Digital ephemera: fundamentals for defining the concept

Efímeros digitales: fundamentos para la definición del concepto

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◈ Abstract

The purpose of this work is to introduce and define the term *digital ephemera*, which is essential to describe a certain group of graphic design products. The methodology that was used was the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), that allows systematic comparisons between cases. It is a method that combines qualitative and quantitative elements to study complex social phenomena, which is especially useful when working with a small number of cases where the use of traditional statistical methods is not functional, because with QCA it is possible to shape social phenomena in terms of relationships between groups and interpreting these relations. In the results, it is described that *digital ephemera* are contents conceived for a short lifespan, designed to be transmitted in digital media, that involve multimodal messages combining images, videos, texts, sounds, or emoticons with various communicative intentions. In the conclusions it is established that the *digital ephemera* have an impact on visual communication, graphic design and the collective memory in the digital era.

Keywords: Digital ephemera, graphic design, visual communication

◈ Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es introducir y definir el término efímeros digitales, necesario para describir cierto grupo de productos del diseño gráfico. La metodología utilizada es el Análisis Comparativo Cualitativo (ACQ) que permite realizar comparaciones sistemáticas entre casos, es un método que combina elementos cualitativos y cuantitativos para estudiar fenómenos sociales complejos, es especialmente útil cuando se trabaja con un número reducido de casos donde no es funcional el uso de métodos estadísticos tradicionales, con el ACQ es posible modelar los fenómenos sociales en términos de relaciones entre conjuntos e interpretar estas relaciones. En los resultados se describe que los efímeros digitales son contenidos concebidos para una corta duración, diseñados para transmitirse por medios digitales, que involucran mensajes multimodales combinando imágenes, videos, textos, sonidos o emoticones con diversas intenciones comunicativas. Entre las conclusiones se establece que los efímeros digitales impactan en la comunicación visual, el diseño gráfico y la memoria colectiva en la era digital.

Palabras clave: Efímero digital, diseño gráfico, comunicación visual

◈ Introduction

The evolution of the internet has transformed the structure and the ways we represent and narrate information. This wide digital repository not only preserves our recent history, but also redefines how people interact with information. With the transition from Web 1.0 to 2.0, users assumed a dual role, transforming themselves from consumers to content producers. This transformation allowed a more active participation and a more dynamic idea exchange, diversifying the available web content. While the information is produced and distributed on the network, digital narratives adopt more dynamic, interactive and multidimensional formats.

This evolution has led to the boom of the ephemeral as a main component of the internet, which is more notable on social media platforms. Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and TikTok, among others, have embraced ephemeral communication, allowing users to share visual and multimedia content that disappears after 60 seconds and is public during 24 hours, among other timeframes. The capacity of sharing information in an instantaneous and global way, ease of access to a huge amount of information, are redefining the ephemeral communication in the digital era. In this context, sound and image banks are becoming increasingly relevant, integrating themselves into the communicative experience of our society. This phenomenon redefines the public exposition in the digital environment as part of daily routine, confirming the start of "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964). Consequently, the direct connection between individuals, information flows, visibility and the temporal exposition of messages, have become the norm in digitally connected society. This change has unleashed challenges and possibilities in multiple disciplines, focusing on graphic design, professionals of this branch have, more than ever, the opportunity to shape how they understand each other and transmit messages in a digital environment that becomes increasingly crowded.

Digital ephemera are a type of visual communications and their study lies at the intersection between visual, social and technological systems of graphic design, which is why the study does not belong to a single disciplinary domain, but rather it requires a multidisciplinary study. It is about a basic or pure research that looks to extend theoretical and fundamental knowledge about visual systems in general and *digital ephemera* in particular. The research used the QCA method, which was proposed by Ragin

in 1997, to carry out a theoretical-conceptual proposal. By using this focus, we can discover some significant similitudes and differences between variables and, therefore, it is possible to obtain a deeper understanding of the underlying processes. This method is particularly useful with a reduced number of data and concepts that are not apt for the conventional statistics and in situations where the patterns may not be immediately evident, which allows a detailed and complex exploration, that brings a solid and comprehensive definition of the digital concept toward the design discipline, which could influence the making and interpretation of a visual product, and help understand the context in which it was produced to explore its origin and evolution with time.

