
A PHONE OF MY OWN. GENDER, RELIGION AND TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract: The invisibility of immigrant women has a negative impact on their integration into the host society. This article examines how access to technology, particularly mobile devices, is an element that can foster the empowerment of immigrant women with religious beliefs who live in the Raval neighborhood of Barcelona. A questionnaire was handed out to 238 women from different origins and different religions, which we complemented with six in-depth interviews. Women's empowerment in the public sphere and their resulting visibility will not be possible if they do not have their own digital tools to connect with the host society. Although 88% of the women we surveyed own a mobile device, possession is not everything. Digital competency (59% admit to having none) and sociolinguistic and cultural competencies are also necessary. In addition, social elements – such as an educational, work-related or social activity – are important in motivating them to expand their networks digitally, so that their use of digital tools does not imply shutting them up in their family's past: 58% of these women use new technologies to talk to family or other people in their home country.

Keywords: *Gender, Religion, Technology, Immigration, Women, Empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

Religious immigrant women who live in Barcelona are not the target audience of the Mobile World Congress, a major event for mobile technology on an international scale hosted by the city each year. This paradox – a hyperconnected city and groups of women who are cut off from digitalization – is the starting point for our research, which is intended to detect the reasons behind the social invisibility of religious immigrant women, and also to what extent their limited social presence is related to their access to technology in a context where “economic globalization has contributed to a new geography of centrality and marginality” (Sassen 1997).

48,485 inhabitants. 22,068 women. 45.7% of this total, immigrants. These are the numbers for the Raval neighborhood in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). In the heart of the Catalan capital, this area is outstanding for its concentration and combination of cultures, traditions, languages and religions from all over the world. The Raval is the center of a city, which is the center of a region (Catalonia, Spain) that has historically received immigration from all over. Although 52.4% of inhabitants consider themselves Catholics, 13 different religions are practiced in the area. Furthermore, in 2015, a law was passed declaring that fundamental equal rights between men and women shall be applied effectively in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Within this context, we gathered a sample of immigrant women from different faiths and religious traditions who live in the Raval neighborhood.

A great deal of attention has been paid to the migratory phenomenon and its technological impact (Kofman 2004). Increased efforts are being made to provide immigrant communities, particularly groups of woman with digital abilities. As pointed out by the United Nations, “Migration impacts on gender relations and female migration can be a driver of social change, increasing women’s economic and social empowerment” (UNFPA-IOM 2013, 46).

Earlier studies have shown that the connection between women, immigration and technology is an expanding field of study. In “Discurso, género e inmigración,” [Discourse, Gender and Immigration] Enrique Santamaría refers to the discourse focusing on immigration from non-EU countries, and insists that there is a gap in the knowledge of the specific battles and concerns affecting immigrant women in their communities (Santamaría 1997, 40). The religious dimension among immigrant

women is a characteristic that is being analyzed with increasing frequency in media, communication and culture studies (Ho and Dreher 2009, Lövheim 2015).

Likewise, Trend (2001, 1) upholds the concepts of mediation and invisibility as “characteristics of an age in which cyberspace has transformed much of material cultural into a vaporous cloud of signal and code”.

In their study on the participation of Spanish women in the social, economic, and professional spheres, Mally and Orlando (2015) provide context for the question of women’s role in public life and show how it has improved since the 1950s. They continue to point out, however, how the ratios in comparison with European standards are low. They also do not refer specifically to the situation of immigrant women, who are much more vulnerable when it comes to socialization (Stella-Orlando 2015, 31).

It is worth pointing out that, according to the latest report from the Mobile World Capital Barcelona Foundation (2016) on the digital gap in the city, there is a significant disparity between technology-related activities carried out by men and those carried out by women. The figures corresponding to the city as a whole do not reveal a digital gap; however, the results obtained for lower-income neighborhoods like the Raval with large immigrant communities do reveal that gap. Kofman has already called attention to the “masculine high-tech sector and the feminine intimate” (Kofman 2004).

GOALS

Given the aforementioned context, the main goals of this article are: *a*) to understand the importance of digital tools for immigrant women in the Raval, *b*) to find out whether these women have the same level of access to digital devices as men do, *c*) to learn why do they use said devices, *d*) and whether the devices are a tool for promoting integration and equality. We are asking these questions at a time when new technologies and mobile devices are accessible to the majority of the population. Precisely for that reason, their use has taken on a value that stretches far beyond the technological sphere and into the social one (Traxler 2015). In fact, this situation represents what authors like McLuhan have already remarked: technological advances bring about social changes.

