

Lost in translation: virtual parties from pandemic times

Perdidos en la traducción: las fiestas virtuales en tiempos post pandémicos

Perdidos na tradução: festas virtuais em tempos pós-pandemia

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ABSTRACT | The COVID-19 pandemic led young people to use digital platforms such as Zoom to maintain relationships and celebrate events, transforming online parties and sociability. This study focuses on analyzing youth virtual parties as onlife experiences during and after the pandemic, exploring the challenges of mediating social aspects into digital environments and their implications for human interactions. This qualitative research is based on a digital ethnography of social gatherings or parties organized digitally, based on interviews with young university students from Guayaquil during the first stage of the pandemic lockdown (2020) and almost two years later, in post-pandemic (2022). The results show that, unlike work and study, which have adapted to virtuality, the party is difficult to translate to the logic of the screens, so the bodies have returned to the spaces where they had known how to resonate together. The research leaves open questions regarding the displacement of meaning and the use of platforms to explore the modalities of linking ourselves to others in the future.

KEYWORDS: parties; youth; onlife; pandemic; platforms; sociality; Zoom; Zoom fatigue.

HOW TO CITE

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RESUMEN | *La pandemia de COVID-19 llevó a los jóvenes a utilizar plataformas digitales como Zoom para mantener relaciones y celebrar eventos, transformando las fiestas y la sociabilidad en línea. Este estudio se enfoca en analizar las fiestas virtuales de jóvenes como experiencias onlife durante y después de la pandemia, explorando los desafíos de traducir aspectos sociales a entornos digitales y sus implicancias en las interacciones humanas. Esta investigación, de enfoque cualitativo, parte de una etnografía digital de reuniones o fiestas sociales organizadas de manera digital, basada en entrevistas realizadas a jóvenes universitarios guayaquileños durante la primera etapa de confinamiento de la pandemia (2020) y casi dos años después, en postpandemia (2022). Entre los resultados se muestra que, a diferencia del trabajo y del estudio, que se han adaptado a la virtualidad, la fiesta es difícil de traducir a la lógica de las pantallas, por lo que los cuerpos han retornado a los espacios donde habían sabido resonar juntos. La investigación deja preguntas abiertas respecto de los desplazamientos de sentido y uso de las plataformas para explorar las modalidades del linkearnos a los otros en el futuro.*

PALABRAS CLAVES: *fiesta; juventud; onlife; pandemia; plataforma; socialidad; Zoom; fatiga Zoom.*

RESUMO | *A pandemia de COVID-19 levou os jovens a usarem plataformas digitais como o Zoom para manter relacionamentos e celebrar eventos, transformando festas e sociabilidade online. Este estudo foca-se em analisar as festas virtuais juvenis como experiências onlife durante e depois da pandemia, explorando os desafios de traduzir de âmbitos sociais para ambientes digitais e suas implicações nas interações humanas. Esta pesquisa qualitativa baseia-se na etnografia digital de encontros ou festas socialmente organizadas digitalmente entre estudantes universitários de Guayaquil durante o confinamento inicial da pandemia (2020) e quase dois anos depois, na era pós-pandemia (2022). Os resultados revelam que, ao contrário do trabalho e estudo, que se adaptaram à virtualidade, as festas são desafiadoras de serem traduzidas para a lógica das telas, levando os corpos a retornarem aos espaços onde haviam ressoado juntos. A pesquisa suscita questões sobre mudanças de significado e o uso de plataformas para explorar futuros modos de se conectar com os outros.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *fiesta; juventude; onlife; pandemia; plataforma; sociabilidade; Zoom; fadiga Zoom.*

INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, Ecuador declared a state of emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Guayaquil was the worst affected city. Classes were held online for almost two years due to the strict lockdown measures. The young people of Guayaquil who were affected by this long lockdown were forced to find other ways to socialize, work and study using digital platforms such as Zoom. The period of the pandemic coincided with the appearance of various complaints on social networks related to a kind of exhaustion due to overuse or the conflict between the energy that users invest in digital self-expression and the insecurity they suffer at work, in the productive field. However, never in history have we been so reliant on personal technological devices and electronic connectivity to perceive what is happening outside our homes, in the external reality. The world became inaccessible during the pandemic lockdown (Rosa, 2020).

