

Signs of the Times in the Digital Age

Theoretical and Epistemological Convergences Between Christian and Digital Anthropology

Lucija Mihaljević*

Summary

In taking the digital as an environment rather than a mere tool, this article develops a shared analytical framework for Christian and digital anthropology, interpreted through the conciliar notion of the “signs of the times.” It argues that, despite differing epistemological premises between the two disciplines, they converge in their understanding of digital identity as relational and narrative, of digital media as environments shaping perception, authority, and belonging, and of digital practice as a field of co-responsibility ordered toward truth, justice, and the common good. On this basis, the article formulates guidelines for online presence that privileges relation over reach and community over spectacle.

Keywords: *Christian anthropology; digital anthropology; relational and narrative identity; media as environment; digital ethics; signs of the times*

Introduction

Today, discerning the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel means taking our digitally mediated everyday life seriously (GS 4). Digital platforms, protocols, and algorithms do not merely carry messages, they steer social life. Here, the digital “environment” denotes not a technical platform nor tool, but a background condition of everyday life that implicitly shapes perception, attention, and patterns of social interaction prior to conscious choice. They significantly shape perception, direct attention, model value orientations, and redefine patterns of belonging for individuals and communities, often through measurability (metrics, predictions) and the profit-driven optimization of the attention economy. In this sense, the digital environment can be understood as a contemporary “sign of the times”, calling not merely for pastoral adaptation but

* Lucija Mihaljević, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Catholic University of Croatia. Address: Ilica 242, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia. ORCID iD: 0009-0002-3751-3398. E-mail: lucija.mihaljevic@unicath.hr

for an anthropological discernment in concrete historical conditions (Baloban, 2013, 383–386; Ančić, 2007, 33–36).

Against this background, the article addresses the problem of how Christian anthropology and digital anthropology can jointly interpret digitally mediated everyday life without reducing the human person to measurable data or abstract norms. If the human person stands at the center, three questions follow: How do we navigate this milieu? What does it do to subjectivity and relations, and which competencies sustain responsible action online?

Classical philosophical anthropology understands the human as world-open, exceeding instinct (Scheler, 2009, 28). Because we are biologically non-specialized, we secure the stability of everyday life through institutions and technologies that offload action and render the world more predictable (Gehlen, 1980, 2–3). Today, platforms and protocols increasingly perform these stabilizing functions. Human existence is also symbolic. We live within a web of language, myth, and science, so meaning is interpreted (Cassirer, 1944, 26). It is also relational, insofar as the person is confirmed in the I and Thou relation and the unconditional summons of the Other's face (Buber, 1970, 53). And human existence is embodied and narrative, since the body is a perceiving subject, and identity forms through the stories we hold true about ourselves and others (Ricoeur, 1992, 140–168).

Christian thought gathers these insights around the dignity of the person and the unity of spirit, soul, and body, grounded in freedom from sin and freedom for the good (GS 22–24). Alongside classical emphases on virtue/telos and on autonomy/dignity, it articulates the boundaries of a Christian anthropology for today (Pinckaers, 1995, 327–355). This anthropological horizon provides the normative criteria for the present analysis. This frame also orients evaluation of digital practices: whether they foster growth in truth, relation, and responsibility, or reduce persons to measurable profiles stripped of story and relation.

It is because, socio-economically, the contemporary media environment both enables and threatens human flourishing (Zuboff, 2019, 351; 376). This calculative regime often comes at the expense of truth, justice, and the common good. Convergently feeding into this dynamic are various sciences and techniques — from economics and behavioural psychology to computer science and data science — that turn experience into variables, model predictions, and compress the incomparable into comparable measures (Porter, 1995, 3–45). Such commensuration (Espeland & Stevens, 1998, 313–317) shifts end toward what is measured rather than what is meaningful.

Precisely for this reason, Christian anthropology, through Church documents on communication has insisted that communication serve truth, justice, and the common good, promoting human dignity over mere efficiency or profit (IM, CP, AN). Newer Church documents render this in the idiom of social media and “algorithmic” publics, encouraging integral, responsible, and relational presence online and care for the vulnerable in place of polarization and manipulation (TFP; WCD, 2024; WCD, 2025).

