed a closer inspection of the church's Facebook (Al-Zaman, 2021; Taylor et al., 2021) and Instagram (Nikam et al., 2021; Novak et al., 2022) accounts. The collection period spans from February 2020 to November 2021 which resulted in 470 posts (287 via Facebook and 183 via Instagram) analyzed. It's important to highlight that Peru declared a national quarantine on March 16, 2020, and it was only until November that in-person religious activities were permitted, hence a contrast between pre and post-pandemic periods was taken into account. This contrast was further verified by conducting two (50 and 48 minutes respectively) in-depth interviews (Minichiello et al., 2008; Deterding & Waters, 2021) with the women who lead the congregation and manage the digital content strategy.

Afterward, a sample of the congregation members that totaled 187 active members (who refer to themselves as "Companions of the Pact) was categorized into three age groups: children (4-12 years), adolescents, and young adults (13-25 years), and adults (26 years and older) and three (3) 35-minute focus groups (Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021), each one comprised of 6 individuals, were conducted across these different age groups to further explore their perceptions of the church's digital communication strategy. The resulting data was then triangulated (Benavides & Gómez-Restrepo, 2005; Gibson, 2017) aiming to achieve methodological convergence. This involved analyzing the themes generated from the instruments in order and then comparing Instagram and Facebook content, interviews, and focus groups' responses to identify consistencies and discrepancies.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

The categories identified through Virtual Ethnography and subsequently measured using content analysis resulted in 470 posts that were categorized as follows:

Motivational Content

Testimonies (40): Experiences where Casa de Luz's community members received economic and financial miracles.

Phrases (30): Graphic pieces containing quotes or images with descriptions encouraging the community to grow in their relationship with God.

Moments of Light

Live Streams (25): Live broadcasts on Facebook where church leaders share brief messages of encouragement and reflection on the Word of God.

Morning Prayers

Morning Prayers (20): Live streams led by congregation leaders sharing a time of worship and prayer in the mornings with the community.

Informative Content

Weekly Reminders (35): Content aimed at reminding followers about the church's weekly activities and meetings.

Special Events (50): Information about in-person meetings and special online events.

Seasonal Events (45): Content related to specific national and international events and seasons such as national holidays, Christmas, and elections.

Family Content

Home Services (40): Photos showing different members of the community participating in Sunday service from their homes.

Special Greetings (25): Posts commemorating special dates, birthdays, or anniversaries of church leaders.

Faces of the Congregation (30): Material featuring church members, aiming to provide opportunities to connect with the congregation.

Shared Moments (35): Elements showcasing online and in-person community interaction.

Sunday Content

Capsules (30): Audiovisual material giving followers an idea of the sermon topic from Sunday and encouraging them to watch the full service.

Announcements (40): Elements informing the community about the next Sunday service or the start of a new message series.

Sermons (45): Live streams sharing the Sunday service of the week.



Figure 1. Comparison of content before and after the pandemic

Source: Images from @casadeluzchurch

The photo format for publication, which was most commonly used in the pre-pandemic era, continued to be employed during the pandemic on both Instagram and Facebook. However, the main change was observed in the content of the posts. In the pre-pandemic era, photos typically depicted smiling individuals in various moments of the services and often showcased large congregations gathered in one place. Following the onset of COVID-19, there was a deliberate effort to capture individuals wearing masks inside enclosed spaces, accompanied by a noticeable decrease in the number of people depicted during moments such as worship times.



Figure 2. Instagram Reels

Source: Data from @casadeluzchurch on Instagram

One of the main innovations in terms of Instagram post formats has been the introduction of "Reels," which are one-minute videos added by the platform in an update in the latter half of 2020. The church utilized this format to share excerpts from the Sunday message that could highlight key points and impactful phrases. With this new format, the church has reached over 3,900 views and up to 128 likes, surpassing their engagement levels with photos and image-based posts.