◈ Digital ephemera

The *digital ephemera* concept starts with a construction linked to the field of study of print culture, that functions as a fundamental basis for its transfer to the digital environment and to the technological-cultural context in which it is. With social media now being popularized, the use of digital media for the consumption and exchange of information has been expanded and modified. Therefore, it is relevant to study the communicative function of the *digital ephemera* in the context of the technological and cultural advance, in addition to its contribution to graphic design. To achieve this, a series of thinkers who have addressed concepts related to the phenomenon from different areas of study are presented. We begin by establishing the concept that is described in this proposal as *digital ephemera* and its origin.

Ephemeral nature in prints

It starts from the definition of the word "ephemeral", that, according to the Real Academia Española (2023), it is defined as something temporary or short-lived. In addition, according to Twyman (2008), ephemera is a Greek derivation formed from EPI = through and HEMERA = the day. However, to move the word "ephemeral" to the field of design, it is important to understand that the concept, *ephemeral prints* or *printed ephemera*, a term introduced by Maurice Rickards (1988), who pointed out that the ephemera applies to almost every printed material "that is not a book" (p. 13[1]), mainly of paper, which will be intended for short-term use. On the other hand, Rickards (1988) pointed out that the *Ephemera Society* first used in Great Britain the term *printed ephemera* in 1975 as "*the minor transient documents of everyday life*" (p. 13) to refer to the printed intended to fulfill a short-term function in everyday life, the term of which could refer to both manuscripts and printed matter.

This statement is reinforced by the study of other ephemeral products of the old printing press, such as publishing catalogs. Garone (2020) mentions that scholars of the subject recognize that catalogs in all their

[1] T. note: The cited pages refer to the original version of the book and may be different in other languages.

varieties primarily serve an advertising and commercial function, thus transcending their commercial role by being conceived as a means of disseminating information. Thus, as a historical source, catalogs "allow us to appreciate forms of commercial and advertising communication, conditions of distribution of goods, and aspirational modes of persuasion to encourage consumption" (Orellana, 2021, para. 8). Therefore, if ephemeral printed matter is linked to the beginnings of catalogs, these did not have a defined and stable frequency, and even circulated independently, with a new publication "replacing the previous one" (Garone, 2020, p. 4). In addition, it is noted that Orellana (2021) agrees that in a main characteristic of the printed is its transience, which means that they are ephemeral. It is understood that these documents are designed to end up in the garbage, which suggests that their purpose is to be "used and thrown away" (Orellana, 2021, para. 2), even if it is high quality and expensive, as is the case with labels for high-end commercial products such as wines, perfumes, etc.

Another way of naming the *printed ephemera* is *disposable literature*, given that there was a great deal of confusion on the subject among both the public and media professionals; Pimlott (2011) prefers this term to define the most ephemeral and least durable forms of print media, including commercial, religious, and political leaflets that are distributed on the streets, door-to-door, or placed on bulletin boards and shop windows, in cafes, buses, and trains, etc.

Although ephemeral materials are distinguished by their transitory nature and its short duration, paradoxically, they have attracted the interest of collectors and historians. Their transience, far from relegating them to oblivion, has served to spark a singular interest in their study and preservation. Their capacity to show a specific moment in time, and the unique perspective that they offer about culture and society of their era, have transformed them into valuable objects of analysis and thought. Therefore, these materials have proved that even though their original purpose is eternally ephemeral, they have a lasting and significant value as pieces loaded with intrinsic information. In consequence, some authors took to elaborate collections that contribute to the study initiated by Maurice Rickards for understanding both the social history and the development of printing and graphic design. In this way, Morris (2013) develops the Thesaurus of Ephemera Terms, where he brings together and classifies a series of documents that are considered ephemera, covering a wide range of topics and genres. The thesaurus is intended to help museums and organizations catalog and better understand ephemeral materials. What is relevant is that Morris not only includes *printed ephemera*, but also manuscripts, typed texts, and some digitally born elements.

For centuries, books stored all kinds of knowledge, but the emergence of printing and the commercial practices of the nineteenth century reveal the ephemeral nature of printed matter, reflecting the volatility and constant evolution of information. These printed materials are key to

understanding the transmission and circulation of ideas in different eras and contexts, a phenomenon that develops different characteristics of the digital era.

