

Understanding Pope Francis' World Communications Day Messages for Intercultural Communication Competencies in a Digital, Globalized World: A Quantitative Study

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Abstract: This study examines the significance of Pope Francis' World Communications Day Messages in enhancing the intercultural communication competencies of various stakeholders in the information and communications fields, including journalists, media professionals, opinion editors, educators, pastors, pastoral workers, and the general public. Through a quantitative and conceptual content analysis of his World Communications Day texts ($N=11$) released from January 2014 to January 2024, we identified three core competencies: embracing a faith-based perspective of reality, cultivating empathetic listening, and communicating truthful information and content with charity in a multicultural context. The findings highlight the critical role of Pope Francis' messages in fostering these competencies. Moreover, they provide actionable insights and clear guidance for their intended audiences, offering practical strategies for engaging in constructive forms of communication, such as open dialogue, active listening, and respectful disagreement, which counteract prejudice, encourage a culture of encounter, and promote positive interactions.

Keywords: Church, • Content Analysis • Information and Communication Technologies • Intercultural Communication Competencies • Pope Francis

Context and Background of the Study

The unprecedented rise of modern information and communications technologies (ICTs) has made digital interactions almost inevitable alongside globalization. It made the world smaller, bringing a divided world and its people closer together and transforming it into a global village, as the Canadian media scholar Marshall

McLuhan once predicted.¹ It transcends diverse cultural backgrounds and fosters more significant engagement with mass media technology than its traditional counterparts, the printing press in 1450, the radio in the 1890s, and television in the early 1920s.² This digital progression has taken communication, information access, and virtual group formation to a new level. Social media fundamentally alters public discourse and cultural norms, making it more challenging to decipher factual truth. They have changed the world like never before, and thus, understanding their impact is vital for navigating the contemporary epoch.³ Moreover, as the most popular and pervasive application of ICT, combining communication with entertainment, social media has also changed how people interact and communicate, whether chatting on a website, using video calls, or participating in online role-playing games.⁴ Social media is a term used to describe the interaction between groups or individuals in which they produce, share, and sometimes exchange ideas, images, videos,

¹ Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2001), 45.

² Jack Lule, *Globalization and Media: Global Village of Babel* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021), 2-4; Roger Silverstone and Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Routledge, 2004).

³ Kylie Jarrett et al., "Dialogues on Digital Society." *Dialogues on Digital Society* (2024): 29768640231216824; Veronica Müllerová and Jaroslav Franc, "What is Changing in Papal Communication with the Rise of Social Media?" *Church, Communication and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2023): 205-226; Michelle Martini, "The Catholic Church and the Media: A Text Mining Analysis of Vatican Documents from 1967 to 2020," *Journal of Media and Religion* 21, no. 3 (2022), 155-173.

⁴ Donald J. Leu, "Toward a Theory of New Literacies Emerging from the Internet and Other Information and Communication Technologies," in *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading*, 5th ed., Robert B. Ruddell and Norman J. Unrau, eds. (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2004), 1570-1613.

and many more over the internet and in virtual communities.⁵

The book “The Digital Divide: Perspectives on Social Media Era” by Bauerlein delves into pressing issues spawned by digital social media platforms like Twitter, Meta (aka Facebook), Instagram, and TikTok, which kindle debates over their impacts on cultures, education, health, business, politics, information access, and societal progress.⁶ On one side of this range of views are the critics who argue that online interactions degrade social manners, diminish reading cultures, and harm, especially the youth through non-stop digital exposure.⁷ In its January 2024 report, the World Economic Forum revealed that 490 global experts identified misinformation and disinformation as the primary short-term risks for the next two years.⁸ They emphasized the urgent need for cooperation on international issues, given the unstable global order marked by polarizing narratives and insecurity, and suggested that new approaches are essential for addressing these risks. On the opposite side

⁵ Narasimha B. Rao & V. Kalyani, “A Study on Positive and Negative Effects of Social Media on Society,” *Journal of Science & Technology (JST)* 7, no. 10 (2022): 46-54.

⁶ Mark Bauerlein, *The Digital Divide: Arguments for and Against Facebook, Google, Texting, and the Age of Social Networking* (London: Penguin, 2011).

⁷ Rao and Kalyani, “A Study on Positive and Negative Effects of Social Media”; Shabnoor Siddiqui, and Tajinder Singh, “Social Media: Its Impact with Positive and Negative Aspects,” *International Journal of Computer Applications Technology and Research* 5, no. 2 (2016): 71–75; Vishranti Raut & Prafulla Patil, “Use of Social Media in Education: Positive and Negative Impact on the Students,” *International Journal on Recent and Innovation Trends in Computing and Communication* 4, no. 1 (2016): 281-285.