The context and the data we collected have led us to situate this research within a theoretical framework that includes authors from a number of disciplines. Gender, immigration, communication, religion and sociology all join together to help us analyze the reality that is the focus of our study from a perspective that is both global and segmented at the same time. With regard to gender studies, our theoretical foundation is made up of authors such as Estelle Freedman (2007), Gillian Youngs (2004), Liesbet Van Zoonen (1994) or Carlos Orlando and Stella Mally (2015). Their studies focus on gender both from a social and a media-related perspective. Then there are studies on discourse in the media, such as the one by Karen Ross and Carolyn Byerly (2004) or the one by Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner and Carole Fleming (2004). Taking into account the influence of the migratory factor in our analysis, Kim Knott and Sean McLoughlin (2010) analyze the concept of diaspora in different religions. Croucher (2011) and Sadie Plant (1997) investigate the role and the social repercussions of digital tools for immigrant women with regard to the topics that interest us. Another aspect that structures this study is technology and its use within communities. In our research, we focused on women's individual use of their cell phones, although we should not forget, along with Brown and Dughid (2000), that "the technological reach that conquers distance doesn't necessarily provide the reciprocity that allows people to form, join, or participate in worthwhile learning communities".

METHODOLOGY

With the aim of answering the questions we laid out, we carried out a six-month-long study using two methodological tools: surveys and interviews. From May to November 2015, we interviewed a total of 238 immigrant women with different profiles and from different faiths who live in the Raval neighborhood. We contacted these women through the neighborhood organizations and associations that work with women who fit the profile we hoped to analyze. The associations were selected for their relevance, the social value of their work and its scope. Likewise, the diversity of profiles was a criterion to keep in mind when it came to choosing which organizations to work with for contacting the women. The organizations that collaborated in the study are: the Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Federation of Filipino Civic and Religious Associations in Barcelona, Lloc de la Dona, Obra Missionera Ekumene,

Barcelona-Centre Evangelical Protestant Church, Raval Interreligious Group, Community of the Lamb, Community of Sant'Egidio and the Catalan Islamic Cultural Center.

On the one hand, we survey the chose technique in order to achieve responses that would provide a representative and balanced scope (Kerlinger 1986) and to obtain suitably sincere information. The aim was to be able to analyze and assess comparable data in a quick, systematic and effective way (De Vaus 2014). It is also worth mentioning that, in addition to the closed-ended survey questions, the participants were given the possibility of expanding on the information in a section at the end reserved for comments. The questionnaire was divided into six categories so that we could focus our analysis on the different aspects we set out to study:

- Profile: to provide demographic and social background information on the women we surveyed.
- Internet: to study the levels of Internet use and access to websites among the women we surveyed.
- Social network sites: in this case, the questions refer to the women's presence in the aforementioned online spaces, the level of anonymity of their accounts, where their contacts come from, and their opinion regarding the sites' safety.
- Cell phones or smart phones: to find out to what extent the women we surveyed have access to said devices, what they use them for and in which languages.
- Opinion: we aimed at learning what do they think about the activities that take place in the digital realm and how do they regard their religion's and culture's online image. As such, the questionnaire ends with nine statements – some of them have to do with the image of immigrant women in the media and others discuss the convenience of new technologies and the women's own perceptions of their skills when it comes to using them.

300 surveys were handed out for the study, 238 of which were completed and returned. All 238 were filled out personally in paper format. In most cases, this occurred at the offices of the organizations that work with the women from different religions who responded to the survey. It is worth pointing out that the survey method is supported by other studies that are similar to ours, either directly or indirectly, including:

Medios de comunicación y religión en España. Una investigación sobre el estado de la comunicación mediática iglesia-sociedad [Media and Religion in Spain: A Study on the State of Church-Society Media Communications] (2005). Published by the Santa María Foundation and undertaken by the Comillas Pontifical University of Madrid and the Theological and Pastoral Diocesan Institute of Bilbao (IDTP), the purpose of the analysis is to identify the opinions of agents involved in Church-media-society communication with regard to the state of Church-society media communications. It uses surveys as both a quantitative and a qualitative method.

La brecha digital de género en la juventud española [The Digital Gender Gap among Spanish Young People] (2010), a study undertaken by the Complutense University of Madrid in the framework of the e-Igualdad.net project. In this case, the authors carried out an online survey involving 400 students from 10 high schools in five autonomous communities in order to analyze the existence of a possible digital gender gap among young people.

Based on our surveys, we observed that 50% of the women we surveyed are married, 79% have children, and 43% are aged between 30 and 49. Regarding their education, it is worth noting that 6% have no education, 15% finished primary school, and 31% received education equivalent to secondary school. In fact, the level of education is higher in some cases than among the male population, and there are cases where it is true that “migrant women often do not come from the poorest classes of their societies, they are typically more affluent and better educated than male migrants” (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002, 10).

The women come from countries such as the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Nigeria, Mali, Algeria, Morocco, Chile, Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia. Sociologist Jordi Moreras describes the migratory history of the Raval by asserting that its reconstruction will not be complete until it incorporates the people who are part of that history, who are also undertaking a parallel process of resignifying and appropriating that urban space (Moreras 1999, 134)

Although most of the cases correspond to Muslim women, our study also includes participants from various Christian denominations and members of the Hare Krishna community.