Figure 3. Livestreams of @casadeluzchurch

Source: Facebook live streams of @casadeluzchurch

On Facebook, live broadcasts predominated, a tool that remained exclusive to this platform. Before the outbreak, brief live streams were only conducted in the afternoons to share reflections on the Word of God, known as "Moments of Light." One of the first innovations stemming from the pandemic was the Sunday services broadcasted from the first Sunday after the pandemic was declared in Peru. They also began broadcasting morning prayers called "Altars" from 5:30 am to 6:00 am daily, and additionally at 8:00 am on Saturdays. Furthermore, they initiated live streams to share reflections and prayers on Wednesday evenings. Casa de Luz transitioned from having a single daily live stream to having up to three live streams per day every week.

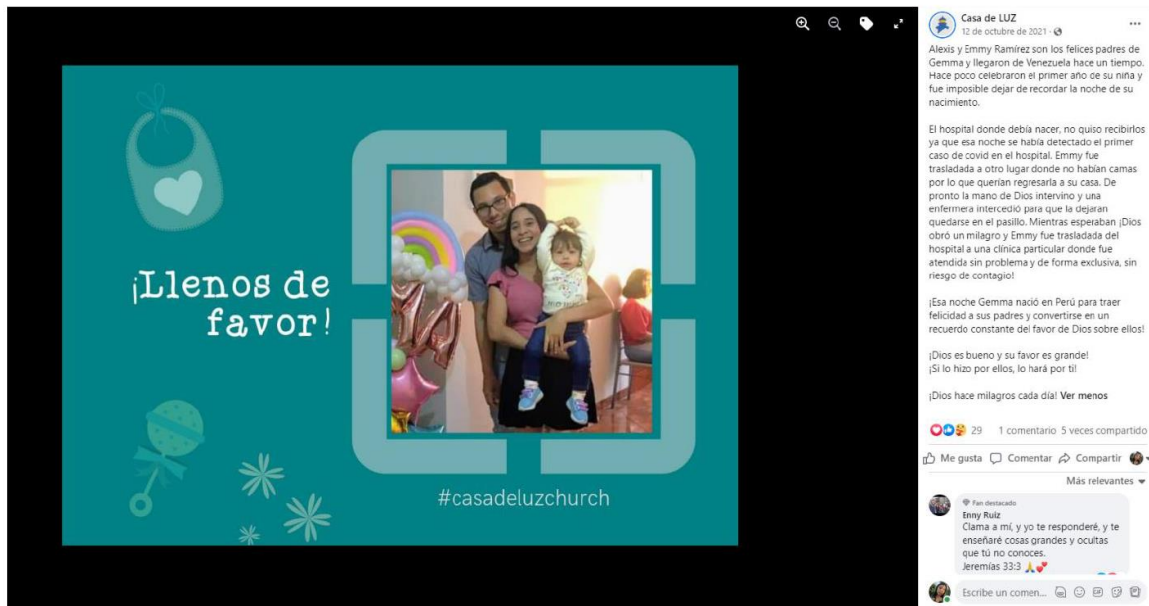


Figure 4. Testimonies

Source: Facebook Testimonies @casadeluzchurch

The impact on Casa de Luz's Instagram and Facebook content not only affected its form but also its substance. To strengthen spirits amid the pandemic, the church started creating more motivational content than it did before COVID-19 arrived. Previously, there were only text-based images containing Bible verses; now, both platforms abound with testimonials from church members who have experienced financial or health miracles. This serves to remind the community that they too can receive their miracle, often with the recurring phrase: "If He did it for them, He will do it for you too!"