⁸ World Economic Forum, *Global Risks 2024: Disinformation Tops Global Risks 2024 as Environmental Threats Intensify*, accessed September 8, 2024 @ <https://www.weforum.org/press/2024/01/global-risks-report-2024-press-release/>

of the communication divide are the optimists who believe these digital innovations are a force for good and represent optimistic strides in education and human development. Their studies highlight the value of social media platforms for professionals, as they provide opportunities for developing marketing skills, identifying business opportunities, and facilitating more efficient networking.⁹ There is an ongoing controversy about the contradictory impact of digital platforms on youth, noting that these tools foster social connectivity and isolation. They can improve the capacity to create and foster online communities but also engender feelings of exclusion and isolation. The digital landscape is flooded with misinformation and disinformation, which can quickly gain traction and spread, especially on social media, influencing public opinions and behaviors.

Controversy or not, the global media have brought both opportunities and challenges to communication and broader international relations. These include navigating potential misunderstandings due to cultural differences, sensitivity in addressing diverse audiences, and the risk of unintentional offense when communicating across cultures. Lule, examining how global media, which refers to international news outlets and social platforms with a broad reach, shapes cultural perceptions and intercultural communication, argued that the worldwide press plays a crucial role in interpreting and influencing human relations.¹⁰ He provides detailed examples of how global media shapes cultural perceptions and influences intercultural communication. For instance, he articu-

⁹ Rao and Kalyani, "A Study on Positive and Negative Effects of Social Media"; Kelley A. Allen et al., "Social Media Use and Social Connectedness in Adolescents: The Positives and the Potential Pitfalls," *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist* 31, no. 1 (2014): 18-31.

¹⁰ Lule, *Globalization and Media*, 10.

lates a scenario in which the international community is depicted as disunited, its trajectory shaped by ongoing conflicts, with the media playing a pivotal role in the struggle to influence the perceptions and emotions of the general public.

Significance of the Study

Given the ambiguous and complex social media landscape, it is crucial to recognize the significance of fostering intercultural communication competence (ICC) among groups and individuals. Wiseman defined ICC as “the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures.”¹¹ Byram observed that this ability involves understanding, respecting, and appropriately responding to the cultural differences and similarities that influence communication.¹² Indicators are used to determine their multidimensional elements, which include cognitive (knowledge about different cultures), affective (openness, empathy, and cultural sensitivity), and behavioral (verbal and non-verbal communication skills, including adapting behavior and language to fit cultural contexts) components. One must have intercultural knowledge, attitude, talent, and awareness to gain ICC.¹³ Moreover, Koester and Lustig contend that public discourses of positive exemplars – or individuals widely perceived as competent in intercultural encounters and relationships,

¹¹ R. L. Wiseman, *Intercultural Communication Competence*. As cited in W. B. Gudykunst & B. Mody (Eds.), *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication*, 2nd ed, pp. 207-224, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2002).

¹² Michael Byram, “Assessing Intercultural Competence in Language Teaching,” *Sprogforum* 18, no.6 (2000): 8-13.

¹³ Mary Jane Collier – “Intercultural Communication Competence: Continuing Challenges and Critical Directions,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 48 (2015): 9-11.

such as successful diplomats or international business leaders – would be a welcome and valuable addition to the ICC literature.¹⁴ These positive exemplars can serve as role models, demonstrating principles and practices of intercultural communication and providing inspiration and motivation to engage more competently and confidently in such interactions. They can work to understand, direct, and improve globalization and media, thereby counteracting powerful actors who shape these forces for their purposes.¹⁵ By studying them, ICC researchers and practitioners can give valuable insights into effective communication strategies, foster a more optimistic view of intercultural interactions, and develop practical training and educational programs for workers in the information and communication sectors.

In this context, there is no reason to doubt Pope Francis meets Koester's standards. According to the Pew Research Center, 80% of Catholics worldwide view him favorably.¹⁶ As one author puts it, "Francis enjoys an approval rating that any other world leader would envy."¹⁷ He is one of the most followed world leaders on social media. Far more non-Catholics than Catholics visit his Twitter account.¹⁸ Dubbed the "people's Pope," he has electrified the world with his message of mercy and

¹⁴ Jolene Koester & Myron W. Lustig, "Intercultural Communication Competence: Theory, Measurement, and Application," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 48 (2015): 20-21.