Nevertheless, despite today's dominance of metrics-driven analyses of social media (commercial and scholarly), support for a Christian-anthropological approach also arises from a scientific epistemology rooted in qualitative understandings of meaning — cultural anthropology. While the discipline of cultural (or social) anthropology has its divergences from Christian thought, its habitus of thick description (Geertz, 1973, 3–30), reflexivity (Bourdieu, 1990, 135–142), and the ethnographic grasp of meaning from the participant's perspective (Pink et al., 2016, 1–19) resists reducing life to numbers. Especially in digital anthropology that slows perception, observes micro-rituals of online life (reactions, silences, unwritten rules, practices of visibility), analyzes media contexts and power, and asks how people live technologies — how they construct identities, sustain communities, and apportion authority across networks.

On this basis, the article advances the central thesis that Christian anthropology and digital anthropology, despite differing epistemological premises, converge on a shared understanding of identity as relational and narrative, media as formative environments, and ethics as co-responsibility. The scientific contribution of the article lies in articulating a synthetic analytical framework that enables dialogue between theological reflection and qualitative digital anthropology, offering orientation for the ethical discernment of digital everyday life.

1. Analytical Approach

This article argues for the complementarity of cultural and Christian anthropological approaches to contemporary digital everyday life. Methodologically, it proceeds as a conceptual-synthetic analysis that brings classical digital-anthropology literature into dialogue with the Church's magisterium, offering a shared analytical frame for both. Such an approach resonates with recent theological reflections that explicitly speak of digital anthropology, emphasizing that digital communication today constitutes a formative environment of human self-understanding, relationships, and cultural meaning, and therefore requires interdisciplinary anthropological analysis (Valković, 2024, 273–276). The aim is neither to romanticize nor to demonize technology, but to discern the digital environment in depth. The synthesis is oriented by the Christian-anthropological norms of respect for the person and service to the common good, together with the ethnographic, qualitative contribution of cultural anthropology.

Given the richness of Church teaching on media, the scope is limited to four key documents (IM, CP, AN, TFP), as well as the Messages for World Communications Day from 2014 to the present.¹ Complementing this, the analysis draws on core digital anthropology, foundational ethnographies and methodological syntheses, while setting also necessary limits. The goal is a comparative, culture-sensitive framework that treats media as environments, attends to identity

1 Since they refer to digital media more precisely.

work through micro-rituals, and situates ethical co-responsibility within locally negotiated regimes of visibility and maintenance.

The study advances an integrative three-step analysis, presenting synthetic codes for comparison between Christian and cultural anthropology: (1) identity — the person as relational and narrative, shaped by the micro-rituals of digital everyday life; (2) culture — the medium as environment structuring perception, authority, and community; (3) ethics — co-responsibility in the use, creation, and analysis of digital content.

2. *Christian Anthropology in the Digital Age*

Christian anthropology starts from relation: the person, created in the image of God and called to communion, “narrates” identity in history through self-gift (GS 12). Communication is therefore not mere information transfer but participation in communion that safeguards human dignity (IM 2; CP 5–14; AN 2–3). In this key, truth, justice, and the common good are not external add-ons to communication but criteria of an authentically human presence.

From *Inter mirifica* to *Aetatis novae*, Church documents consistently interpret communication as ordered to truth, responsibility, and the common good, while recognizing that media shape not only opinions but human experience itself (IM 5; CP 16–17; AN 2–3). *Towards Full Presence* translates this tradition into the logic of digital platforms, emphasizing integral presence, responsibility for visibility, and critical awareness of algorithmic personalization and »filter bubbles« (TFP 14–15; 44). Against metricized virality, it proposes a culture of encounter that prioritizes persons and relationships over reach and spectacle (TFP 19; 37).

From 2014 to the present, the Messages for World Communications Day develop these lines further, privileging listening, truthfulness, and care for the vulnerable over polarization and manipulation — practical virtues for inhabiting a deeply metrified environment without reducing persons to profiles.

2.1. *Identity: The person as relational and narrative*

Since the call to communion is the very structure of personal existence (GS 12), identity in a Christian-anthropological key is relational and historical — shaped by covenants, promises, and witness, by narratives of self-gift: the person »finds himself through a sincere gift of himself« (GS 24). Church communication documents translate this logic into narrative witness: *Communio et progressio* roots communication in diverse gifts and ministries ordered to unity, i.e. emphasizes communication as service to communion (CP 11–14).