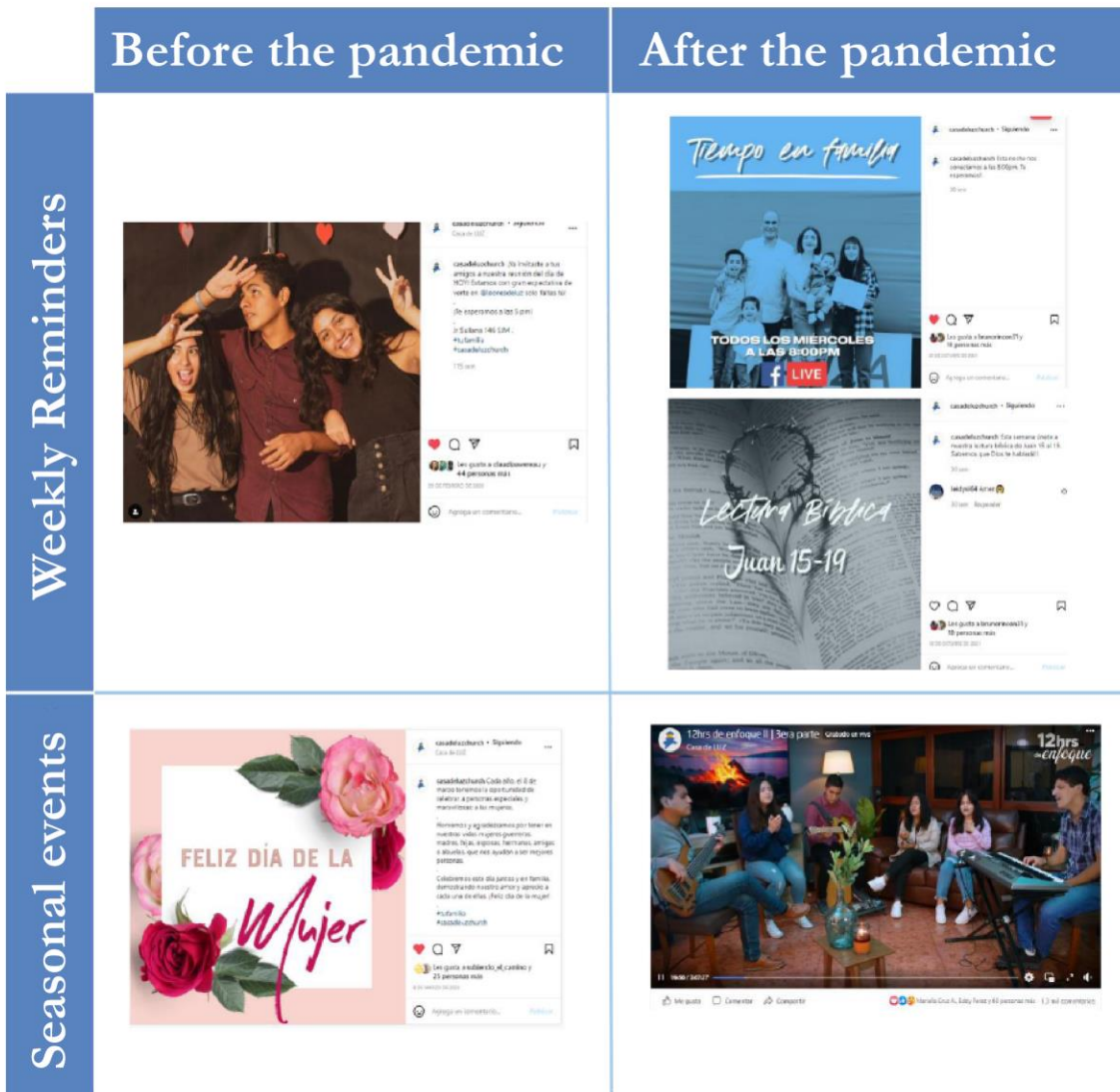


Figure 5. Comparison of Informative Content

Source: Facebook and Instagram content from @casadeluzchurch

During the pre-pandemic era, informative content was the primary type shared. However, the pandemic brought significant changes, notably shifting activities predominantly to virtual platforms, diversifying them, and making them more interactive. On one hand, Weekly Reminders evolved to inform about virtual meetings, detailing only the time and date so everyone could connect from home. Additionally, reminders about weekly Bible readings, which were not a pre-pandemic practice, became more prominent. The necessity for virtual engagement due to the pandemic also allowed for greater creativity with Seasonal Events. For instance, on October 31st, traditionally associated with Halloween, the church organized a virtual 12-hour Focus event for prayer and worship with family.