The transience of information in the digital age: the rise of ephemeral content

Internet has not only been a digital storage space to file the recent past, but it is also an evolving platform. This vast digital repository not only stores our current history, but is also redefining the way information is represented and narrated. As Cassany (2012) pointed out, "The advent of the internet has changed the rules of the game, moving away from a paper-based culture and facilitating the production, distribution, and access to audio, visual, and written artifacts in an easy, inexpensive, and universal way" (p. 21). This statement starts from a metaphor formulated by Tim O'Reilly in 2004, who explained a relevant change detected on the internet. During the era of web 1.0, a few professionals produced content for consumption by the majority; later, a new form of online interaction, known as Web 2.0, began to emerge. Cassany (2012) asserts that, at this new stage, many internet users took on a dual role: they were no longer just consumers of content, but also its producers. This transformation gave the opportunity to a more active participation and a more dynamic exchange of ideas, which diversified and hugely increased the available content on the web. Moreover, Cassany (2008) adds that the technological change and globalization modified the use of writing, meaning that technological and social changes have generated new forms in the production and practice of reading. For this reason, the author attributes that the electronic text shares properties with the internet and digital media, such as hypertextuality, multimodality, and virtuality. In a similar way, Salinas (2017) affirms that "eliminating the act of reading from consciousness is a characteristic of a society that communicates through multimedia technology by transmitting multisensory experiences, where knowledge and information are experienced rather than reasoned or repeated" (pp. 21-22). Therefore, "reading and writing are very different tasks when done online. Written artifacts are diversifying and becoming more sophisticated on the internet" (Cassany, 2012, p. 57).

As information that is produced and distributed on the internet, the traditional methods evolve. Digital narratives adopt more dynamic, interactive and multi-dimensional formats. This change in methods of representation and narration in digital media is a consequence of the reproduction of information on the internet. The ephemeral is a common constant on the internet and has become the norm on social platforms such as Snapchat, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, and others.

To contextualize the *digital ephemera* concept, it is necessary to consider that the platform Snapchat as the pioneer social media in incorporating

deliberately ephemeral content. Authors such as Grieve (2017) point out interactions based on photographs constitute a legitimate and authentic form of communication. Moreover, the same author proposes that interactions the platform offers can be considered as a conversation where people follow a series of pseudo-linguistic rules in terms of syntax and change. Communication is based on the feature called My Story, which acts as a repository for content published on the network. This allows *snaps* to be seen as a similar narrative to news channels in other social media. The platform allows users to share photos and videos with a maximum duration of 60 seconds, by which the content sender can choose to show it in a group format, to be public or private. In this way, this content is deliberately ephemeral, since it was published to remain for 24 hours and disappear after being seen or at the end of the established time. After the platform gained popularity with this format around 2011, other social media creators like Facebook or Instagram incorporated it, naming their adaptations as *Stories* or temporary statuses, as in the case of WhatsApp. In this sense, Instagram is a good example of a entirely visual social network inspired by the square format of Polaroid cameras and their developing filters, which over time has ceased to be a repository of images and has become a social network that promotes "immediacy and the phatic function, hindering reflection and slow processing." (Aguilar, 2020, p. 3).

Faced with this communication landscape that breaks with the flow of one-way messages, the TikTok platform, which was initially known for the creation of short music video clips, now offers the possibility of making videos lasting between 15 and 60 seconds. In addition to recording, it allows users to include sound effects and music, as well as graphics, text, stickers, filters, color and lighting retouching, timing, etc. This social media platform represents a form of communication where video prevails. In this digital space, as well as other platforms, technology allows information to be presented verbally, moving away from the need for written messages and returning to the paradigms of oral communication, now through digital means.

In this context, sound and image banks are becoming increasingly important. According to Carrillo (2004), these multimedia resources are becoming an integral part of the communicative experience in our society. This is possible thanks to tools that make it possible to represent and communicate new fresh and appealing ideas, which change the way we communicate and understand the world. This evolution in communication is not only limited to the proliferation of videos, but also extends itself to other aspects of digital technology. The capacity of sharing information in an instantaneous and global way, the possibility to interact in real time with people all around the world, and the ease of access to an immense and ever-growing amount of information is just one of the factors that are redefining ephemeral communication in the digital age.