The recent *Messages for World Communications Day* (WCD, 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023; 2024; 2025) place narrative at the heart of communication as well, emphasizing stories that build up rather than tear down and that sustain shared memory and hope. This vision is grounded in the Lord’s method »come and see« (Jn 1:39), which presents truth as something communicated through encounter:

going toward the other, dwelling with people and events, listening, and only then narrating responsibly to “speak the truth about life that becomes history (WCD, 2021).

In this perspective, narration is not an ornament but an ethic of proximity. A good story arises from encounter, verification, and shared life, including in digital environments, where »come and see«. entails patient attention to context, to one’s interlocutors, and to the consequences of what we publish. Within this horizon, the Messages repeatedly underscore listening as the first condition of dialogue, the call to speak the truth in love and with the heart, and the cultivation of a »wisdom of the heart«. that keeps communication fully human (WCD, 2022; 2023; 2024). They culminate in a vision of Christian digital presence marked by hope and the deliberate disarming of aggressive or polarizing forms of communication (WCD, 2025).

In the digital epoch this means: the person remains relational online. If identity unfolds in relation, then networked presence, which shapes and carries narrative, must be measured by interrelation (solidarity, care, respect for limits), not by visibility metrics alone.²

2.2. Culture: Media as environment shaping perception, authority, and community

Church texts early recognized that media are not mere “channels” but environments that shape culture.³ *Aetatis novae* calls the communicative sphere the »first Areopagus of our time« and asks for pastoral planning that takes seriously the structural power of media systems (AN 2–3, 11–18). Today’s digital media form an ambience that standardizes rhythms of presence, models of visibility, and forms of authority; Christian anthropology urges that these patterns be evangelized, not merely adapted to. In the same key, the World Communication Day messages invite the internet’s maturation from connection to encounter: WCD (2014) calls it »something truly good, a gift from God«, yet insists on proximity and solidarity; while WCD (2019) reframes “network communities” with »We are members one of another« and »truth is revealed in communion«.

Towards Full Presence (2023) offers a precise diagnosis of platform logic. Algorithms decide what to show based on behavioural patterns and attention rhythms, meaning »not only our previous choices, likes, reactions or preferences, but also our absences and distractions, pauses, and attention spans« (TFP 14). They are intensifying personalization and confinement in frames that »lead us

2 Empirical–theological studies of religion and the internet further confirm that digital environments do not suspend religious identity, but reconfigure it narratively and relationally, through new forms of witness, belonging, and everyday practice of faith (Novak & Valković, 2016, 392–396).

3 This understanding of media as environments rather than neutral channels is echoed in recent theological analyses that describe digital communication as a pervasive style of life, shaping everyday practices, rhythms of presence, and forms of belonging, rather than merely facilitating the transmission of messages (Bernadić, 2022, 294–298).

into an isolation of ‘filter bubbles’« (TFP 15). The answer is community–building, not audience–building, that is »directing digital connections towards encounter with real persons, creating real relationships and building a real community« (TFP 24), and offering witness »by our words and by our lives« (TFP 80). Convergetly, WCD (2024) notes that AI is reshaping the ecosystem, »radically affecting... certain foundations of life in society«, warns of »cognitive pollution« and »echo chambers«, insisting that information cannot be severed from living relationships.

The document also speaks of an “onlife” reality, rejecting a strict online/offline split and proposing complementarity (TFP 9). For Christian anthropology, authority in digital environments does not flow from metrics and visibility (reach) but from truth–seeking service to communion. The criterion is not naked visibility determined by algorithms, but responsible presence that builds communion.

2.3. *Ethics: Co-responsibility in the use, creation, and analysis of digital content*

Christian reflection on communication is unapologetically normative. Speech and mediation are ordered to truth, justice, and love for the common good. *Inter mirifica* ties the right to be informed to a double demand: “news... should always be true and complete” (IM 5). *Communio et progressio* unambiguously repeats the truth imperative, linking it to sincerity and honesty (CP 17). *Aetatis novae* widens responsibility beyond senders and receivers to everyone who shapes the communicative space (authors, intermediaries, institutions) since communications configure totality of social life (AN 11–18). In the platform era, *Towards Full Presence* translates these norms into practice: transparency, accountability, and an “examination of conscience” regarding how we inhabit digital spaces (TFP 41).