The other methodological technique used in our study is the interview, which helped us to complement and reinforce the data we compiled. In this case, it let us collect ideas and reflections, as well as adding new dimen-

sions to the issues at hand (Busquet, Medina and Sort 2006). The interviews were undertaken with six women who represented the six different communities we contacted. A video summary was created from these interviews, which has been uploaded to the Internet portal Women Tech Religion. The women we interviewed are Marta Vilalta, Protestant minister; Yara Veguirre, member of the Hare Krishna community; Malika Kbir, Muslim community; Malika Mayzou, Muslim community; Rosie de los Reyes, Filipino community; Assia Japjur, Muslim community. In addition, we also interviewed Louise Guido (February 2016), the founder of Smart Woman, an online and mobile platform aimed at empowering women all over the world through knowledge dissemination and the creation of online communities. Guido is also behind the Foundation for Social Change, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating and providing professional training for girls and women from developing countries, in many cases through the use of new technologies.

The interview is also a technique used in prior studies that have a similar focus. One example is *The Status of Women in the U.S. Media* (2015), produced by the Women's Media Center in the United States.

MY OWN SPACE/DIGITAL WORLD

Louise Guido (2016) explains that new technologies provide women with their own means of communication, which puts them into contact with other women in similar situations, outside their immediate surroundings. In that sense, women's access to technology is extremely relevant. The results of our study show that in the case of the Raval, 74% of respondents said they had an Internet connection at home, whereas 24% did not. Availability, however, is not always equivalent to accessibility. We should bear in mind that, in many cases, tradition allocates to men the activities that are most linked to independence or communication outside the family. In that sense, immigrant women are often the primary guarantors of tradition in some of these families. (Roque 1999, Al-Ali 2000). If we look at the example of families coming from Morocco, Roque (1999) proposes two types of families to take into account: traditional families – patrilineal and endogamous; and modern families – which are nuclear in nature. In the aforementioned classic and traditional typology, a closed-off community is defined in which the ties are very strong, but relationships between women are destined to be broken,

since women's tasks are ultimately centered on their husbands' families. Taking this fact into account, it is worth drawing attention to the duplication of points of reference for immigrant women in their host countries: those that correspond to their new external world, and those of their family circle. According to Ribas (1999), in this case the external points of reference do not always lead to changes in the internal ones. In fact, studies such as the one quoted reveal a profile of immigrants who do not entirely assimilate to their new environment and who preserve, or even reinforce, their roots.

When it comes to women, Guido (2016) and Herring (2005) highlight the importance of the concept of community on the path to gender equality. Friedman (2005) corroborates this, explaining how the horizontal organization characteristic of the Internet democratizes participation, allowing it to reach all social groups and providing them with a means of expression where they can convey their ideas and identities. New technologies emerge as a private space that women can call their own, so that their ties with other women remain unbroken even when they are immersed in their own families; virtual networks among women contribute to their empowerment (Youngs 2004; Herring 2005; Lövheim 2016), not just online and in digital spaces. This new virtual situation is the first step toward lending real-world entity to these relational networks.

Chambers, Steiner and Fleming (2004) have asserted that the Internet drives public discourse and reinforces the public sphere based on the logic of community. However, in the case of immigrant women in the Raval, the creation and consolidation of these networks that contribute to empowerment and equality goes beyond access to an Internet connection at home. In that regard, the access to digital tools and equality also has to do with the women's ownership of their devices and the systems to connect to the Internet. The data we obtained in that regard indicates that 88% of immigrant women in the Raval neighborhood have their own mobile phone, although the device is a smart phone in only 56% of cases. As for the number of women who own their own tablet, the figure is 29%.

Louise Guido (2016) also points out that in some countries where she is involved in direct interventions, there are many situations where women do not have a phone of their own because their husbands, fathers or brothers have made that decision for them. In some cases, access to a technological device, considered to be of value, is a right that men believe corresponds to them. One clear example of the situation is shown by the

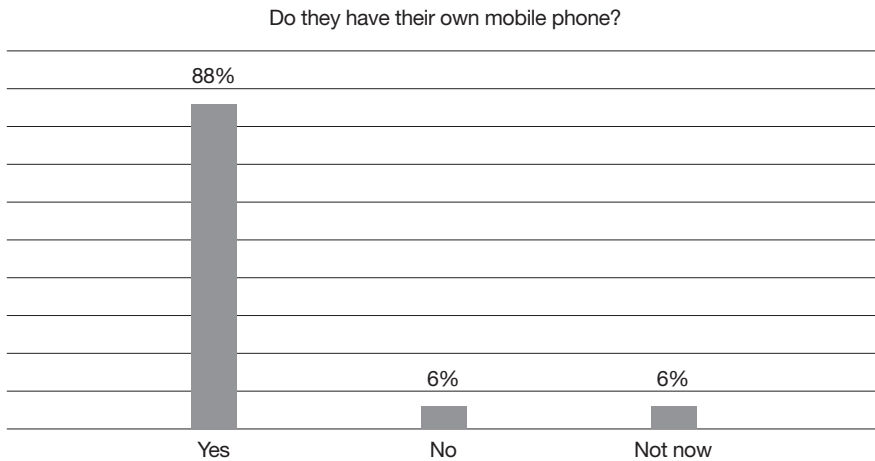


Figure 1.