The memeory concept and the digital era archive

For millennia, human beings have searched to document histories conveying information through narratives, images and written text. However, the representation and redistribution of narratives through digital media have altered how we understand and experiment the past. In this way, Wilson (2009) considers that technological media have introduced metanarratives through online databases. Even though it is common to associate memory with the experience of the past, "digital media give rise to the capacity to 'adapt' and 'forget' through a condition caused by generational editions of memory" (Wilson, 2009, p. 184), which significantly impacts the collective memory. In other words, digital technology allows to modify and adapt our memories, just like an editor changes a text. In this sense, this phenomenon raises doubts about the legitimacy of authorship and the accuracy of historic narratives, which can lead to the creation and distribution of multiple versions of the past. In addition, the academician Mayer-Schönberger (2009) provides a perspective in which he suggests that the information posted on the internet can be easily misunderstood or get out of context.

On his behalf, Bannon (2006) recognizes that new technologies support people and organizations in their memory processes, emphasizing this human activity as a complement that constitutes the duality of memory between knowledge and oblivion, interpreting the mind's notion as a computational mechanism. In this way, his contribution accentuates the need of considering both benefits and challenges that the new technologies present to our relationship with the memory and the information in the digital era. Moreover, Mayer-Schönberger (2009) focuses his study on what he calls *digital memory,* a field that has gained relevance as our lives become increasingly digitized. In his attempt to protect personal data and prevent the indefinite storage of information on the internet, he proposes the implementation of termination dates for information. He calls this innovative concept default expirations. His proposal represents a potential solution the privacy and security of personal data in the digital world.

As more people use social media apps to chronicle the events of their lives, it becomes crucial to seeks ways to archive published and shared media in order to preserve memory. Anderson (2020) emphasizes that the use of these platforms today requires consideration of backing up, saving, migrating, and archiving content for the future, in order to avoid losing the past. In the same way, Bayer *et al.* (2015) add that the temporary characteristics of social media mold the use and perceptions of a given medium. They also prove that social media are valued in part for their archiving capabilities, which allow people to organize, document, and remember meaningful personal experiences from the past.

Ephemeral perceptions of social media

From the arrival of Snapchat, ephemeral social interaction has become popular all around the world, which caused a meaningful change in social media. The ephemeral nature of this application began to be used in everyday life, with the term Snap becoming part of the communication experience. In this way, authors such as Kircova *et al.* (2020) support the idea that social media change everything, including language, and have the power of adding new words to people's vocabulary. Based on the same principle of social media that are characterized by "being temporary available", it is believed that a visually oriented culture has been fostered, given that communication is based on photographs. However, these platforms have constantly progressed, including new functions. Instagram stories are a clear example, since now users can see how many people have seen their "stories" and who they are. These types of features raise questions about privacy and broaden the perspective on mechanisms for communicating on social media.

This phenomenon transformed social media, but also got the attention of scholars when talking about being present "in the moment". In this way, Bayer *et al.* (2015) investigated the relationship between ephemeral and Snapchat user's experiences to verify if the platform is related with social and emotional experiences for it ephemeral nature. Results show that Snapchat interactions are considered more pleasant and create a more positive mood, but they are considered less supportive. This type of interactions is also studied in the marketing field, Trounce (2018) defines the ephemeral content in social media as something that creates a sense of urgency driven by fear of missing out (FOMO for its acronym), based on how users react to such content.

Other similar concept is the case that "these platforms show content during a limited period of time and they use the principle of "burn after reading" (Van Nimwegen y Bergman, 2019). This principle assures that the shared content gets self-destructs after a certain period of time. In addition, Villegas and Castañeda (2019) quote Sedek and Śląski to understand users' dynamics on digital content. This understanding has facilitated the collective construction of alternative communications based in a common cultural caudal. This has given rise to the term *digital content* to consolidate a definition that refers to multimodal messages transmitted through social networks that combine images, text, sounds, or emoticons to convey communicative intentions, becoming a tool used by both ordinary users and organizations and brands seeking a presence in digital media. In this sense, Villegas and Castañeda (2019) mention that integrating digital content into social media becomes relevant for the visual communication design. However, further research is needed into its communicative effectiveness, which depends on image interpretation and on fields such as the psychology of perception, semiotics, and communication.