In the years leading up to the pandemic, a critical movement of users and activists began to question the hours of connection to social networks, and the idea of life beyond devices circulated strongly (Lovink, 2019). However, during the lockdown, there was intense digital exploration to re-establish social connections that had been withdrawn or even banned due to health measures. In this context of digital saturation, a crucial question emerges: Is it necessary for the psyche to reconnect with close social bonds to renew a sense of belonging at a time where social networks are becoming weaker? (Lovink, 2019). What has happened during the pandemic suggests this, as in practice the user's two homes -the digital home and the real home- have overlapped or merged until they were indistinguishable (Floridi, 2017).

Sibilia (2008) describes how, thanks to the use of social networks, we are moving from the concept of intimacy to the notion of extimacy, a development that corresponds to what Debord (1967) calls the society of the spectacle. In this context, Floridi (2017) defines the onlife experience as the place where the presence of the body and of others becomes a screen experience, which in turn is also a real experience, where exercises of hybrid use, offline and online practices coexist. In recent years, there have been methodological efforts that, based on the concept of onlife experience, put into practice a digital ethnography that integrates and fuses communicative dynamics, in which the assembly of both homes is recorded (Flores-Márquez & Gonzalez Reyes, 2021; Sisto, 2022).

In an effort to add to the scholarly literature on the onlife experience based on digital ethnography, we propose that these experiences - such as the party or Zoom meetings that took place during the pandemic - represent another way of reconnecting, through hybrid practices and screen solutions, the bonds of habitual

contact that have been abruptly broken by enforced distance. To this end, a digital patchwork ethnography (Günel et al., 2020) was conducted through in-depth interviews with young university students.

The overall aim was to analyze the transformation of youth parties during the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring the changes in the use of video calling platforms, the features that were maintained in the virtual party, and their relationship to the face-to-face celebration.

Three questions were specifically formulated to answer the secondary objectives: What behaviors did young people adopt during digital celebrations?

The aim is to identify the patterns of use adopted on video calling platforms to celebrate the party and to understand their meaning for young people in the confinement phase.

R.Q.1. What behaviors did young people adopt during digital festivities?

The aim is to identify the usage patterns adopted on video call platforms to celebrate the holiday and to understand their meaning for young people during the lockdown period.

R.Q.2. How can the face-to-face celebration be transferred to the transition to the digital realm?

The aim is to identify the characteristics that lead to the transition from a face-to-face celebration to digital celebration and which of these characteristics are lost in the process.

R.Q.3. What aspects of the digital party remain after the return to the face-to-face party?

The aim is to identify the features of the virtual party that remain after returning to the face-to-face party.

STATE OF THE ART

Platforms and planned social gatherings

The pandemic led to an increase in remote working and the use of video calling software worldwide (Kemp, 2020; Owl Labs, n.d.a, n.d.b; Bailenson, 2021; Randstad Research, n.d.). Although this growth was not the same in all countries, the total time spent on video calls increased from March 2020 and in the following months. In the case of Ecuador, the Zoom platform became the eighth most visited website in the country in 2020 and 2021 (Kemp, 2020, 2021, 2022).

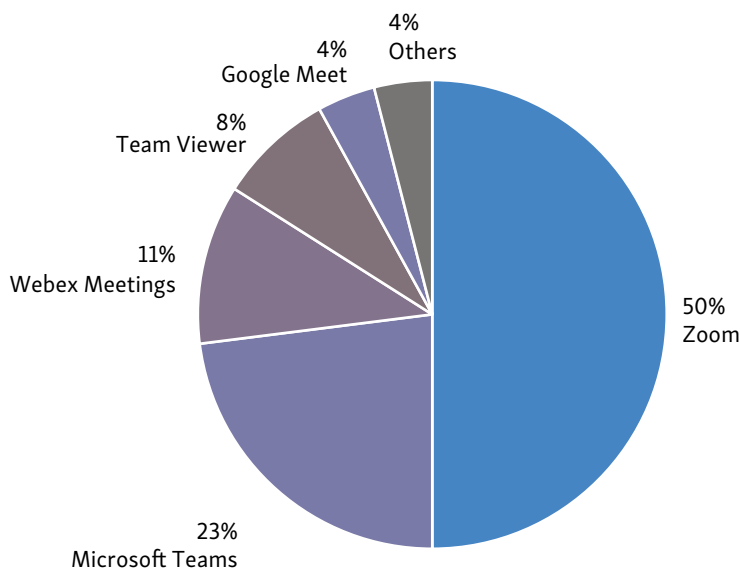


Figure 1. Videoconferencing software market share in 2021

Source: Sadler (2021).