project for a cell phone application called Zero Mothers Die. The initiative, created by the Catalan company Universal Doctor, provides pregnant women in countries such as Ghana, Gabon, Mali, Nigeria or Zambia with cell phones for the purpose of monitoring their pregnancies. According to Dr. Jordi Serrano Pons, CEO of Universal Doctor, the telephone is a tool that provides these women with daily advice, and it serves as a source of support for them at all times. The goal is to reduce maternal mortality, which numbers 300,000 women a year worldwide. According to Dr. Serrano Pons, the project is now handing out pink telephones to the women. The reason: because the phones were initially all ending up in the hands of the women's husbands, brothers and fathers. If they're pink, however, nobody takes them away, for aesthetic reasons. Now, the devices are known internationally as "The \$30 pink cell phone that could help save the lives of pregnant women".

Beyond the digital devices themselves, social network sites are a prominent part of the digital world for the women we interviewed. We discovered that in most cases the women have accounts on two specific sites: Facebook (24%) and Skype (67%) are the sites they are most familiar with. In general, other social network sites are not part of the everyday digital environment for immigrant women in the Raval. Few of them have accounts on YouTube or Instagram. Twitter is the least well known or used by the women we surveyed; in fact, 95% of them do not use Twitter or have a Twitter account.

The women's limited digital presence on social networks as indicated by our sample leads us to surmise that, although the tools are available, a lack of access is delaying women's empowerment, and at the same time, postponing the advance toward gender equality. Furthermore, we detected a certain mistrust of certain social network sites among the women we interviewed. According to Rosie de los Reyes:

Facebook can be dangerous if you use it for every activity. I do not put every activity in my life on Facebook. It is only if I want to share something.
(Rosie)

Other women we interviewed also launched severe criticisms of the site, arguing that it can be dangerous in terms of breaches of privacy and that many of its users can be thoughtless. Thus, the concept of community highlighted by Guido (2016) and also by Youngs (2004) – a community that women can build using digital means – is still limited by a lack of use (though most of them have access), whether by choice or due to other factors, of these spaces for dialogue and potential integration.

In that sense, it is also worth remarking that age is a factor that plays an important role. In the interviews we carried out, only one of the interviewees stated that she also uses new technologies at work. She was the youngest interviewee, Yara Veguirre, representative of the Hare Krishna community. Likewise, she had a more positive outlook regarding social network sites and spoke favorably about them, branching out beyond Facebook. Veguirre also uses Twitter and LinkedIn and believes that:

Internet lets people, and especially women, share their opinions and their beliefs and helps them interact more with people. (Yara)

For women with a similar profile, where digital tools are an inherent part of their daily lives, the confidence and abilities they possess when using those tools, as we will see later on, are more evident than in the case of women who do not use them since their everyday lives do not require it. As explained by Linda Stepulevage (2001): "Technology does not always have a distinct presence; it is interwoven into everyday life and involves continuous engagement." Her reflection leads us to analyze in the following section the influence of skill levels among immigrant women in the Raval when it comes to using the digital tools to which many of them have access.

FAMILIARITY WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND CONFIDENCE IN THEIR USE

The lack of use and in some cases the lack of access to new technologies is not the only factor that limits community building and digital equality among immigrant women in the Raval neighborhood. In the interviews we carried out we detected that in all aspects, there are concepts linked to new technologies that immigrant women in the Raval do not understand. This fact made it impossible for them to respond to some of the interview questions. We ask ourselves, then, to what extent availability and access to new technologies go hand in hand with making an ideal use of them. In fact, when we asked the women we surveyed whether they use the Internet, 12% answered that they did not know; 9% could not answer whether they own a tablet; 39% did not know whether they have a personal blog; 38% responded that they did not know whether they have a website, and 36% claimed not to understand the concepts related to social network sites. Furthermore, 31% of the immigrant women we talked with believed that they do not know enough about new technologies and how to use them. 38% answered that they did not know whether they had sufficient knowledge. As such, we see that many immigrant women in the Raval do not have the necessary skills to use digital tools to the full extent offered by the devices.