¹⁵ Lule, *Globalization, and media*, 8.

¹⁶ Pew Research Center "Majority of U.S. Catholics Express Favorable View of Pope Francis" (2024), accessed May 27, 2024 @ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/04/12/majority-of-u-s-catholics-express-favorable-view-of-pope-francis>

¹⁷ Chris Lowney, *Pope Francis: Why he Leads the Way he Leads* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Juan Narbona, "Digital Leadership, Twitter, and Pope Francis," *Church, Communication and Culture* 1, no. 1: (2016): 90-109.

humility, energizing the church and appealing to people of every faith.¹⁹ His unassuming and open nature underscores the importance of intercultural communication in fostering mutual understanding, compassion, and peace in a world marked by diversity and polarization.

Since 2014, his annual World Communications Day (WCD) Messages have expressed his vision for empowering individuals with the skills to effectively communicate on complex, emerging global issues using modern communication tools. His focus on the “culture of encounter” aims to bridge cultural gaps and promote empathy, inclusivity, mutual respect, and collaboration amidst the multifaceted challenges of today’s communication landscape.

Given his perceived liberal reformist agenda and enhanced pastoral approach to the church’s issues, there is no question that Francis has been a lightning rod for controversy.²⁰ Despite the vast power of his position as leader of one of the world’s most formidable religions, Francis’ WCD messages are not taken at face value. There are questions and even doubts about their orthodoxy. At the top of the list is how his messages could be more realistic and attentive to the complexity of the current digital media landscape. Will they be a hopelessly inadequate response to the complex issues in highly technological and digital societies? Will Francis pay more attention to the political, ideological, social, and economic

¹⁹ Robert Draper, *Do Not Ask What Good We Do: Inside the US House of Representatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 1.

²⁰ Ross Douthat, *To Change the Church: Pope Francis and the Future of Catholicism* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018); Kelly A. Allen et al., “Social Media Use and Social Connectedness in Adolescents: The Positives and the Potential Pitfalls,” *The Educational and Developmental Psychologist* 31, no. 1 (2014): 18-31; Robert Kaiser Blair, *Inside the Jesuits: Pope Francis is Changing the Church and the World* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

agendas that have materialized in digital media? To put it mildly, his critics feel that the emphasis on mercy and dialogue overlooks the aggressive tactics often seen in the press and does not adequately address the politics of technological development. Finally, the critics note a discrepancy between the calls for improved media communication and the actual practices of the Vatican's media outlets.

In summary, critics of Francis argue that his approach needs to be more practical and straightforward and should address the challenges and issues in digital media. However, there seems to be an oversight in understanding how his views on ICTs have evolved and changed. This study seeks to bridge this gap by deeply diving into Francis' eleven WCD messages published between 2014 and 2024. Toward this aim, the present study explores and deconstructs them by identifying their most prevalent concepts and significance in addressing social media's potential opportunities and challenges in a multicultural world. Furthermore, it engages with the critiques of these discourses and evaluates their contribution to enhancing ICC.

Statement of the Problem

Three questions guided the study:

- What are the most prevalent concepts in Francis' WCD messages from 2014 to 2024?
- How has his understanding of these concepts progressed over time?
- How do these concepts address intercultural communication opportunities and challenges within the church and beyond?

Methodology

The present study employs a content analysis method to systematically code, categorize, and interpret the most prevalent concepts within Francis' WCD messages. Content analysis serves as a research instrument for identifying the occurrence of specific words, themes, or concepts across a designated qualitative data corpus.²¹ This methodological approach facilitates a dual-process analysis, wherein textual data is qualitatively examined and quantified concurrently.²² Elo and Kyngäs explain that content analysis' core objective is conceptualizing phenomena under observation.²³

This analytical tool is essential in research domains where studies addressing the phenomenon are lacking, thus necessitating the derivation of coded categories directly from the textual data, a process underscored by Hsiuh and Shannon.²⁴ In preliminary research within areas characterized by scant information, content analysis emerges as a pertinent mechanism for delineating prevalent themes discerned within the dataset.²⁵ Furthermore, this study selected conceptual content over relational analysis. A specific concept is examined in conceptual analysis, and its presence is quantified and counted. The primary objective is to

²¹ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1990), 45

²² Simon C. Kitto et al., "Quality in Qualitative Research," *Medical Journal of Australia* 188, no. 4 (2008): 243-246.

²³ Satu Elo & Helvi Kyngäs, "The Qualitative Content Analysis Process," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 62, no. 1 (2008): 107-115.