Data collected in the first months of the pandemic (Sadler, 2021) identified Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype and Cisco Webex as the platforms that recorded the most virtual calls per day (figure 1). In total, they have more than 500 million users per day, with Zoom standing out with 300 million daily users.

In terms of market share breakdown in 2021, the data shows that Zoom and Teams dominate almost three quarters of the sector, with Zoom being the undisputed market leader (Sadler, 2021).

According to the data, Zoom is the fastest growing video calling platform. It has grown from 10 million daily users in December 2019 to 200 million users in March 2020 and 300 million users worldwide in June 2020 (Iqbal, 2022).

Zoom defines itself as “a platform to connect, create, and innovate” (<https://zoom.us/>). It is a video conferencing platform for the education, financial services, government, healthcare, manufacturing and retail sectors. Like any other platform, however, it must be understood not as a simple medium or intermediary, but in terms of its political-economic character. Platforms are performative by nature (Manovich, 2013) and can be understood as mediators of information (Bucher, 2018). We are not only users of platforms, but we are also mediated by them (Lazzarato, 2006). Thus, platforms are structures that are intentionally designed to influence and orient participation toward a particular purpose, emphasizing their inherent, rather than lack of, neutrality (Gillespie, 2017).

This means that platforms, by their very nature (content structure, algorithms, enabled free or paid features, business model), program and model such encounters, rather than just being tools that we use to freely program - in this case - social or professional encounters.

We understand sociality as a fact in which social life takes shape and is present. It is a concept that brings into play the idea of the encounter of a body with other bodies, which makes it possible to understand it also as a celebration, when it is structured around the pleasure, excess and confusion of bodies in a space. In its festive dimension, sociality enacts symbols and rituals familiar to all, as understood in the tradition of French socio-anthropology (Bataille, 1987; Caillois, 2014; Durkheim 1982; Maffesoli 1996; Mauss, 2006). Parties as events are planned with the aim of initiating dynamic social activities and seek to generate collective resonance, highlighting the idea of the body as an organ of resonance (Rosa, 2019) that seeks to establish a relationship of meaning with the surrounding world through breathing, feeling, eating, drinking or listening. The aim of this study is to determine whether phenomena of virtual sociality retain these characteristics of sociality. The purpose of any collective resonance is to find ways of appropriating or appropriating interaction or exchange in a transformative way (Rosa, 2019).

Behind every platform there is a programmed sociality, because every platform is a context of interaction with techno-linguistic automatisms (Berardi, 2014) that subject every social interaction to norms (Bucher, 2012, 2018; Lindgren, 2021). In the case of Zoom, sociality is determined by the logic of the conference: One has the floor and is listened to by the others; the faces on the screen have the same weight; the body remains immobile, it does not resonate in contact with other bodies.

There is a hegemonic use of platforms in which users are governed by preconfigured rules, functions, and structures that are accepted by those who use them. Through predefined rules, functions, and structures, these digital media “govern” the actions of users. Individuals must consciously or unconsciously accept the inherent configurations, modes of interaction, and codes of expression (Lazzarato, 2014). However, uses other than those originally proposed by these platforms have been documented by authors such as Van Dijck (2016).

Semiotic and cultural studies propose the existence of decodings or aberrant readings of communication (Hall, 1980), understood as the receivers' interpretations that differ from those defined or preferred by the senders. We could say that this is also the case in the social use of technology: there may be uses other than those programmed by the developers of the technology. The

use of a video conferencing platform for social gatherings or parties is, strictly speaking, a different use of the platform, but at the same time this sociality is subject to technological functions that influence not only the use, but also subjective and emotional effects.