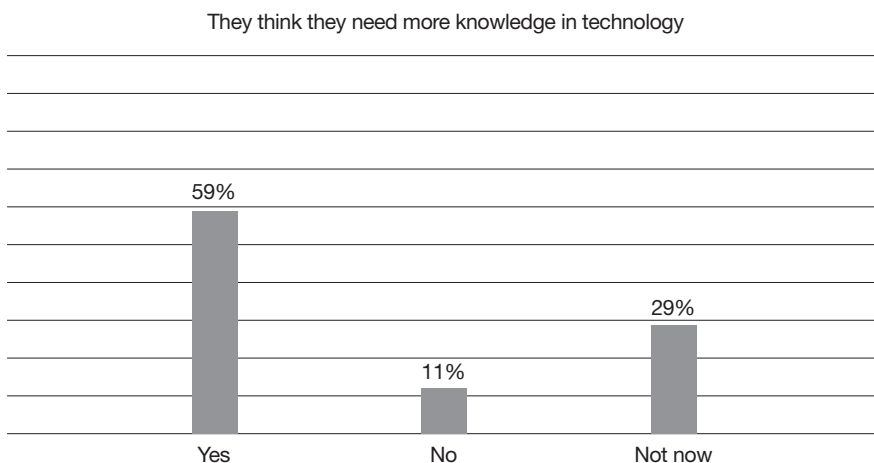


Figure 2.

While new technologies are a tool for empowerment and gender equality (Herring, 2005), the existence of a skill gap in terms of their use among immigrant women is a barrier that needs to be overcome. This gap, which is detected in the report from the Mobile World Capital Barcelona Foundation (2016), is confirmed in the Raval neighborhood. Furthermore, highlighting the activities for which these women use digital technologies, it is noteworthy that 31% report that they do not use the Internet to communicate with other people. In fact, 21% of these women do not make phone calls from a cell phone; they make calls from public telephones or at Internet cafés.

Aside from these women's familiarity with new technologies or their skill in using them, their opinion of new technologies and how much they trust them are also an object of this study. In this sense, it is worth highlighting that 48% of the women who use social network sites have opened accounts using their real names, but 15% use a pseudonym. Plus, 30% believe that the digital sphere is not the best place for self-expression. Traditional media are not better valued, however. In fact, 36% of the women we talked with believe that traditional media are not representative of religious immigrant women, 45% did not respond to the question, and only 20% believe that their profile does have representation in the media. When we asked if traditional media deal with issues and subjects that concern these women, 18% felt that they do not, 45% did not respond, and 36%, in this case, think that they do. Furthermore, when we asked whether the media portray a negative image of immigrant women in the same situation as the women we interviewed, 21% answered yes. According to Marta Vilalta, a minister at the Barcelona-Centro Protestant church:

You only see men in the features on immigrants; you don't see any women. Where are their stories? No one is telling them. We should use new technologies to provide visibility for these women and their problems. So long as their stories remain hidden, no one watches out for them. If we communicate those stories, then society can react. (Marta)

How women are represented in the media is not a trivial factor. Van Zoonen (1994) explains that the point of view that has served to construct reality in the media has been male centered and executed by those who have traditionally wielded power. She adds that the representations in mass media are not naive; they are executed within the framework of power relationships. In that same sense, Stuart Hall (1997) asserts that:

It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them – how we represent them – that we *give them a meaning*. [...] In part, we give things meaning by how we use them, or integrate them into our everyday practices. It is our use of a pile of bricks and mortar which makes it a ‘house’; and what we feel, think or say about it that makes a ‘house’ a ‘home’. In part, we give things meaning by how we *represent* them – the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them. (Hall 1997, 3)

Thus, in the representation and limited presence of immigrant women in online media, we detect the possible existence of a certain legacy of the traditional representation of women in traditional media, and we can deduce that the type of representation expressed by López Díez (2004) and Stuart Hall (1997) has created a certain pattern that may have an influence on the measured participation of many women.

It is worth noting that studies on the representation of women and presence, as well as the treatment of gender, are not limited to an analysis of traditional representation; they also touch on the lack of a feminine presence (which is implicit and explicit in many cases) in images, texts or media iconography (Bach Arús et al. 2000; Vígara Tauste and Jiménez Catalán 2002).

Krijnen and Van Bauwel (2015) provide further context for the issue, questioning to what point an entirely symmetric media representation between men and women would lead to a reassessment of social structures. Indeed, the authors highlight the importance of “how women are represented” as opposed to “how much”.