Culture of the ephemeral

Information and communication technologies (ICT) have transformed communication due to the *online* social media boom. These have interconnected millions of people globally, changing personal interaction and revolutionizing communication between companies and their clients for more efficient information exchange. In this way, Berlanga and Martínez (2010) point out the need to take advantage that social media offer, where the use of text and images that complement each other prevail, especially in terms of immediacy. In today's culture, oral discourse is enriched by the representative nature of its social group, paying greater attention to iconic and audiovisual language. Nonetheless, it keeps the importance of verbal language, "since the word is the most powerful communicative instrument human beings possess" (Berlanga and Martínez, 2010, p. 54).

Nowadays, they are a great number of tools that were created for different tasks, such as blogging, sharing images or videos, building encyclopedia sites and connecting through social media apps. These tools, once used exclusively by experts, are now accessible to everyone and are an integral part of daily life. This democratization of access to information has allowed millions of internet users to actively participate in the creation, distribution and content consumption. Meaning that, now they are not only spectators, but the can have an influence on the internet's information, promoting creativity and diversity in digital content. In this way, immediacy is an essential component of the ephemeral culture. Monfort (2013) points out that:

> The addressee of the information demands that it be accurate, well-researched, and high-quality, but at the same time instantaneous. This is because the new cocktail is seasoned with the appearance of smartphones, which allow people to interact wherever they are, to be the first ones to know the news at any time, having all the possibilities in their own hands, without having to wait to arrive home or to the office to sit in front of the computer. (pp. 270-271)

From an integral perspective, technology reconfigures society in a *connective-digital* environment, giving rise to a generation that grew up immersed in this panorama. This phenomenon was defined by Piscitelli (2009), who analyzes how digital technology and new generations are intertwined, describing them as *digital natives.* This author states that:

> Consumers and future producers of almost everything that exists (and that will exist) are digital natives, and between both generational cuts (or populations) distances are infinite, and communication and behavioral coordination possibilities become terribly difficult, if not impossible, unless intergenerational technological mediators exist (a path that some of us embarked on many years ago and that should be codified and institutionalized much more). (p. 41)

On the other hand, some other authors have made contributions to the concept, such as Orellana and Etcheverry (2016), who mention that digital natives are "those who have grown up under the influence of technologies, distinguishing themselves from digital immigrants" (p. 66). Hence, digital natives are the main authors of ephemera, since, according to Orellana and Etcheverry (2016), the network is their socializing element, and at the same time they learn with it, contributing to and from the network. The connective-digital environment provides experiences that combine the participation on social media, the production of multimodal content and discursive codes from platforms. This resonates with a generation that has normalized the digital public exposure and "the idea that the Internet functions as an amplifier of situations from the analog world" (Gallardo-Paúls y Enguix, 2016, p. 49). This phenomenon confirms the principle of McLuhan where " the medium is the message". McLuhan (1964) maintains that the way we transmit and receive information is more important that the information itself. This concept comes from an analogy with electric light, saying that light is information, that is, *a mean without message.* This means that, in the social consequences of any medium, the result is an extension of ourselves (McLuhan, 1964). Therefore, connectivity and information flows, as well as visibility and transparency, have become the norm.

The graphic designer and creator of digital ephemera

The increase of digital contents throughout the years has caused a saturation of information. As a result, digitalization opens new paths for transmitting and receiving messages. These messages are ephemeral when they exist only within virtual environments. The challenges of design are located in complex contexts where even time has an influence on the performance of graphic solutions. This expands the scope of the graphic designer's work. However, the media moves the power of products to consumers, they challenge notions of privacy and interest, and take up a large part of people's time. Therefore, it is considered that these contents have transformed the way we interact. Perception processes imply actions to understand and assimilate the message, and the designer has the responsibility to analyze and respond to this environment.

Graphic design faces new challenges due to the current technological and cultural progress, which may seem complex and stray from its main function: communication. Furthermore, as Davis and Hunt (2017) point out, visual artifacts such as logos or slogans do not usually solve difficult social problems on their own. Real change will come when problems at the intersection of visual, social, and technological systems are addressed. As a message creator for a specific audience, the designer should understand the crucial role that social media have with the interaction between users and contents. Therefore, it is essential to define a concept that is truly useful for graphic design and that also contributes to expanding knowledge about the evolution that the media has undergone over time.