Sadness and fatigue Zoom

There are several discussions on the psychic effects of the use of platforms, which are added to the general effects of capitalism and the control society that modulates subjectivity by exercising power through remote technologies (Deleuze, 2006; Lazzarato, 2006). According to this view, the new forms of domination have social and psychological effects: They isolate them and intensify their sad affects. The pandemic, through screens and platforms, is carrying out the dystopia elaborated by Turkle (2012), in which we are finally alone together. Other authors such as Berardi (2007, 2017, 2019), Han (2012, 2014), Illouz (2007) or Pelbart (2009) reflect critically on the relationship between technology and sadness. Lovink points out that there is technological sadness as a style. The author highlights the transformation of sadness into a technological emotion that is encapsulated in a code and characterizes it as a unique form of expression in the contemporary era (Lovink, 2019). An example of this is the term Zoom fatigue, coined by Bailenson (2020), which alludes to the fatigue that occurs in people due to the constant use of platforms for video calls. Zoom fatigue is directly related to the change in non-verbal communication through cameras and computers, specifically through the reduction of perceptible communication signals. During the pandemic, the use of video calling platforms has been high for long periods of time. This fact and the limited communication (Bailenson, 2021) explain why video calls, while saving time and energy (Ong et al., 2014), require more cognitive effort and are more stressful than face-to-face meetings (Microsoft Human Factors Lab, 2021).

In his seminal article, Bailenson (2021) points to four possible causes to explain Zoom fatigue: 1) the feeling of constantly being watched by faces on the screen that invade personal space; 2) the increased cognitive load required to interpret and display nonverbal responses via the screen and the selection of closed shots that prevent interpretation of nonverbal language; 3) the constant self-evaluation of seeing one's own face constantly mirrored on the screen; and 4) the physical movement restricted to the camera frame and desk seat.

Zoom fatigue is another example of how digital life has sad consequences. Lovink (2019) suggests that the source of this "technological sadness" lies in the constant fragmented attention, hyper-awareness, and interruptions of individuals saturated with sensory inputs such as inputs from sensors, APIs, and scripts.

This fatigue leads to a suppression of emotional presence. It is characterized by an inability to be fully engaged.

The party: theatricality, resonance and transformative experience

The party is part of the subterranean force of social life (Maffesoli, 1996), a solemn practice in which the rational individual expresses his desire to abandon the costume of the self and merge with the collective. In the party as a celebratory space, therefore, the logic of the theatrical prevails among those present, the metamorphosis that takes place and the idea of an unforeseen outcome. In the French socio-anthropological tradition, the feast is associated with the atavistic human urge to belong to the communal body. For Durkheim (1982), the feast is linked to the search for a mythical or symbolic time that escapes the wear and tear of days, the cycles of labor. For Caillois (2014), this festive time has connotations of the sacred, as it enables behaviors and attitudes that escape from ordinary life. Bataille (1987) argues that the feast is a space for the expenditure of energies or, more directly, the waste of what remains as an energetic residue of rationality and calculation. Mauss (2006) sees the feast as a different economy in which gifts are exchanged under a non-commercial logic that is meant to weld the communal space together. These approaches coincide insofar as the feast reactivates the bond and thus its significance for the emotional state of the individual. These forces, these yearnings, these subterranean motives that guide the feast are fundamental to the feeling of the orgiastic: the celebratory encounter that harnesses the confusion of emotions that oscillate between feelings of resistance, anger, excitement, debauchery, sweetness, arousal or the will to transgress boundaries (Maffesoli, 1996). The latter is usually interpreted as the cathartic moment in which the self becomes the other and the other no longer resembles the self. This dimension of the festival is emphasized by Byung-Chul Han (2020) when he speaks of the festival as an experience in itself that is not subordinated to an external purpose.

The party organized in a house, as a gathering of acquaintances and strangers, of guests and friends, is an expression of sociality: a way of rehearsing the collective. The party fulfills an integrating function for communal energies, for subversive attitudes, for questionable moral concepts that only become part of social life when they are accepted at the party. In this way, it fulfills a very specific social function: to change everyday life, to change or abolish order and discipline.

The party survives the changes brought about by technologies, institutions and the market in the task of disciplining citizens in an order with its own logics and hierarchies. It can be associated with what Rosa (2020) calls an axis of resonance,

that is, the way in which individuals create conditions of encounter to facilitate their appropriation or assimilation of the world around them in a transformative way. As Rosa explains, the body is an organ of resonance because it has windows through which it establishes different translation systems for the world around it (skin, breathing, hearing, drinking, eating). The experience of resonance is generated as an indeterminate event that guarantees a momentary correspondence or arousal of the individual. The party can be an axis of resonance due to its disruptive nature (Rosa, 2019).

Resonance is the encounter with the other, or the disruptive event that changes the coordinates and schemata of how one feels in the world and how the world feels in relation to the individual. Resonance is a responsive concept that works in a dynamic way, with transmissions in both directions (subject-world). Rosa (2020) identifies four phases that are set in motion within a resonance process: 1) affectation; 2) self-efficacy; 3) transformative assimilation, and 4) the time of unavailability.