A WINDOW TO HOME AND ONTO THE WORLD

If we look specifically at the main ways in which the women we surveyed use new technologies, the majority use them for communicating with other people. However, in the results of our surveys we detected that in the case of immigrant women who live in the Raval neighborhood, although technology is used for communication and to foster community, in most cases it is not used to promote integration with other women in the city or with immigrants from other countries. Marta Vilalta states:

Immigrant women mainly use new technologies in relation to their immigrant status; because they have left behind their countries and their families, they will make bank transfers or use Skype to talk with relatives back home, etc. (Marta)

The immigrant women who use new technologies in the Raval neighborhood use them to reconnect with their roots and with the communities they had already created personally, in the countries where they were born. The data paints a clear picture; only 14% of the women we surveyed stated that they use social network sites to communicate with people who are not from their home countries. In fact, 32% admit that they use social networks to talk with family and a large portion (26%) say that the sites are a good tool to keep in contact with the people who still live in their home countries. In that sense, and according to the women we interviewed, being able to have face-to-face conversations with far-away relatives is a very important thing. Beyond simple conversation, thanks to tools like Skype immigrant women can continue to virtually experience common events and rituals in their countries of origin. Malika Kbir (a Muslim woman from the Raval who participated in the in-depth interviews) explains that:

Telephone conversations were boring and far too expensive. Now I can see my mother and find out how she's doing. We even have tea while we talk. (Malika)

Rosie de los Reyes says the same thing when talking about how important instant communication is for the Filipino community, since the community is spread out all over the world. Being able to see live images is also one of the most important factors for her. She believes that, with video support, people can share their ideas better, as well as their emotions. In any case, we found that although these tools are used to strengthen networks worldwide, currently they do not create new relationships in the host country. Further data confirm this: 31% of the women we surveyed use technology in their native language and not in Catalan or Spanish. As such, the tools' potential for promoting integration and equality is not entirely being harnessed.

Therefore, for women who have arrived in a new environment, digital technology can be an element that provides comfort and connection with their places of origin. According to Croucher (2011) this contributes

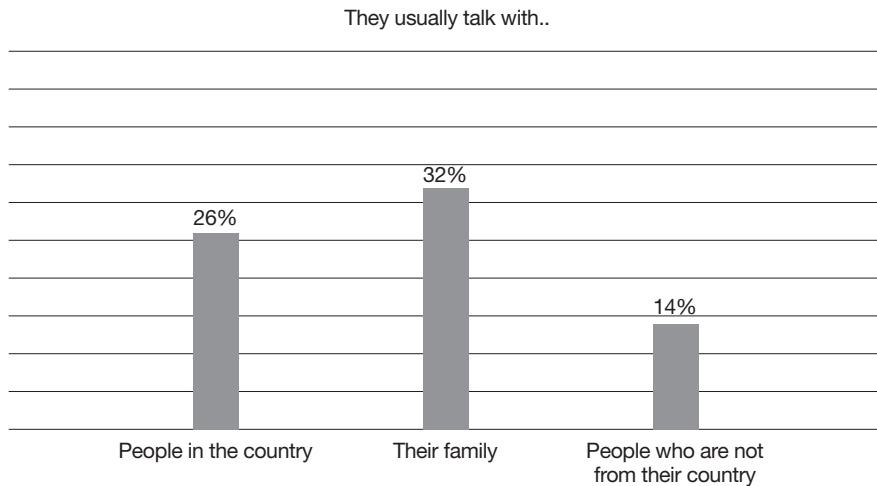


Figure 3.

to helping people overcome the sadness they may feeling during the initial period in a new country. However, 45% of the women we interviewed have lived in Barcelona for more than 10 years. The Web, then, is a non-space of absolute freedom that has two sides. On the one hand, it is a window onto the world and all its possibilities. On the other, it can further isolate women who are not open to their surroundings, which creates a “false freedom”. Furthermore, one of the aspects that Herring (2004) posited as an advantage of digital media – geographic dispersion or even anonymity, which allows for creating communities of interest beyond the local sphere – is thus called into question.

At this point, it is worth reflecting on women’s use of new technologies from the standpoint of Habermas’s “public sphere” (1989), which represents the space for free political deliberation and participation in the debate and critique of other spheres, such as government, business or family. A large number of studies (Benhabib 1992) have revisited the concept with a critical eye, since its initial formulation disregarded gender and gender differences. According to Chambers, Steiner and Fleming (2004) as well as Youngs (2004), the concept excludes women because women have always provided support to the activity of men as free and equal citizens, by acting from within the ‘private sphere’. For Van Zoonen (1991), women have historically been part of the public sphere, but their contributions have been obstructed, ignored and marginalized. On her

part, Rita Felski (1989) developed a counter-discourse to Habermas (1989), a feminist alternative to the model of the 'public sphere'. In that vein, the production and circulation of new alternative media for women generates and reinforces feminine identity and the notion of a women's community (Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004). The authors also assert that, although the idea was developed with print media in mind, the Internet can become a space of democratic expression for women: "Certainly cyberfeminists believe that a feminist counter-public can flourish in cyberspace, and that new communication technologies are liberatory" (Chambers, Steiner and Fleming 2004, 239).

Religion is an element of utmost importance for the women we surveyed, and their online activity – if it exists – shows this. In fact, 51% of the women we surveyed stated that they search the Internet for topics related to religion. However, some of the women we interviewed personally are reticent to look for information about religion on the Internet because of the amount of misleading information they find, which, according to them, is a source of prejudice. Yara Veguirre points this out, and Malika Kbir (Muslim woman from the Raval who participated in the in-depth interviews) explains that:

You find accurate information on the Internet, and you also find lies. That's why I prefer not to search for information on religion. (Malika)

On the other hand, 39% admit that they only communicate on social media with people from their same religion, although 75% explain that they belong to networks where there are users from other religions. Coinciding, however, does not imply contact, and it is far from implying membership in a strong interreligious community.