²⁴ Hsiu- Fang Hsieh & Sarah E. Shannon, "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis," *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005): 1277-1288.

²⁵ Kim Holmberg, "Co-in Linking to a Municipal Webpage: A Webometric and Content Analysis," *Scientometrics* 83, no. 3 (2010): 851-862.

assess their frequency within the dataset because they may serve as a proxy for significance.²⁶

Unit of Analysis

The analysis corpus comprises the eleven WCD messages of Francis from 2014 to 2024, published in multiple languages online by the Vatican's Dicastery for Communications.²⁷ The Dicastery for Communication, which has been bringing together all the Vatican's media platforms since 2015, has the highest budget of any Vatican organization.²⁸ The choice of the Vatican's Dicastery for Communications as the source of the WCD messages is based on its credibility and authority in the communication field, ensuring the data's reliability and relevance. They are papal opening statements for WCD, a yearly worldwide celebration organized by the Dicastery for Communication that focuses on using media for evangelization.²⁹ These messages are directly relevant to the research objective of exploring themes and significance in an intercultural and digital world. Issued annually, they address global audiences and focus on modern ICTs, aligning with the study's aim to analyze their prevalent themes and their significance for ICC. As a leading international figure, Francis can provide

²⁶ Mojtaba Vaismoradi et al., "Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis: Implications for Conducting a Qualitative Descriptive Study," *Nursing & Health Sciences* 15, no. 3 (2013): 398-405.

²⁷ Pope Francis. World Communications Day. Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, accessed @ <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.html>

²⁸ Andrea Tornielli, "*Humanae vitae* y el último sondeo secreto de Pablo VI," *Vatican Insider* (La Stampa), July 10, 2018, accessed September 28, 2022 @ <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/en/2018/07/11/news/humanae-vitae-paul-vi-s-secret-survey-1.34030850/>

²⁹ Martini, "The Catholic Church and the Media," 155-173.

authoritative and potentially influential perspectives in these messages, making them rich sources for understanding the opportunities and challenges facing intercultural communications today. These discourses' thematic depth and global relevance can offer targeted insights into the evolving nature of communication across cultures, justifying their selection as the primary texts for this content analysis. Table 1 shows the descriptive data for the WCD messages.

Table 1. Descriptive Data for Francis' WCD Messages from 2014-2024 (N:11)

Year	Theme	Year	Competencies
58 th	Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart	2024	Adopt a spiritual way of viewing reality.
57 th	Speaking with the heart	2023	Communicate the truth in charity.
56 th	Listening with the ear of the heart	2022	Listen with the heart.
55 th	"Come and See"	2021	See reality for ourselves, spend time with people, and listen to their stories.
54 th	"You may tell your children and grandchildren."	2020	Make one's own the truth contained in good stories.
53 rd	"We are members of one another."	2019	Invest in relationships and affirm the interpersonal nature of our humanity.
52 nd	"The truth will set you free."	2018	Speak the truth in charity.
51 st	"Fear not, for I am with you."	2017	Encourage open, creative, purposeful communication.
50 th	Communication and Mercy:	2016	Communicate with mercy.
49 th	The Family: A Privileged Place of Encounter.	2015	Model the family as a setting for learning authentic communication.
48 th	Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter	2014	Promote effective communication toward closeness and unity.

Data Collection

We have included all eleven WCD messages delivered by Francis from 2014 to 2024. This corpus of texts was compiled by and sourced from the official Dicastery of Communications via the Vatican website, ensuring the authenticity and integrity of the documents for academic examination and analysis.

Data Analysis

To analyze the conceptual trends and patterns in the dataset, along with their prevalence, progression, and significance, we implemented a four-step process based on Elo and Kyngäs.³⁰ Our methodical approach ensures the analysis is systematic, transparent, and replicable.

Firstly, during the preparation phase, we accessed and retrieved the WCD messages delivered annually by Francis between January 2014 and January 2024 from the official Vatican website. Next, we immersed ourselves in the dataset to understand and review its content and context. We chose to take an inductive, data-driven approach to uncover patterns, themes, and categories within the dataset without imposing our predetermined expectations. This approach allowed us to remain open to new and unexpected themes emerging from the dataset, ensuring that our findings are grounded in the content rather than influenced by preconceived notions. Next, we conducted open coding and made initial notes during our readings, labeling concepts in the margins to describe various aspects of the dataset. Next, we quantified and analyzed the dataset's prevalence, progression, and significance of specific themes using a software tool. We then developed general descriptions of the research topic through the three questions raised by the study. Finally, we discussed the outcomes and insights derived from the posed research questions alongside an examination of the current literature. This facilitated the drawing of cogent conclusions and the proposition of directions for future research endeavors.