The purpose of every party is not the staging of the familiar or the known, but the opposite. The party as an axis of resonance is not only aimed at influencing others or getting a reaction from them, it is also a process of subjective transformation: we enter the party in a certain way, but we leave it in a different way, thanks to a process of transformative assimilation of affects and emotions that allow us to describe the experience of the party as a unique (unforgettable) moment of existence. Therefore, the party is always unpredictable (Maffesoli, 1996; Rosa, 2019) and it is this component, its ability to generate resonance or not, that must be questioned in the transition from the presential party to the virtual party.

METHODOLOGY

Method

Digital ethnography is a method whose flexible character aims to accompany us in the search for descriptions adapted to the conditions of contemporary society, especially those generated by the various forms of computer-mediated communication that permeate our daily lives (Hine, 2015). In light of the above, ethnography was chosen because it provides a multi-layered perspective that allows us to approach the ways in which people construct the meaning of their lives mediated by technology, more specifically, how young university students reconstruct the meaning of sociality after the pandemic has made the world inaccessible.

Conducting a digital ethnography in the early stages of the pandemic means rehearsing a form of patchwork ethnography, which, according to Günel and colleagues (2020), is conceived as an in-process inquiry that works with the gaps, limitations, partial knowledge, and multiple commitments that characterize all knowledge production. In an initial phase, the pandemic made immersion difficult and required the use of remote ethnographic methods; in addition to this were the difficult economic, labor and psychological conditions created by the lockdown of both the young informants and the teacher-researchers. The pandemic is just one of many conditions forcing anthropologists to conduct this patchwork ethnography of fragmented events. However, this is no reason to stop following the tradition proposed by Geertz (2000), according to which ethnography is not so much an exhaustive description as a dense description: an event that could reveal a dense meaning of that experience, in this case the virtual experience. Every ethnography strives for density of meaning.

The meaning of the face-to-face party becomes more complex when it passes through a technological mediation. This forced us to test a form of ethnography that takes into account at all times the links established by the chosen social group between the party as an offline practice and the party as an online solution. We agree with Benassi when he understands that the social practices conceived during the pandemic and carried out through platforms such as Zoom should be analyzed not only as a contraction of the real experience, but also as an extension of the repertoire of sociality to the digital experience. According to Benassi (2021), the onlife experience, characterized by media immersion, has spurred the creation of new methods for studying online sociality, considering the digital space as an extension of the real one.

Sample

The research consisted of two phases in which the responses of two groups of students aged 18 to 22, generally middle and upper-middle class and selected from a private university, were compared at two different times during the pandemic. In the first phase, responses were collected during the first semester of 2020. Subsequently, the responses were also collected in the second half of 2022. A total of seven in-depth interviews were conducted in the first phase (six women and one man) and nine in the second phase (six women and three men).

Process

The first phase of the interviews was conducted via the Zoom platform to comply with COVID-19 constraints. The second phase of interviews was conducted face-to-face.

For the development of the interview guide, the work of Mauksch (2019) was used, which proposes an analysis of events as 'forms' and attempts to explore the structuring of the events themselves. The guide for both interviews included questions to describe the following events, both face-to-face and virtual: main actors of the social events, dress code, food, alcohol consumption, decoration/layout of the space or adaptation of digital interfaces for these effects, opening and closing rituals.

The second phase also included a projective technique in which respondents selected three words representing emotions/actions or ideas about face-to-face gatherings and three representing emotions/actions or ideas about virtual parties, the meanings of which were explored with clarifying questions.

For information processing, the corresponding audio files were downloaded after conducting the interviews in phases 1 and 2. The Google Pinpoint tool was used to support the transcription process. Excel spreadsheets were then used to categorize the interviewees' responses into categories that related to the interview questions and key themes and patterns were sought (Coffey & Atkinson, 2003).

Verbal consent was obtained for the recording of the interviews to ensure ethical treatment of the interviews. In this way, confidentiality was ensured at both stages of the study. No questions were asked that could reveal the identity of the interviewees in order to avoid deductively revealing an individual's identity (Tolich, 2004, cited in Kaiser, 2009). For reporting purposes, respondents from the first phase of the pandemic were coded E1 and respondents from the second phase after the pandemic were coded E2, followed by the corresponding interview number. For example, if E2-6 is reported, this means that it is a quote from interview 6 of the second (E2) post-pandemic phase of the study.