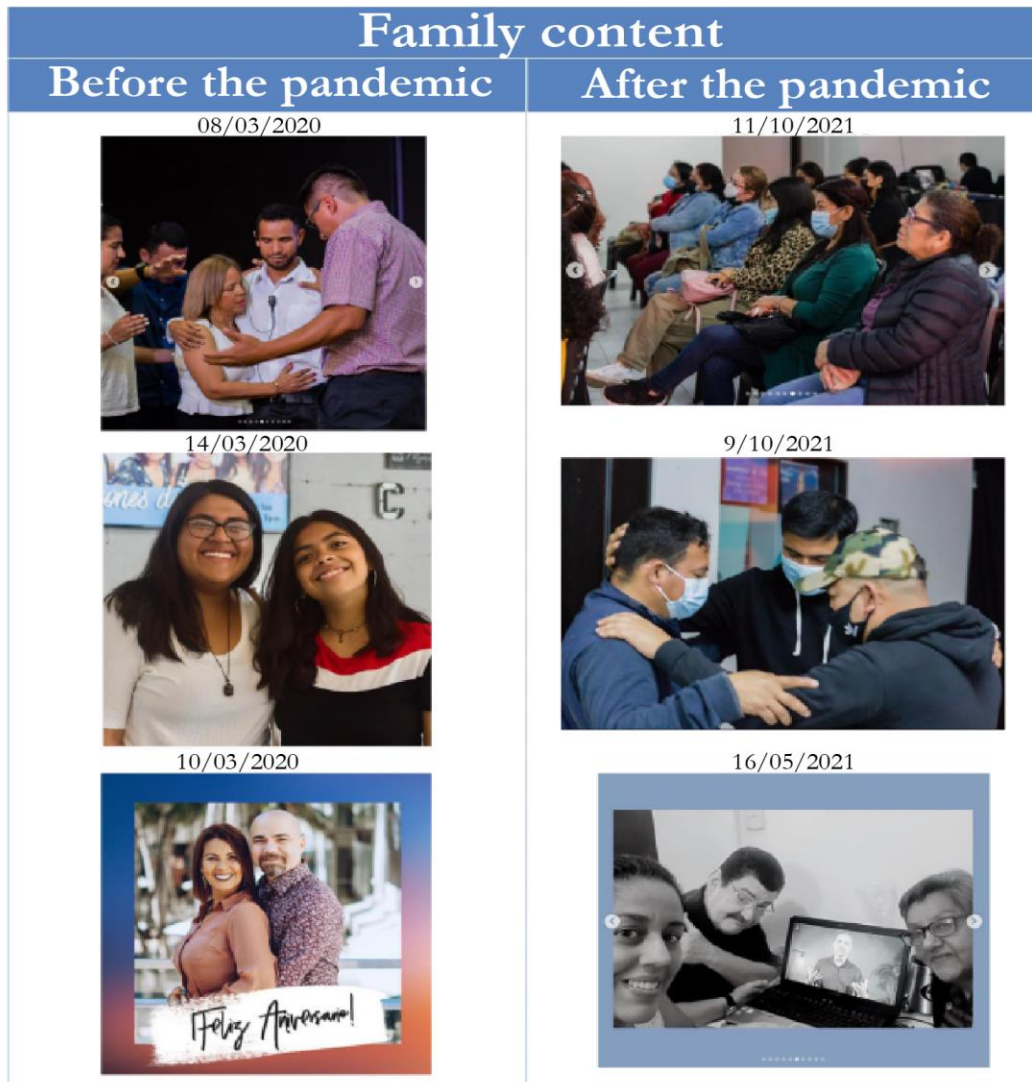


Figure 6. Comparison of Family Content

Source: Photos taken from @casadeluzchurch

Both before and during the pandemic, posts highlighting shared moments, congregation members' faces, and special greetings to church leaders for birthdays or, in the case of pastors, their anniversaries, were emphasized. Significant changes included efforts to include photos clearly showing the use of masks in enclosed and limited spaces, especially as some in-person activities gradually resumed. Additionally, there was a shift towards posting photos of members participating in services from their own homes.

Interviews

Casa de Luz church directs its digital communication strategies with two primary objectives: 1) spreading God's love and the gospel of Jesus, and 2) positioning itself as a local church option. The first objective is articulated through three core principles: a) loving God above all else, b) demonstrating visible love for neighbors, and c) believing in God's supernatural power—channels through which they convey God's love. Emphasizing the creation of a familial, supportive community in a digital space overcomes the limitations of physical absence, guiding their digital communication to relay these messages effectively.

Strengthening spiritual bonds involves enhancing interpersonal relationships among Casa de Luz members and their connection to the local church, reinforcing these bonds. Different approaches are tailored for distinct audiences: teaching unfamiliar or skeptical individuals to embody "light," as described in the gospels, and sharing God's Word, while encouraging active members to invest in mutual understanding and spiritual growth. Digital platforms facilitate ongoing member-to-member and church-to-community dialogues.

Like many organizations during the pandemic, Casa de Luz faced closures and halted in-person congregational activities. Swift adaptation ensured uninterrupted sharing of God's Word, initially through pre-recorded and transitioning to live services, now broadcasted on Facebook, YouTube, and their website. Recent innovations include live Sunday services via Zoom, fostering real-time connections. Virtual congregational activities—courses and prayer times—persist alongside in-person gatherings.

To manage increased broadcast demands during the pandemic, new technology teams were formed, overseeing diverse functions such as podcasts, social media, video editing, and more. These teams, composed of young volunteer church members, expanded their roles and volunteers throughout the pandemic.