From this horizon follows a stance for digital everyday life. Justice and charity forbid weaponizing facts against persons privacy, reputation, and due process limit disclosure, with special care for the vulnerable, above all minors (IM 5; CP 33–39; AN 11–12; TFP 55). The same horizon rejects attention–hacking tactics (like rage–baiting),⁴ deceptive editing, manufactured virality, deepfakes, because influence should be argued, not engineered. And since engagement metrics are not moral criteria, prudence requires critical distance from metrics and automation: when algorithms steer distribution or decisions, those responsible owe bias testing, human oversight, plain–language explanations, and avenues of appeal.

At the level of public culture, WCD (2018) anatomizes “fake news” as deliberately deceptive content that mimics journalism and rides emotional triggers in homogeneous environments. This ethical conversion belongs in the governance of shared spaces, where owners, moderators and institutions share responsibility for rules that protect deliberation. Those rules set clear standards, apply modera-

4 Rage–baiting is the online practice of deliberate provocation of audience anger to generate clicks, comments, and shares. These are provocative headlines/posts designed to spark outrage rather than encourage reasoned discussion.

tion that is consistent and proportionate, provide guardrails against harassment and doxxing, and use procedures that prioritize de-escalation over virality. *Towards Full Presence* pushes beyond audience-building to community-building, where credibility arises from the coherence of word and life and online presence is stewarded with transparency, restraint, and accountability (TFP 41; 44).

A practical ethic for creators, intermediaries, and users therefore means to say what is true, protect dignity (especially the vulnerable), be transparent and correct errors, refuse manipulation, keep human judgment over metrics and machines and govern spaces for the common good. The decisive question is not “Can it be optimized?” but “Does it honour the person and serve communion and the common good?” Within this horizon, digital communication is also understood as a concrete field of proclamation and witness, where credibility depends not on reach or visibility but on relational integrity, responsibility, and coherence between message and life (Novak & Uldrijan, 2020, 704–708).

3. *Digital Anthropology from a Cultural–Anthropological Perspective*

At this point, cultural anthropology emerges as a necessary interlocutor, offering descriptive and reflexive tools for examining how ethical and relational questions take shape in lived digital practices. Digital anthropology, as an established subfield, positions itself not as an extension of platform metriculture, but as its critical counterpoint. By foregrounding context and meaning, it offers relational, narrative, qualitative accounts grounded in reciprocity and reflexivity, through knowledge co-produced via participation, trust, and exchange (Geismar & Knox, 2021, 1–10).

Early digital ethnographies demonstrated that online life is embedded in everyday social relations and constitutes a serious anthropological terrain (Miller & Slater, 2000, 1–9; Boellstorff, 2015, 3–9), an insight subsequently systematized through embedded, embodied, and everyday approaches to digital ethnography (Hine, 2015, 14–16). As Pink and colleagues put it, »do ethnography as the digital unfolds as part of the world that we co-inhabit with the people who participate in our research« (Pink et al., 2016, 19). In this vein, digital ethnography works with people, not on them (Hine, 2015, 186–188). On this approach, digital anthropology becomes a valuable interlocutor for Christian anthropology. The guiding premise, demanding in its simplicity, is that technology is not imported “from outside” into society but is part of the very fabric of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and belonging.

Put differently, in cultural anthropology, the digital is not an addition to life but its modern infrastructure of the everyday. Media are constitutive of culture rather than neutral channels; while meaning and power are produced within concrete regimes of visibility and practice (Carey, 1989, 13–36). Consequently, the field is defined by situations rather than apps, framing platforms as relational infrastructures whose affordances norm attention, perception, and sociability (Pink et al., 2016; Bucher, 2018, 1–10).

Thus, its reciprocal, reflexive procedure yields the thick description needed to understand how meaning, belonging, and authority are negotiated in networked spaces — not at the level of abstract ideals, but in the concrete situations where people live, communicate, and sustain communities.