For the results report, we first created a dense description and tried to describe and compare the characteristics of the face-to-face party and its transfer to virtuality in 2020 in order to determine the significance of these experiences based on interview excerpts. On the other hand, in discussing the results, the hermeneutic and interpretative nature of ethnography is developed to provide a thick description of the experiences (Geertz, 2000). The results are discussed based on the theory.

RESULTS

Characteristics of face-to-face vs. Zoom parties

Table 1 is a summary of the various elements that are lost in the translation from the real life interface to the virtual interface.

Category	Face-to-face parties	Zoom parties
Main actors in social events	The honored (for birthdays) and the organizers (for more spontaneous outings) are mentioned as the main protagonists. The guests are mentioned as secondary characters. Other actors mentioned: waiters, DJ.	They are reduced to the main characters or actors, the groups are smaller, only those invited are connected.
Dress code	Depending on the occasion, something special was worn. Dressing up for the party was an important part of the experience.	It practically disappears. Many of them mention that they go to these meetings or parties in the clothes they wear at home, or even in their pajamas.
Food	They are an important part of certain parties, especially the more formal ones or those associated with special celebrations such as birthdays, weddings, etc. Cakes, snacks and even main courses are mentioned at more formal gatherings.	Many mentioned that attempts were made to coordinate that people would have food available when they joined. However, it was very difficult to stick to this or to share the same food, although an attempt was made.
Alcohol consumption	It was mentioned as central to the face-to-face meetings.	It was intended to encourage participants to have any type of alcohol on hand to share while they were online. It was difficult for all participants to get the same type of drink.
Decoration, space layout	Decorations (e.g. balloons and lights) and the arrangement of furniture as well as creating spaces for conversation, dancing and snacking/drinking were cited as crucial to any face-to-face party.	This dimension has almost completely disappeared at the Zoom parties. The only thing remotely reminiscent of decoration are the filters or backgrounds that the platform allows each user to customize, and the use of ready-made party filters and backgrounds for specific occasions.
Starting rituals	Opening rituals mentioned were the type of music (slower, not danceable), the fact that the lights are usually on, and waiting for most of the guests to arrive. Waiting for most of the guests to arrive.	What was mentioned as the equivalent of startup rituals were reminders via WhatsApp about the Zoom party.
Closing rituals	Romantic or national music was mentioned as a final ritual. It was an indication that the party was coming to an end. Another indicator was the end of alcohol.	The notifications sent by the platform 10 minutes before the end of the 40-minute sessions in the free version have been identified as an indicator of the end of the Zoom party. In certain cases, only if they felt very entertained, they were encouraged to create a new meeting and send the link again via WhatsApp.

Table 1. Comparison between face-to-face party and Zoom party

Source: Own elaboration.

Translating the festival into virtuality

In transferring the face-to-face party to the virtual one, an attempt was made to preserve certain elements of the festive ritual that were considered essential and which were reproduced in the digital environment as follows:

1. Use filters and zoom backgrounds to create scenarios of parties or outings where you are present in person.
2. Use screen sharing to show photos or content from their mobile phones.
3. Use parallel communication channels such as WhatsApp or Instagram so that participants who want to comment privately can do so.
4. Ensuring that attendees have some kind of alcoholic beverage available.
5. In the case of a birthday, light a candle and sing for the birthday boy or girl.

The following translation problems were identified:

1. Lack of platform flexibility. This implied problems such as not being able to perform other activities within the same social meeting, or the difficulty of following conversations because the videoconferencing platform is structured by a certain hierarchy where only one person speaks at a time.
2. The inability to create other environments within the main session. Sometimes tried to solve this, albeit not very effectively, by using Whatsapp as an alternative channel. The surprise of someone turning up uninvited was never possible. The platform makes it difficult to expand social ties. The impossibility of expanding social circles, as explained by E1-6: "At any party, there is always the possibility of a stranger showing up. They usually come with a guest, they are friends of our friends".
3. The use of this platform for productive purposes, whether for work or study, which leads to fatigue in the virtual parties.