The study shows that for the moment, in the case of women who live in Barcelona's Raval neighborhood, new technologies do not contribute to entering into contact with other religions. This aspect leads us to intuit the presence of parallel societies that coexist within a larger society, but which do not respond to the concept of *multiculturalism*, since they do not come into contact (Lentin and Titley 2012). Some of the women categorically asserted what Roque (1999) and Guido (2016) point out: that many women remain rooted in their own traditions and religions. In some cases, they express that "there is only one" religion, and they are skeptical about looking for information online, since they explain that they have been learning about their religion all their lives. Malika Kbir,

who also refuses to look for information about religion online, was very vehement in her explanation:

I don't look online for information about my religion. We know how things work, and I have it all in my head. There's just one religion. There isn't anything to change. I know how it works, and that's that. If I have any questions, I have books. They tell me all I need to know. (Malika)

At this point, it is worth highlighting the study undertaken by Mia Lövhheim *Une voix à elles :jeunes, musulmanes et blogueuses* [A Voice of their Own: Young, Muslim, Women Bloggers] (2014). The research focuses on three blogs and the social network activities of three young Muslim women who live in Scandinavian countries.

Despite their differences, these three bloggers represent examples of how young women use new media, especially blogs, to participate in a mediatized public sphere, where they act as independent agents with the ability to participate in religious debate from a position of authority. (Lövhheim 2014, 318)

The study reinforces the ideas put forth by Chambers, Steiner and Fleming (2004) regarding the Internet as a space for women to express themselves and as a tool that contributes to equality. In that sense, the article "Las nuevas tecnologías como herramienta para la igualdad de género" [New Technologies as a Tool for Gender Equality] (Micó, Díez and Sabaté 2016) shows the aforementioned tools' potential for visibilization and integration, and how they are not always used to the full extent of their possibilities in the case of the Raval. Thus, we can see that, in this respect, reality and theory move in different directions. Especially taking into account the different social spaces and situations of the women in question.

CONCLUSIONS

The study we have presented in this text led us to reflect on different aspects associated with the issues that concerned us: gender, equality, integration, new technologies and religion. The analysis of the interviews we conducted, complemented by the theoretical perspective on the subject of our study allowed us to prepare a comparison that shows the situation

of immigrant women in the Raval with regard to the management of new technologies along the road to equality. This two-fold point of view helped us uncover the reality of the neighborhood. The conclusions of our study are presented in the following paragraphs.

First off, we detected that digital tools are an element that can contribute to integration and gender equality (Herring 2005) through the creation of a community beyond the immediate surroundings of the immigrant women who live in the Raval neighborhood. These tools are a means for creating networks (Guido 2016), which reach beyond the direct relationships these women can establish in their own environments. Authors such as Youngs (2004) or Chambers, Steiner and Fleming (2004) highlight how the digital sphere provides a space that expands Habermas's 'public sphere' (1989) and opens it up to include more than just men. It puts the public sphere within the reach of women who, represented most often by the media in traditional situations and positions (Van Zoonen 1994), contributed to the 'public sphere' from a modest and secondary position.

For this reason, we see the digital sphere and related tools as an important means of promoting gender equality (Youngs 2004; Friedman 2005). Digital tools provide immigrant women with a very important opportunity: expressing their opinions and interests, as well as their everyday concerns in a public digital space that, paradoxically, provides them with a certain digital intimacy, connects them with the world where they feel most comfortable (their home countries) and empowers them, giving them the possibility to become part of a community (Guido 2016) beyond the limits of their immediate surroundings.

In the case of the women we surveyed, access to this new space, which is generally widespread, also provides a potential path toward integration into the host society where they live (Croucher 2011). The case of the Raval is also exceptional. The number of cultures that coexist there is high, although a means for them to communicate and come together could promote the creation of new intercultural and interreligious relationships. We should reiterate that a large number of the women we surveyed (75%) stated that they encountered people on social networks who did not belong to their religion.

However, despite the broad possibilities we know are offered by new technologies, these are not used well enough by religious immigrant women in the Raval to allow for achieving the milestones we cited and harnessing their full potential. This research helped us understand the women's habits in terms of use and access to new technologies, in addition

to their perceptions and opinions about those technologies. We have seen that, for the time being, many of the women still do not use new technologies in their daily lives to communicate with other women in their new environment. As such, the communities that could be created have not been fully developed.