3.1. *Identity: Relational and narrative selfhood*

Digital anthropology starts from a relational–narrative self: personhood emerges through networks of people, things, and signs, and is continually “re–told” in practice (Miller, 2011, 1–16; Baym, 2015, 1–12; 26–42). Everyday micro–practices (or rituals), such as emoji, reactions, read receipts, typing indicators, short posts and stories, and even silences, operate as micro–rituals of belonging, indicating alignments, boundaries, and the values through which relations are negotiated (Miller & Slater, 2000, 1–9). By “micro–rituals,” digital anthropology refers to small, repeated interactional practices that carry normative expectations and through which relationships, authority, and belonging are continuously negotiated. Far from being trivial signals, delayed replies, channel switching, or deliberate non–response function as normative markers of attention, respect, or distance (Hine, 2015, 186–188).

Consequently, identity is not a profile or a bundle of visibility metrics but a situated performance. Classic insights on self–presentation as the dramaturgy of relations meet online “context collapse” and “imagined audiences,” rendering overlapping publics unstable, while the self is narrated through sequences of micro–posts and regimes of selective visibility (Marwick & Boyd, 2011, 115–120; Baym, 2015, 93–112). Rather than a “fragmented” self, a more accurate description is relational and contextual, shifting as networks, norms, and affordances (visibility, ephemerality, response rhythms) change (Hine, 2015, 1–3; 24–27).

A key mediator is polymedia,⁵ where channel choice is morally and relationally coded: an SMS, WhatsApp message, phone call, or voice note “counts” differently and carries distinct expectations of intimacy, civility, and urgency (Madianou & Miller, 2013, 170–176; 180–183). Within this frame, silence itself becomes action, as delayed replies, “seen then reply later,” or switching channels/platforms recalibrate belonging and interpretive power. Micro–rituals are thus the grammar of belonging that sustains distant ties and the arena where authority, closeness, and boundaries are negotiated (Hine, 2015, 186–188).

Methodologically, identity work is read not from profiles or analytics but from sequential performances and local rules of belonging, traced ethnographically across spaces, genres, and visibility rhythms (Miller et al., 2016, 8–15; 50–57). Finally, digital anthropology treats identity as an ongoing, relational narration — one that resists reduction to metrics and is legible in the minute, patterned

5 The concept of *polymedia* captures how the moral meaning of communication does not lie in a single medium, but in the relational choices made among available media within a given social context.

exchanges through which communities are actually made (Miller, 2011, 1–16; Baym, 2015, 26–42).

3.2. Culture: New media as environments of perception, authority, and belonging

In a cultural–anthropological lens, the digital is not a mere “channel” but an environment: infrastructures and affordances that quietly norm perception, attention, and sociability. Interfaces and protocols set background expectations (tempos of availability, default audiences, persistence/ephemerality of traces), through which what appears to be “individual choice” is shaped by relational infrastructures (Hine, 2015, 14–16; 24–27). Put simply, media are constitutive of culture, and they shape lifeworld (Carey, 1989, 13–36).

In everyday practice, recommendation algorithms, notification design, and visibility rules organize what becomes noticeable and consequential, shaping how authority is accrued and what counts as participation (Bucher, 2018, 1–10). A group chat, for instance, operates as a micro–infrastructure of community: it coordinates knowledge, redistributes attention, and opens micro–negotiations over importance, urgency, and the division of care — in short, they structure shared life (Taylor, 2018, 1–14).

Because online publics are scaled and overlapping, actors routinely navigate “context collapse” and “imagined audiences” (Marwick & Boyd, 2011, 115–124). Consequently, there is no single “global” mode of use: the same feature is translated into local genres of participation, authority, and care — from norms of response time and the ethics of “seen/reply” to forms of address, honourifics, and turn–taking that mirror hierarchies of age and status (Baym, 2015, 93–112). Shared access and multilinguality further recalibrate who is able to speak and what should persist, while studies of “networked religion” offer valuable cultural lenses for analyzing belonging and power (Campbell, 2012, 64–72).

Authority and community boundaries are organized through the governance of visibility and maintenance labour: who has access, who moderates, how decisions are enforced, and who bears the costs of participation (Roberts, 2019, 1–14)? Methodologically, this entails following situations rather than applications, and tracing sequences across spaces and formats. Hybrid fieldnotes and triangulated traces (timestamps, edits, forwarding pathways, and shifts in audiences) support step–by–step analysis, alongside a reflexive practice attentive to how the researcher’s presence reshapes the field (Geiger & Ribes, 2011, 1–10).