Changes in video calling usage

The second phase of the research revealed that respondents had difficulty remembering and locating virtual parties. While all teens reported having Zoom parties, unlike the first face-to-face party after the pandemic, the virtual parties were only vaguely remembered and most placed them between 2020 and 2021. Finally, they referred to the Zoom platform as a place to watch movies or play video games rather than a place to attend parties. E2-7, for example, mentioned using the video call party "to meet up in the evening and play games or watch movies, but also to talk (...). We meet up, we talk, and after a while we start playing games online, and that is something we keep up".

These descriptions are in addition to the meanings that young people identified when comparing platform parties with face-to-face parties (table 2). The following ideas are repeated:

Words associated with the face-to face party (open box)	Words associated with the Zoom party (closed box)
Hugging, closeness, experience	Bored, empty
Encouraging, good vibes	Anguish, anxiety
Companionship, friendship	Conversation
Fun, excitement, joyfulness	Comfort
Spontaneity	Depression, sadness
Happiness, smiles	Limited
Gratitude	Nostalgia
Speak	Loneliness
Freedom	Fear, worry, insecurity
Relaxed	Watching videos by platforms

Table 2. Main results of the projective technique

Source: Own elaboration.

In general, the experience of the virtual party via video call is rated as unsatisfactory, as not real, while the face-to-face party is, as E2-2 says, “a more complete experience”. This is also confirmed by E2-6: “We used to want to get to know everyone, and the only way to do that was virtually. I think there was a lot of communication in that environment. Today, meeting face to face is much more enjoyable”.

These face-to-face parties have two main meanings in the second phase:

1. The party (without biosecurity) is the milestone that represents the end of the pandemic, the idea, as E2-8 puts it, that “you are no longer facing a health crisis”. Or, as E2-9 puts it, the celebration afterwards, “after this strange thing that happened to us”.
2. Enjoyment of the encounter with the bodies. In their descriptions of the Zoom party, the assertion of a certain energy, a vibration of bodies that was achieved with the face-to-face parties persists, evident in expressions such as E2-9’s “finally I could dance” and E2-5’s “who wants a virtual birthday (when at the onsite party) you were there with lots of friends vibrating loudly”.

In contrast, in the second phase, when respondents were asked to catalog which activities they preferred to do virtually or online, they equally indicated working or studying, acknowledging the advantages of the modality in one activity or the other; however, all young people preferred the parties in person, as E2-6 confirms: “(...) nowadays we have kind of left that aside, face-to-face is more enjoyable”. Or as E2-2 explains, “because (...) face-to-face interaction is a thousand times better than virtual interaction”.

DISCUSSION

This is a qualitative study that focuses on researching the meanings of limited samples and cannot be generalized. In addition, the young people interviewed are of Latin American origin, which implies non-verbal dynamics, proxemics and the construction of corporeality due to their cultural origin, and that the first phase of fieldwork was carried out during the first and most critical phase of the pandemic, with the corresponding complications.

Platforms designed for specific purposes (work or entertainment) have expanded their functions during the pandemic. WhatsApp and Zoom, for example, are beginning to enable onlife experiences as they are used for work, education and socializing, transforming the meaning of social encounters into a hybrid online and offline activity.

The meanings that young people attribute to the video calls used for socializing during the pandemic reveal a process of accumulation of use: the platform transforms the contexts of work and partying into identical contexts. It does not allow the meetings or their nature to be differentiated. The Zoom platform was used for work and educational purposes, with meetings taking place within the framework of hierarchical relationships and professional and academic productivity goals. In addition to confinement, the platform creates a sense of fatigue in these young people. Rather than resignifying the video call because it was used for a celebration, its continuous use at work or study tends to “spoil” the affective, horizontal and friendly bonds of the party or social gathering.

The party is an event that guarantees affective bonding, but it is also the manifestation of a willingness to enter into unprecedented relationships of affection and emotion with strangers. Partygoers’ highest aspiration is to free themselves from themselves for the sake of others. The sample collected in 2022 emphasizes that Zoom parties during the pandemic sought to restore the bonds lost due to confinement; however, in the post-pandemic present, it is impossible to think in this circumstance-induced way.

The party is not only the search for new connections, relationships and experiences. It is also the opportunity to initiate processes that can change existence, thanks to the mutual and unexpected communication with others, whether through the gaze, the spread of the word, the dance, the multiple feast of the senses that every party activates. What makes the experience of a party unique is that its results cannot be calculated, reasoned or measured. In the 2022 interviews, we can see how the virtual party no longer fulfills resounding expectations, so young people turn to other online activities, such as playing online games.