We realized that women who use new technologies and social networks are not using them to connect with the host society, but to remain connected to their roots. One of the most common reasons they use new technologies is to communicate with people from their home countries. Furthermore, most of them use their native languages to express themselves on digital platforms, which prevents them from being used as a tool for learning or gaining fluency in Catalan or Spanish. In that sense, Croucher (2011) presents the debate on media as two sides of the same coin for immigrants and highlights the importance of a midpoint between the two extremes.

One side argues that the more immigrants use host culture media, the less likely they are to “become” American. The other argues such media serve as a middle point during an immigrant’s transition. I take a middle ground on this debate, believing host culture media help during an immigrant’s adoption of US culture as long as they also consume some US media.

The lack of information on the use of these new technologies is another of the reasons we discovered as a factor that affects the situation. As we noted earlier, many of the women we interviewed do not understand the concepts inherent to digital platforms or tools; this fact shows us that having access to these tools is not tantamount to knowing how to use them well enough to harness all the advantages they offer. Linguistic capabilities and education – not just technological abilities – are the starting point for these women’s emancipation. As long as they only use mobile devices to connect to their home countries, there will be no visible contribution to their new host societies. “The goal of literacy remains elusive. By attempting to empower these women, feminism contributes to the broader project of redressing global inequalities” (Freedman 2007, xvii).

Religion and traditions are elements that can be – and are – adapted to digital space. In the case of many immigrant women in the Raval, however, they are still an obstacle to entering the digital sphere. The combination of culture and religion still relegates some women to the private sphere (Ribas 1999). And many of them keep religion separate

from the digital realm and focus exclusively on family-related and domestic issues, reserving religious pursuits for when they are offline. In that sense, the age factor plays an important role. We detected that the younger women we interviewed, who also use digital technology in their day-to-day academic or professional lives, are more likely to be open to digital tools in the spiritual facet of their lives.

It remains to be seen in future analyses on the subject whether these women are interested or concerned with acquiring the necessary skills to adequately use these new tools; other aspects to investigate include whether the situation is similar or different in other areas of Barcelona, or even in other cities, regions or countries.

Without better access to and use of mobile devices, it is unlikely that the goals of the European Network of Migrant Women will be achieved, i.e., “increased positive image building of migrant women’s potential and contributions in EU economies and societies” with the aim of achieving “a positive impact in decreasing the level of gendered racial and xenophobic discrimination against migrant women”.

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ANNEX I

Survey sample

GENERAL DATA

Name:

Age:

Country of origin:

Civil Status:

 Single Married Divorced Separated

Religion:

 Muslim Evangelic Sikh Catholic Others

Number of children:

 1 2 3 4 5 More than 5

Job:

City / District:

Since when do you live in Barcelona?

Academic level:

Email:

INTERNET

Do you have internet access at home?

- Yes
- No

Do you use external telephone rooms for surfing the internet?

- Yes
- No

How often do you use internet?

- Every day
- Twice a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Almost never
- Never

For which activities do you use internet?

- Email
- General information
- Social media
- Communication (Skype, Hangout, Viber)
- Films/Series
- Reading blogs

I have a profile in:

- I do not know what a profile is
- Facebook
- Instagram
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Skype
- Others
- I do not have a profile

Do you use internet for searching religious issues?

Do you use the email for contacting your family abroad?

- Once a week
- More than once a week
- Never

Do you use internet for contacting people from Barcelona?

- Once a week
- More than once a week
- Never

SOCIAL MEDIA

In social media (Facebook, Twitter, Badoo, Google+)...

- My profile is called after me
- I have another name

I own or I manage a website.

- Yes
- No

I own a personal blog.

- Yes
- No

In social media I contact...

- People from my country of origin
- People that are not from my country of origin
- People from my family

In social media...

- I publish pictures of me
- I publish pictures of my family
- I publish pictures of my friends
- Others

In social media...

- I have met people from other religions
- I only talk with people of my same faith

Please tick those sentences you agree:

- I am afraid of social media
- I like social media
- With social media I can show who I am and what I do
- With social media I can meet people

In social media I consider myself...

- Active
- Passive
- Sometimes active
- I do not know

CELL PHONE OR SMARTPHONE

Do you have your own cell phone?

- Yes
- No

Do you have your own smartphone?

- Yes
- No

For which activities do you use the smartphone?

- Only calls
- Calls and messages
- Calls and email
- Calls, email and internet

Do you have your own tablet?

Do you have your own Ipad?

In which language do you use your cell phone?

- My mother language
- I use several languages
- Catalan
- Spanish

Do you agree or disagree with these sentences?

Media (TV, press, radio) ignore religious women.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

Media are concerned about immigrant women in Barcelona.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

Media have a positive image of immigrant women.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

Media have a negative image of immigrant women.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

With ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) I feel more useful and understood in my community.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

With ICT I can express myself better in offline meetings.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

I think I need more knowledge on ICT.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

I think I have enough knowledge on ICT.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

I do not need more knowledge on ICT.

- I agree
- I disagree
- I do not know

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