The purpose is to transmit a concise and comprehensive message to a specific audience. It is essential to have a solid proposal that contributes to future generations of designers. This contribution is achieved through a deeper comprehension of discipline, through a holistic focus of graphic design. This focus should consider the users' needs, structuring of contents and transmission medium. Designers should adapt themselves to technological and cultural transformations to deliver aesthetically pleasing and effective designs for transmitting the message.

◆ Methodology

The proposed research is primarily based on defining a concept applicable to the field of graphic design. The problem arises because it is necessary to explore this new panorama that involves the graphic designer in the creation of messages that will be given off by a digital medium, mainly in virtual communities. This is due to the volatility and the constant evolution of information in the creation of contents at the digital era. For this reason, the bibliographic research and the applied instruments will serve as a basis for the shaping of the *digital ephemera* concept. Since these are considered a type of visual communication, their study is located within the social phenomena. Therefore, they do not belong to a single disciplinary domain. Instead, they require a multidisciplinary study that, "through its respective approaches and theoretical-methodological tools, enables a more complete and consistent analysis" (Rojas, 2013, p. 28) of the concept, where the document analysis and the data collection bind.

The research will use a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) proposed by Ragin (1987). According to Escott-Mota (2018), QCA "provides to social science in a baselined method in cases for a crossed analysis, combining the strengths of quantitative and qualitative methodology" (p. 57). This investigation methodology allows "to compare cases in a systematic way in order to identify patterns" (Stewart, 2024, para. 4). Thus, as Vegas (2016) said, QCA shapes social phenomena in terms of relationships between sets, interpreting these relationships as sufficient or necessary conditions, allowing for the codification and comparison of the information collected. In this way, QCA brings a basis to contribute to the development of theories and concepts that could be applied on the design field.

At first, an analysis was carried out to describe and represent documents in a systematic way. This process includes the selection, collection and organization of information in the theoretic basis, in order to achieve a convergence of results. At the moment of comparing the selected contributions, the contextual relation was analyzed to formulate the term *digital ephemera*, that could be seen on Table 1.

Tabla 1
Theory contributions of different authors regarding to the studied variables

Efímero	Medio	Transitoriedad	Lenguaje	Evolución
"Any 'non-book' printed matter, principally of paper, designed in the main for short-term use". (Rickards, 1988, p. 13).	"The catalog is designed to circulate information." (Garone, 2020, p. 4).	"The main feature of printed materials is that they are transitory, ephemeral; documents designed to end up in a trash can: it is understood that they are meant to be used and thrown away" (Orellana, 2021, para. 2).	"Follow a set of pseudo-linguistic rules in terms of syntax and turn-taking, and where a narrative forms over the course of the visual interaction" (Grieve, 2017, par. 6).	"Studying ephemera could contribute to an understanding both of social history and of the development of printing and graphic design". (Morris, 2013, p. 2).
"The short-term nature of ephemeral content creates a sense of urgency that's fueled by the fear of missing out (FOMO)". (Trounce, 2018, para. 12).	"The advent of the internet has changed the rules of the game for paper-based culture, facilitating the production, distribution, and access to audio, visual, and written artifacts in an easy, inexpensive, and universal way" (Cassany, 2012, p. 35).	"Temporal features of social media shape the uses and perceptions of a given medium, and research shows that social media are valued in part for their archiving capacity" (Bayer *et al.*, 2015, p. 956).	"Passing on narratives can bring about something like a shared common memory amongst a group of people, but through each act of human recall, listening, and storage its content is altered if only ever so slightly" (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009, p. 28).	"Thanks to digital technology, sound banks and especially image banks are becoming increasingly important as part of the communicable experience." (Carrillo, 2004, p. 9).
"The addressee of information demands that it be accurate, well-researched, and high-quality, but at the same time instantaneous." (Monfort, 2013, pp. 270-271).	"The term 'digital content' is a neologism used to refer to multimodal messages transmitted through virtual social networks" (Villegas and Castañeda, 2019, p. 259). Digital content "combines various modes of expression, including images, text, sounds, and emoticons to convey communicative intentions" (Villegas and Castañeda, 2019, p. 257).	"New technologies support people and organizations in their remembering processes, I wish to stress that other complementary human activity that constitutes the duality of memory, namely forgetting" (Bannon, 2006, p. 3).	"It promotes immediacy and the phatic function that prevents reflection and slow processing." (Aguilar, 2020, p. 49).	"Consumers and future producers of almost everything that exists (and will exist) are digital natives" (Piscitelli, 2009, p. 41).