3.3. Ethics: Use, production, and analysis in digital environments

If platforms are environments of life, then using, making, and analyzing digital content are morally inflected from the outset. In the ethnographic tradition ethics is inseparable from reflexivity and thick description (Geertz, 1973, 3–30; Hine, 2015, 186–189; Pink et al., 2016, 1–19). This applies equally online: »Quo-

ting from online material became a practice to be undertaken very carefully, as it places the material into a new context, forging new relations of visibility« (Hine, 2015, 187).

Thus, ethics is not an add-on but a design precondition governing the entire data life cycle, including: what to collect, how to store, how long to retain, who may access, and under what conditions sharing or archiving is legitimate? Consent is treated as an ongoing relationship, oriented to contextual integrity, respecting audience norms and privacy expectations specific to a setting (Hine, 2015, 186–189). Where possible, data minimization prevails (Kitchin, 2014, 218).

Co-responsibility also concerns how we handle traces (logs, histories, meta-data) which must be interpreted with context and, where feasible, checked collaboratively with participants to avoid extractivism and honour actors' own meanings (Geiger & Ribes, 2011, 1–10). Metrics can help, but they are indicators, not truths: they suggest patterns that require qualitative testing and social-historical situating (Kitchin, 2014, 169–170; 224–226).

An ethical orientation coheres around three families of virtues. Firstly, truthfulness, which includes accuracy, contextualization, and clear labeling of methods and limits (Boellstorff et al., 2012, 129–150). Secondly, justice and inclusion require attentiveness to how algorithmic selection and research design can re-produce inequality and exclusion (Bucher, 2018, 1–10; Roberts, 2019, 1–14). Thirdly, care and co-responsibility call for sensitivity to privacy and vulnerability, to the often-invisible maintenance work that keeps communities and infrastructures usable (moderators, volunteer admins, family caregivers), and to the moral costs borne by those who sustain shared spaces (Taylor, 2018, 1–14). Rather than letting “what is measured becomes the goal,” digital anthropologists subordinate measurable traces to the meaning of practice, the well-being of participants, and the integrity of communities.

Conclusion

Read through the conciliar key of *Gaudium et spes*, convergences between digital and Christian anthropology appear as “signs of the times”, not curiosities but signals of deeper cultural and epistemic shifts. This article has shown that these convergences are not merely thematic parallels, but analytically productive points of dialogue for interpreting digitally mediated everyday life. The digital age thus becomes both a locus of anthropological reconfiguration and a privileged horizon for theological discernment on dignity, relationality, and transcendence.

At the level of identity, both traditions center a relational, narrative self. Digital anthropology's account of sequenced micro-practices, audience calibration, and storied belonging meets Christian anthropology's claim that the self is constituted in relation and gift. What emerges is a shared diagnosis of hybrid presence, life as sign and body, online and offline, where gestures and stories

mediate belonging. Rather than dissolving personal agency, these conditions call for deeper agency and accountability in how we are present to one another.

At the level of culture, both frames reject media neutrality. Platforms operate as environments that structure perception, visibility, authority, and community, normalizing tempos of attention and rules of recognition. Digital anthropology names the infrastructures, recommendation loops, maintenance labour, visibility regimes, while Christian anthropology offers the horizon of *communio*: proximity over spectacle, community over aggregation. In this context, *communio* denotes not simply social connectedness, but a normative vision of relational life ordered toward mutual recognition, responsibility, and the common good. Together, these perspectives clarify how digital environments can be evaluated not only descriptively, but also normatively.

At the level of ethics, both align around co-responsibility. Reflexive, contextual practice, including consent as relationship, respect for contextual integrity, and care for the vulnerable as well as the often-invisible labour that keeps spaces usable, converges with the ordering of communication to truth, justice, and the common good. The analysis demonstrates that ethical evaluation in digital environments cannot be reduced to compliance or optimization but must attend to relational consequences and shared responsibility. Practically, this means guarding data dignity (the person over the profile), pursuing algorithmic justice (bias testing, human oversight, intelligible explanation), and widening digital inclusion so none are excluded from participation and care.

As a conceptual and synthetic contribution, the article does not aim at detailed empirical case analysis, but rather at clarifying analytical categories and points of convergence that may inform and orient future empirical research across diverse digital contexts.