Unlike pre-pandemic times, Casa de Luz now diversifies content on digital platforms, from event announcements and congregation photos to screenshots of virtual meetings and video excerpts of Sunday messages via Instagram "reels" and archived Facebook videos. Emphasizing encouragement during challenging times, they plan to extend outreach beyond their community.

Digital platforms, once daunting, now serve strategic church goals, translating the church experience online during the pandemic to interact with and spiritually enrich their community, conveying God's love through social networks.

Focus Groups

Virtual platforms enhanced spiritual growth across all age groups, with digital tools like text images of verses and phrases on Instagram or Facebook positively impacting faith development. Adolescents and young adults found encouragement in Instagram "reels" and practicality in live Sunday broadcasts. Adults noted improved worship despite internet challenges, emphasizing intentionality in adapting to online worship for a meaningful spiritual experience. Participants identified Facebook and YouTube as their primary digital platforms, primarily using them for personal use rather than active engagement with Casa de Luz's content on Instagram. They typically check these platforms daily, specifically looking for content such as Sunday messages or testimonies to share or repost.

During the pandemic, there was a noticeable increase in digital content, particularly photos of members participating from home, and improved production quality of live streams. The shift to platforms like Zoom for more intimate interactions beyond Facebook Live was highlighted, fostering a more personal connection among members. This approach has been instrumental in nurturing faith growth through shared testimonies and practical messages that prompt moments of reflection and connection with God.

Participants noted that digital platforms not only facilitated sharing the church's message but also strengthened their sense of community, especially through Zoom meetings and small group sessions. Despite challenges, transitioning from Facebook to Zoom for Sunday broadcasts enhanced their spiritual experience, requiring personal effort and adaptability to seek God's presence amidst distractions.