"These platforms display content for a limited period of time and use the burn after read principle (Van Nimwegen y Bergman, 2019, p. 1060).	"The idea that the Internet acts as an amplifier of situations typical of the analog world" (Gallardo-Paúls and Enguix, 2016, p. 49).	Predetermined due dates "One possible way we can mimic human forgetting in the digital realm is by associating information we store in digital memory with expiration dates that users set" (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009, p. 171).	"Oral discourse is enriched by iconic and audiovisual language, which are privileged in today's culture." (Berlanga y Martínez, 2010, p. 47)	The internet is their socializing tool, and they learn online at the same time... Digital natives are no longer just textual, but also multimedia. Their sources and codes for recognizing their cultural environment are completed through the perception and decoding of images, audio, and video" (Orellana and Etcheverry, 2016, p. 66).
"It is these less durable, more ephemeral, forms of print media that I call 'disposable literature'". (Pimlott, 2011, p. 516).	"The medium is the message because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action". (McLuhan, 1964, p. 2).	"Digital media gives rise to an ability to 'version' and 'forget' through a condition brought about by generational edits of memory". (Wilson, 2009, p. 184).	"Social media changes everything, including the language, and has the power to add new words to the vocabulary of people" (Kircova *et al.*,2020, p. 2177)	"Eliminating the act of reading from consciousness is a characteristic of a society that communicates through multimedia technology by transmitting multisensory experiences, where knowledge and information are experienced rather than reasoned or repeated" (Salinas, 2017, p. 57).

Source: Compiled by authors.

The analysis is carried out by segmenting the information contained in this research, comparing the characteristics of ephemeral printed matter and transferring them to social media in the digital age. As seen in Table 1, the first variable (ephemeral) searches for the relationship between the term *printed ephemera* and the temporary nature of social media, highlighting that the temporary nature of *printed ephemera* gives them a limited lifespan, with an impact that is often short-lived. In contrast, social media operate in a digital environment in which information has a constant influence. This affects the necessity of users for immediacy and the way how they perceive information. Therefore, this difference in temporality has an influence on the way how information on each media is consumed and valued.

On the other hand, the second variable (medium) highlights that the internet is a medium that allows for the dissemination of and access to a vast range of content in an efficient and accessible manner. It emphasizes the diversity of ways in which information is presented, indicating that presentation and format have a significant impact on its perception and understanding. In contrast to the above, printed catalogs are distinguished by their function as a medium for circulating detailed information to a wide audience and their durability over time when archived.

The third (transience) contrasts ephemeral print media with the ability of social media to modify and adapt narratives, which influences the way stories are constructed and transmitted in this digital environment. While ephemeral printed materials reside in the collective memory for a short period, social media allows memories to be constantly modified and adapted, influencing the way information is remembered and forgotten. Digital media, including social media, offer new ways of documenting and experiencing the past, introducing "meta-narratives" and raising questions about the authorship and accuracy of historical narratives. Despite the challenges they present for reactivating memory, their ability to archive and organize meaningful experiences can contribute to the construction of a new form of memory over time.

For the fourth variable (language), it is noted how ephemeral printed matter resembles the brief, visual posts shared on social media. Both media enable communication, reflecting the importance of considering context and temporality when interpreting online information, which is why it is considered a legitimate and authentic form of communication.

Finally, the fifth variable (evolution) shows how the evolution of print and digital communication over time has been fundamental to the preservation of history and has influenced the way content is produced and consumed, transforming participation, learning, and reading. This process has been especially significant for younger generations, who have grown up immersed in a multimedia environment.

