

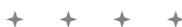
Our Voice

People from the generations who, despite benefitting from information technologies, grew up without computers or Internet are still surprised that our daily lives go hand-in-hand with the digital world. Also surprising is that not only are platforms and apps not part of a “parallel reality,” but many of us actually spend an enormous part of our life in them. In fact, we must become aware of this: the borders between our online and offline activities both blur and intensify. Given this, a group of CISAN and IIBI researchers have developed a collective project starting with the affirmation that virtual communities are, indeed, communities; and where we ask ourselves how collective knowledge is built in them through shared interests, the exchange of ideas and knowledge, dialogue, and even, on occasion, confrontation.

This issue of *Voices of Mexico* is dedicated to reflecting on this looming reality—not the Matrix, but where our algorithms almost redefine us—in which we have to adapt to technology to not be left behind. With the crosscutting theme of the creation of communities in the socio-digital space, this issue presents a series of articles that analyze a broad spectrum of themes: from the digital inclusion of senior citizens, to academic virtual communities and international groups of football fans; from the ethical use of artificial intelligence to reader communities and the creation of audiences for public television stations; from the discussion of democracy and activism to artistic creation.

The IIBI and the CISAN collaboration makes it possible to focus on a very relevant topic from many different, but complementary, perspective and methodologies. This fosters transdisciplinary thinking, given the diverse backgrounds of the interinstitutional team of researchers, but also from the point of view of the selection of case studies that are crisscrossed by the digital. On the other hand, it also optimizes the resources invested in programs like PAPIIT (IG300724), which has financed this team. This co-edition of *Voices of Mexico* is a clear result of the production and dissemination of the cutting-edge knowledge that our university produces, as well as of the determination that inter-institutionality will take us forward, enriching our analyses and interpretations of phenomena fundamental for understanding contemporary societies.

Graciela Martínez-Zalce
Director of the Center for Research on North America



Virtual communities are by no means a new topic, but they continue to be of interest and offer new characteristics to study thanks to today's information and communication technologies.

Howard Rheingold coined the term “virtual community” in 1993 in his work *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*, to describe the communities that were emerging on the Internet. Since then, the existence of virtual communities shows us that the Internet is not only a means for people to access information, but also a medium where individuals communicate with each other to exchange opinions and build relationships.

While at first, some worried about the threats that creating these communities might pose, today, they are used differently, not only for personal relationships, but for professional, academic, leisure, and political activist interests, among others. Thus, their study has become more complex from the social point of view and extends activities in the physical world to those in the digital world.

Anonymity, the use of algorithms for commercial ends, and the circulation of unvalidated information are some of the topics of concern they have sparked. But we also cannot be technophobic and deny the positive aspects they offer, permitting communication for purposes as far-reaching as teaching, academic pursuits, support for vulnerable groups, or those that aim to make improvements in different fields.

The combination of the technological and the social turns virtual communities into a broad topic for study, and therefore demands the use of different methodologies, among them undoubtedly virtual ethnology. However, looking at the topic from different disciplines allows us to appreciate novel theoretical-methodological proposals. Perhaps this quality is what makes virtual communities a challenge to deal with.

One valid alternative is to analyze them using an interdisciplinary approach to bring together efforts and reflections that allow us to look at them fully. This is why this issue of *Voices of Mexico* deals with virtual communities in an interdisciplinary way. From the point of view of library science and information studies, the analysis of information is central. In this sense, digital media have opened up veins of research topics since the appearance of the Internet and its growing use, as well as that of other technologies.

The researchers who write in this issue contribute analyses based on the theories of information and library science studies, joined to proposals for pedagogy, sociology, and data analysis, just to mention a few. This offers a sufficiently solid approach for looking at these reflections in different contexts.

Virtual communities are becoming more and more common, in a framework where the information and knowledge societies converge. These two levels that co-exist today also mean that these networks become stratified and serve as channels for the flow of information and/or of knowledge.

The diverse perspectives from which virtual networks can be researched turn them into a broad topic that cannot be dealt with without collaboration among scholars from different disciplines. In that sense, for the Institute of Library Science and Information Research Institute, the opportunity to participate with the Center for Research on North America is very fortunate and shows what can be covered from the point of view of information studies.

Georgina Araceli Torres Vargas
Director of the UNAM Library Science and Information Research Institute



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Suscripciones y ventas: revprode@unam.mx

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