Underlying these three analytical levels is a shared methodological posture of reciprocity. Ethnographic co-production, working with people, rhymes with the conciliar posture of listening. This convergence supports the article's proposal of a synthetic analytical framework oriented toward thick description before prescription, qualitative judgment over measured metrics, and the co-design of norms and practices with affected communities.

If these convergences are “signs of the times” the task is twofold: analytically, to specify how platformed life reshapes personhood, belonging, and authority in concrete settings; practically, to translate insight into habits and designs that honour the person and serve *communio* and the common good. Both perspectives resist letting metrics set the terms of value: relation before reach, quality before quantity. In this sense, the scientific contribution of the article lies in offering an interdisciplinary framework that enables both critical analysis and normative discernment of digital everyday life. Read in this light, the digital environment is not only a problem to manage but a call to discernment — a call to think and act together so our networked lives become more truthful, more just, and more human.

Bibliography

- AN. *Aetatis novae* (22 February 1992). Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral instruction *Aetatis novae* on social communications. *The Holy See*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/index.htm (28.1.2025)
- Ančić, Nikica (2007). Tumačenje “znakova vremena” — zaboravljena zadaća Crkve? *Obnovljeni Život*, 62(1), 31–54.
- Baloban, Stjepan (2013). Današnji znakovi vremena i poslanje Crkve. *Nova prisutnost*, 11(3), 381–395.
- Baym, Nancy K. (2015). *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bernadić, Mario (2022). Digitalna komunikacija kao novi stil života u zatvorenom svijetu. *Vrhbosnensia*, 26(2), 291–311.
- Boellstorff, Tom (2015). *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton: Princeton University.
- Boellstorff, Tom; Nardi, Bonnie; Pearce, Celia; Taylor, T. L. (2012). *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton: Princeton University.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University.
- Buber, Martin (1970). *I and Thou*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Bucher, Taina (2018). *If... Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Campbell, Heidi A. (2012). Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 80(1), 64–93.
- Carey, James W. (1989). *Communication as Culture*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Cassirer, Ernst (1944). *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven: Yale University.
- CP. *Communio et progressio* (23 May 1971). Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral instruction *Communio et progressio* on the means of social communications. *The Holy See*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/index.htm (28.1.2025)
- Espeland, Wendy Nelson; Stevens, Mitchell L. (1998). Commensuration as a social process. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24, 313–343.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gehlen, Arnold (1980). *Man in the Age of Technology*. New York: Columbia University.
- Geiger, R. Stuart; Ribes, David (2011). Trace ethnography: Following coordination through documentary practices. In *Proceedings of the 2011 44th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (pp 1–10). Piscataway: IEEE.
- Geismar, Haidy; Knox, Hannah (Eds.) (2021). *Digital Anthropology*. London: Routledge.
- GS. *Gaudium et spes* (7 December 1965). Paul VI, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, *The Holy See*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm (28.1.2025)
- Hine, Christine (2015). *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied, and Everyday*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- IM. *Inter mirifica* (4 December 1963). Paul VI, Decree on the Media of Social Communication *Inter mirifica*. *The Holy See*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/index.htm (28.6.2025)
- Kitchin, Rob (2014). *The Data Revolution: Big Data, Open Data, Data Infrastructures & Their Consequences*. London: Sage.