Once the above had been addressed, the present research refined the content to highlight representative phrases, from which codes were generated for each analyzed segment. The order of representation for each variable is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Representative phrases of each variable

Efímero	Medio	Transitoriedad	Lenguaje	Evolución
Temporary nature of printed materials and social media.	The internet as an efficient and accessible medium for disseminating content.	Relationship between printed transience and duality of memory in social media.	Visual communication through visual and brief forms on *printed ephemera* and social media.	Evolution of printed and digital communication in preserving history.
Brief and fleeting impact of ephemeral printed matter.	Social networks with an emphasis on immediacy and brevity of content.	Difference between perception and valuation of information.	The importance of context and timing in online interpreting.	Influence on content production and consumption, transforming participation, learning and reading.
Demand for immediacy on social media.	Significant impact of presentation and format on the perception of information.	Contrast between the transience of print media and the adaptability of social media.	Oral discourse enriched by the iconic and audiovisual language of social media.	Significant impact on younger generations immersed in a multimedia environment.
Dynamics of consumption and dissemination of content.	Difference in the perception and assessment of information.	Impact of memory on the construction of digital narratives.	The environment and the moment in which the information is shared.	Transformation of the communicative experience in society over time.
Sensation of urgency.	Contrast between durability of information in catalogues and ephemeral temporality of social media.	Social media are valued for their file capacity.	They add new words to people's vocabulary.	

Source: Compiled by authors.

Finally, representative phrases were refined and a selection of codes for each variable emerged. This made it possible to identify similarities, differences, and patterns among them, which formed the definition of the concept of *digital ephemera* represented in Table 3.

Table 3
Representative phrase codification of each variable

Efímero	Medio	Transitoriedad	Lenguaje	Evolución
Transience	Efficiency on the internet	Transience	Visual communication	History preservation
Short duration	Transience on social media	Collective memory	Interpretation	Transforms production and consumption.
Immediacy	Information presentation	Adaptability	Communicative authenticity	Digital natives
Content dynamic	Availability online	Digital narratives	Information perception	Communicative transformation

Source: Compiled by authors.

◈ Results

As a result of the comparative analysis, the study establishes that the concept of *digital ephemera* is based on the understanding of the term ephemera used in various disciplines. This concept is intertwined with the transience of print media and the durability and immediacy of content transmitted by digital technologies, especially social media. Furthermore, the transience of content creates digital narratives in the collective memory, forming an authentic language that conveys a message.

Therefore, *digital ephemera* are content conceived for a short duration, designed to be transmitted by digital means, involving multimodal messages combining images, videos, texts, sounds, or emoticons with various communicative intentions. Although such content may seem insignificant due to its transience, it acquires relevance in the transmission and promotion of ideas and, like ephemeral printed matter, becomes a reflection of the context in which it was produced, capable of providing information about the technology, type of composition, tools, current formats, and particular languages used in their creation, making them objects of study for the analysis of social relationships and characteristics of graphic design in their era.

The term *digital ephemera* applies to any digital information that is not intended to be permanent from the outset, such as social media posts or temporary status on messaging apps. However, this concept can also be extended to web pages, social media groups, and blogs, which, although intended to remain in place over time to establish reliable channels of communication between organizations or individuals and their audiences, require constant updating of their content and structure to reinforce or expand communication with their users. This concept adapts to and reflects the nature of digital communication, where information circulates and evolves rapidly.

◈ Conclusions

The definition of *digital ephemera* as content designed for a short duration and transmitted by digital media, combining multimodal messages, is crucial to understanding the evolution of visual communication in the digital age. This is because *digital ephemera* impact visual communication, graphic design, and collective memory in the digital age.

This content not only reflects the cultural and technological context in which it is produced, but also calls for study of how they influence the perception and consumption of information.

Digital ephemera, although transient, contribute to collective memory by reflecting specific moments in time. Therefore, it must be explored how this content influences the way information is remembered and forgotten in the digital age. The study of *digital ephemera* offers a unique window into how technology is redefining the way we communicate and remember data in a digitally connected society.

The creation of *digital ephemera* particularly challenges graphic designers to adapt to an ever-changing environment, which can impact the discipline by incorporating new forms and codes of visual communication.

A solid and comprehensive definition of the concept of *digital ephemera* is important for the discipline of design, as it can influence the production and interpretation of a visual product, as well as help to understand the context in which it was created and its evolution over time.◉

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