Taking into account the four stages Rosa (2020) identifies to define the process in which resonance occurs (affectation, self-efficacy, transformative assimilation and unavailability), each party brings into play an achievement and a certain transformation of the self that manifests itself in the participant's willingness to live a communicative, resonant process of transformative assembly.

Perhaps for this reason, what is most often repeated in the interviews analyzed in 2020 is that the digital version of the party implies a reduction of this staging, which is necessary to indulge in a resonance process. Unlike the face-to-face party, where alcohol is a substance that enhances affection, the presence of alcohol at the virtual party of the first research phase is related to the need to forget isolation, uncertainty, fear, and tragedy. The use of filters and backgrounds from before the pandemic is a sign of a nostalgic present, a mourning for the party.

The absence of the body, the fatigue caused by hyper-attention, but also the fragmentation generated by the possibility of pursuing other activities (gaming, chatting on networks) makes it difficult to create a bond, a connection. The meeting is over and there is no ("physical") memory of having met, as can be seen from the interviews. There was no particularly memorable virtual party.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzes the party as an onlife experience through a digital ethnography conducted with young university students during the phases of confinement in Guayaquil from 2020 to 2022.

Despite the aforementioned limitations of this study, both in terms of its focus and its implementation during the most critical phase of the state of emergency, the results confirm the critique of the notion of user, producer or prosumer, which considers platforms, digital media and social networks as neutral, while in reality they shape participation, intimacy, friendship and sociality (Gillespie, 2017). However, the pandemic has forced a different use of these platforms. They were designed for video conferencing, where a vertical, ordered and efficient

communication style prevails. The interviews also report on the exploration of other platforms to translate the party: WhatsApp, Instagram, Second Life, Discord and even some video games where young people meet socially, but not to play, but to chat. Young people have used video calling platforms in other, even deviant, ways, subverting their original functions (Lindgren, 2021) by using them for partying. But because of the way such platforms program or condition interactions, the translation from the face-to-face party to the virtual one proves to be a failure. The concept of the platform as a performative mediator is confirmed: they model the world they claim to represent (Bucher, 2018), in other words, they transform the social gathering, the Zoom party, into a lecture, without surprise, without the unforgettable.

The concept of resonance shows that it can be achieved with minimal elements and in different contexts (Rosa, 2020). Since the party is unpredictable, it becomes an anthropological necessity that must be rehearsed again and again to find the effective possibility of resonance. In the study, we found that it is necessary to achieve the same impact as a face-to-face party through the digital medium. Scenographic efforts are made, food, music and drinks are shared. People emphasize that there is a general loss of what one expects from a party, they point to the lack of physical contact, the unexpected encounter and they miss the manifestations of ecstasy and getting out of oneself. This does not rule out the possibility of a digital translation of the party, as its success depends on the willingness of the participants and the conditions of its development.

The party as a social ritual, as a disposition to resonance, is to a considerable extent untranslatable or at least difficult to translate. Much is lost in the translation of the disposition of the participants, and this disposition is related to processes of enactment, theatricalization of the self and metamorphosis that aim to reduce the distances that separate us from others.

Examining whether these practices are still being carried out as they were initiated in the pandemic is one way of understanding whether the party as an axe of resonance, achieves a plausible translation into digitality. The fact that online rehearsal is abandoned, dismissed or redirected to the game or other forms of relationship indicates that it was relatively or limitedly successful at ensuring processes of mutual influence and assimilatory transformation at the time.

For future research, it is interesting to examine other cultures outside Latin America where physicality is more accustomed to technological mediation. For example, Japanese culture, where there are young people who voluntarily lock themselves up with and without the pandemic (*hikikomori*). Also, studying generations that have grown up in this digitality or the development of more

immersive interfaces such as the metaverse or augmented reality could lead to a change in the onlife translation of the party. A quantitative approach would also make it possible to determine other social uses of video conferencing platforms and their post-pandemic relevance.

The rejection of the Zoom party, manifested by the students in 2022 as a form of resistance to Sibilia's (2005) project of the post-organic body, stems from the necessary task of rediscovering the powers of the body. Pelbart (2009) asserts that the essence of the body lies primarily in its engagement with other bodies.

It seems that despite all the warnings about the loss of the body (Berardi, 2017; Le Breton, 2007), bodies still want to come together because of the imperative of connection, to find each other, to come together, to avoid sadness.

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