- Madianou, Mirca; Miller, Daniel (2013). Polymedia: Towards a new theory of digital media in interpersonal communication. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 16(2), 169–187.
- Marwick, Alice E.; Boyd, Danah (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately?: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, 13(1), 114–133.
- Miller, Daniel (2011). *Tales from Facebook*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Miller, Daniel; Costa, Elisabetta; Haynes, Nell; McDonald, Tom; Nicolescu, Razvan; Sinanan, Jolynna; Spyer, Juliano; Venkatraman, Shriram; Wang, Xinyuan (2016). *How the World Changed Social Media*. London: UCL.
- Miller, Daniel; Slater, Don (2000). *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach*. Oxford: Berg.
- Novak, Krunoslav; Uldrijan, Ivan (2020). Digitalni svijet kao novo područje (evandeoskog) naviještanja. *Bogoslovska smotra*, 90(3), 699–715.
- Novak, Krunoslav; Valković, Jerko (2016). Religija i Internet — novi izazovi življenja vjere. *Obnovljeni Život*, 71(3), 389–403.
- Pinckaers, Servais (1995). *The Sources of Christian Ethics*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America.
- Pink, Sarah; Horst, Heather; Postill, John; Hjorth, Larissa; Lewis, Tania; Tacchi, Jo (2016). *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.
- Porter, Theodore M. (1995). *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life*. Princeton: Princeton University.
- Ricoeur, Paul (1992). *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Roberts, Sarah T. (2019). *Behind the Screen: Content Moderation in the Shadows of Social Media*. New Haven: Yale University.
- Scheler, Max (2009). *The Human Place in the Cosmos*. Evanston: Northwestern University.
- Taylor, T. L. (2018). *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*. Princeton: Princeton University.
- TFP. *Towards Full Presence* (28 May 2023). Dicastery for Communication, Towards Full Presence: A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media. *The Holy See*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/dpc/documents/20230528_dpc-verso-piena-presenza_en.html (28.1.2025)
- Valković, Jerko (2024). Digitalna antropologija: Kako komunikacija u digitalnom okruženju utječe na čovjeka? *Diacovensia*, 32(2), 271–289.
- WCD (2014). Francis, Message for the 48th World Communications Day 2014. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (26.3.2025)
- WCD (2018). Francis, Message for the 52nd World Communications Day 2018. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (5.3.2025)
- WCD (2019). Francis, Message for the 53rd World Communications Day 2019. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (5.2.2025)
- WCD (2020). Francis, Message for the 54th World Communications Day 2020. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (5.2.2025)
- WCD (2021). Francis, Message for the 55th World Communications Day 2021. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (6.2.2025)

- WCD (2022). Francis, Message for the 56th World Communications Day 2022. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (6.2.2025)
- WCD (2023). Francis, Message for the 57th World Communications Day 2023. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (5.2.2025)
- WCD (2024). Francis, Message for the 58th World Communications Day 2024. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (10.2.2025)
- WCD (2025). Francis, Message for the 59th World Communications Day 2025. *The Holy See*, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.index.html> (26.3.2025)
- Zuboff, Shoshana (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Znakovi vremena u digitalnom dobu

Teorijska i epistemološka konvergencija kršćanske i digitalne antropologije

Lucija Mihaljević*

Sažetak

*Polazeći od shvaćanja digitalnoga ne kao funkcionalnoga komunikacijskoga sredstva, nego kao ambijenta svakodnevice, rad razvija zajednički analitički okvir kršćanske i kulturne (digitalne) antropologije, čitan u koncilskom ključu »znakova vremena«. Rad pokazuje da se, unatoč različitim epistemološkim polazištima, te dvije antropologijske tradicije susreću u razumijevanju osobe kao relacijskoga i narativnoga bića, oblikovanoga praksama, pripovijedanjem i odgovornošću u konkretnim društvenim kontekstima. Usporednom analizom crkvenoga učiteljstva o komunikaciji i suvremene digitalne antropologije razabire se njihova konvergencija na trima razinama: identiteta, kulture i etike. Na razini identiteta obje perspektive ističu relacijski i pripovjedni karakter sebstva, vidljiv u mikropraksama digitalne svakodnevice. Na razini kulture mediji se razumijevaju kao okoliši koji strukturiraju percepciju, autoritet i pripadanje, a ne kao neutralni kanali. Na razini etike obje antropologije naglašavaju suodgovornost, slušanje i brigu za ranjive, nasuprot redukciji osobe na mjerljive podatke. Kao normativno mjerilo ističe se *communio*, s naglaskom na susret prije spektakla i zajednicu prije publike. Rad zaključuje da se u recipročnom dijalogu kršćanske i kulturne antropologije oblikuju smjernice za odgovornu digitalnu prisutnost usmjerenu prema dostojanstvu osobe i općemu dobru, uz kritičku distancu prema sveprisutnoj metrifikaciji digitalne svakodnevice.*

Ključne riječi: kršćanska antropologija; digitalna antropologija; relacijski i narativni identitet; mediji kao okoliš; digitalna etika; znakovi vremena

* Izv. prof. dr. sc. Lucija Mihaljević, Hrvatsko katoličko sveučilište. Adresa: Ilica 242, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska. E-adresa: lucija.mihaljevic@unicath.hr