These digital tools have played a pivotal role in Casa de Luz's growth during the pandemic, expanding their reach locally and internationally. The church's proactive approach in leveraging these platforms underscores its commitment to fostering a supportive digital community that continues to grow spiritually despite physical limitations.

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the mediatization of religion, prompting the Casa de Luz Christian church and others globally to adopt digital strategies to maintain community engagement amidst unprecedented

challenges. The results illustrate a profound shift from traditional to digital communication methods, reflecting broader trends in religious adaptation and transformation during crises.

The concept of "mediatization," as expanded by Perez-Vela (2023) goes beyond social media presence to encompass changes in member interactions, evangelization methods, and message communication within social media frameworks. Couldry and Hepp (2013) emphasize its dual nature—quantitative expansion and qualitative transformation—which Casa de Luz demonstrated through expanded community reach and a redefined church identity during the pandemic.

Before COVID-19, Casa de Luz primarily used social media for one-way information dissemination, akin to Helland's (2005) "religion online" model focused on broadcasting information without interactive engagement. However, the pandemic catalyzed a shift to Helland's (2005) "online religion" model, characterized by interactive content and enhanced community interaction. This transformation was crucial in maintaining spiritual connections and adapting to new digital realities, as observed globally (Pérez, 2016; Campbell, 2020).

Campbell (2020) argues that technology shapes religious and social communications, highlighting how the pandemic created a "distanced church." This concept alludes to the unplanned, swift, and often uncomfortable transitions towards technologically driven forms of religious gathering. Casa de Luz's adaptation exemplified this shift, utilizing platforms like Facebook Live for Sunday services and Zoom for small group meetings to maintain community cohesion and spiritual engagement amidst physical distancing measures.

Digital Strategies and Community Impact

The transition to digital platforms, such as Facebook Live for Sunday services and Zoom for small group meetings, exemplified Casa de Luz's adaptation to the pandemic's challenges (Gegenhuber & Greenwood, 2018). Innovations like "Capsules," short Instagram reels of Sunday messages, and interactive live broadcasts fostered deeper community engagement and spiritual connectivity (Amaro da Silva, 2020). These strategies aligned with Amaro da Silva's phases of digital praxis, where churches develop virtual initiatives tailored to digital contexts.

Insights from Casa de Luz's digital platform managers underscored the church's clear vision and strategic alignment of digital tools with its mission (Campbell, 2020). This "networked religion" approach emphasized the continuity between offline essence and online presence, ensuring a consistent spiritual experience across platforms. While acknowledging the benefits of virtual engagement, such as increased accessibility and outreach (Dyikuk, 2020), Casa de Luz recognized that digital experiences cannot fully replicate in-person gatherings, indicating ongoing challenges in balancing virtual and physical community dynamics.

Broader Implications and Future Directions

The experiences of Casa de Luz reflect broader trends in Latin American churches, where digital strategies have become integral to maintaining religious practices amidst social distancing measures (Bandeira & Carranza, 2020; Areiza-Padilla et al., 2022). These adaptations highlight the mediatization of religion as a dynamic process reshaping traditional practices and community engagement dynamics (Norget, 2021).

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of these digital transformations on religious communities, particularly regarding community cohesion and the evolving role of digital platforms in religious expression (Carney, 2022; Fuente-Cobo et al., 2023). Understanding these dynamics will guide local churches in leveraging digital tools effectively while preserving their core missions and spiritual connections in a post-pandemic world. Future research should delve deeper into the impact of the pandemic on internal communications within local churches. Strengthening the community's spiritual bonds can be supported by employing digital platforms, which in this case were complemented by internal communication channels.

Additionally, it would be valuable to analyze the responses to new digital communication strategies across different age groups separately, including adolescents, young adults, adults, and older adults—a group not included in this study. Understanding how each demographic adapted to digitalization would provide insights into the unique challenges faced by each age group. Furthermore, considering the upcoming post-pandemic era, it is crucial to study the adaptability of local churches and their members to this new phase. This period

does not imply a return to the pre-pandemic normalcy but requires an understanding of how churches can navigate this transition.

Local Christian churches should recognize that changes in congregational dynamics and online presence are likely to be permanent. To remain relevant and effective in connecting people with a faith community and fostering their relationship with Jesus, churches need to shift paradigms and embrace digital tools as a means to extend the reach of the gospel.

Therefore, it is recommended that local churches reassess their digital communication strategies. If these strategies are already in place, they should be updated; if not, they should be developed to address the current needs of congregations that have spent two years in a pandemic and are approaching a post-pandemic period that will not mirror pre-COVID-19 life entirely. Above all, churches should maintain their core values and principles, ensuring that their online presence reflects the essence of the church as the body of Christ. By embracing digital transformation, churches can navigate crises, expand community outreach, and uphold spiritual continuity amidst unprecedented challenges.

CONCLUSION

This local church has significantly evolved its evangelization strategy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic by leveraging digital communication tools whilst preserving its core message and incorporating more motivational content to address the discouragement caused by the pandemic. This shift is evident in the variety of live broadcasts on Facebook and Instagram reels, which allowed the church to extend its reach not only nationally but also internationally, attracting new members from Latin America and Europe. Such innovations demonstrate its ability to adapt and maintain its influence within the community.

The pandemic-induced changes are expected to have a long-lasting impact on Casa de Luz's operations. The church plans to continue using digital platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Zoom for Sunday services, family reflections, and prayer meetings. The establishment of a dedicated Technology team emphasizes a permanent commitment to integrating digital strategies into church activities.

Casa de Luz has always valued its community, referring to members as family. To sustain this unity, the church adapted its digital communication strategy to the challenges posed by the pandemic. This strategy strengthened community bonds, enabling members to stay connected and form new friendships through innovative formats such as Instagram reels and Facebook live streams. Additionally, financial and health testimonies, along with member-featured photos, have encouraged the congregation to continue their spiritual growth within the church.

Despite the success of digital platforms in maintaining and growing Casa de Luz's community, these platforms do not fully replicate the spiritual experience of in-person services. Distractions and connectivity issues inherent to home environments limit this experience, highlighting challenges beyond the control of the Technology team. Nonetheless, the local church has promoted adaptability and perseverance, emphasizing the importance of personal intentionality in seeking God's presence during digital gatherings.

The study's findings indicate that modern digital strategies have been generally effective for this religious community, particularly among younger generations. Instagram resonates with younger members, while Facebook serves adults, although many of them prefer other forms of closer interaction. Adolescents and young adults, accustomed to virtual interactions, find it easier to form new friendships online. Consequently, the digital content team has increased its use of Zoom for core religious activities, a tool well-suited for internal church communication.

This experience highlights the critical role of digital communication in maintaining and expanding religious communities during challenging times. The church's proactive approach to digital adaptation ensures it remains relevant and continues to fulfill its mission in a post-pandemic world. This strategy not only reflects the church's core values and principles but also positions it for continued growth and influence in both physical and digital realms.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study on this local church's digital communication strategies, several limitations should be considered. Firstly, the focus groups and interviews primarily involved active church members, potentially excluding perspectives from less engaged or non-members who might interact differently with the church's digital content. Secondly, the study focused on a specific timeframe during and immediately after the pandemic, which may limit the generalizability of findings to other periods or contexts. Additionally, while efforts were made to triangulate data from multiple sources (virtual ethnography, content analysis, interviews, focus groups), the study's qualitative nature could benefit from more quantitative measures to assess the broader impact and effectiveness of digital strategies.

Future research could explore longitudinal studies to track changes in engagement over time, comparative studies with other churches or religious organizations, and investigations into the long-term effects of digital platforms on community building and spiritual growth. Likewise, exploring the perceptions and experiences of non-active members or those outside the local community would provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital engagement in religious contexts.

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