³⁰ Satu Elo & Helvi Kyngäs, "The Qualitative Content Analysis Process," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 62.1 (2008): 107-115.

Ethics Statement

The study used the Ethical Guidelines that the Association of Internet Researchers outlined.³¹ It involved the collection of publicly available documents from the Internet that were explicitly designated for public use. Researchers analyzed without any economic or political affiliations to the individual under study. No personally identifiable information was gathered or retained during the process. As a result, the publication of this study poses minimal risk to the individual being observed.

Results

With a pastoral end in view, the WCD is an annual religious event conducted by popes to address the current opportunities and challenges in communication and media from a Catholic perspective. Its messages have crystallized as guidance to communicators, journalists, media professionals, and the general public on how to use social communications ethically and effectively. Right from its beginning, Christianity is a religion of communication and believes in a God who communicates with his creatures in many ways.³² Social communications concern the church so much that it merited a separate decree at its Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), the *Inter Mirifica* (On the Means of Social Communication), highlighting communication media's

³¹ Franzke, Aline Shakti, Anja Bechmann, Michael Zimmer, Charles Ess, and the Association of Internet Researchers, *Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0* (2020), <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf>

³² Franz-Josef Eilers, "Church and Social Communication," *Faith and Media: Analysis of Faith and Media: Representation and Communication* 17 (2009): 39.

significance and immense potential for shaping culture. It is safe to say that this is where Francis is coming from.

The first WCD was celebrated on May 7, 1967, shortly after the conclusion of Vatican II. Like a double-edged sword, after surveying the granular developments in social communication across time, Paul VI and subsequent popes have taken cognizance of the beneficial opportunities presented by communication media in enhancing human existence with values like truth, beauty, and goodness, as well as the potential challenges, including the dissemination of less virtuous values such as misinformation/disinformation, and the imposition of conflicting and false information on the public's minds and hearts, such as hate speech or propaganda.³³ As stressed by scholars in the field of Digital Religion, the Vatican had an overall positive and sometimes even enthusiastic relationship with emerging communication technologies, generally depicted as practical tools to evangelize and foster the Catholic agenda.³⁴

While the WCD messages may not constitute infallible teachings on faith and morals, they are considered essential and authoritative coordinates of the pope's thoughts on social communications based on reason aided by faith. The messages are typically published on January 24, the feast day of Saint Francis de Sales, the patron saint of writers and journalists. Like his predecessors, Francis' WCD messages may hold significant pastoral value within and beyond the church. As his church's primary communicator today, they reflect his approach to engaging with modern ICTs, fostering dialogue, and promoting values in the material and

³³ Ernest Henau, "Church and Media. Two Worlds?" in *Faith and Media: Analysis of Faith and Media: Representation and Communication*, ed. Hans Geybels, Sara Mels, and Michel Walrave, 53-69. (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2009).

³⁴ Martini, "The Catholic Church and the Media," 157.

digital environment. In particular, members of the church worldwide may view them as scriptural and rational guidance on navigating the challenges and opportunities of social communication tools and methods. However, given the diversity within the church, which includes cultural, social, and economic contexts, their reception and pastoral applications may vary among individuals and ecclesial communities, both regional and local. We now turn to the ten most prevalent concepts within the dataset.

The most prevalent concepts in Francis’ WCD Messages

The descriptive statistics analysis identifies the ten most prevalent themes in the dataset, notably “Listening” (0.25%), "Communication" (0.22%), “Heart” (0.13%), “Truth” (0.09%), "Charity" (0.08%), "Encounter" (0.06%), "Openness" (0.05%), "Media" (0.04%), "Dialogue" (0.04%), and "Hope" (0.02%). Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the ten most prevalent themes within the dataset.

Table 2. Descriptive Data for the Ten Most Prevalent Concepts

Concepts	Frequency	Percentage
Listening	175	0.25
Communication	150	0.22
Heart	87	0.13
Truth	62	0.09
Charity	60	0.08
Encounter	41	0.06
Openness	38	0.05
Media	33	0.04
Dialogue	30	0.04
Hope	17	0.02
Total	693/20367	1.00

Built upon a foundation of Gospel narratives and metaphors that embody core Christian principles and framed in a faith-based understanding of humans as created in God's image and as beings-in-relation, Francis contends that communication holds a spiritual significance as part of God's plan and as an essential means of fostering a sense of community (2018:1). Such a stance is a manifest illustration of his view that human existence is fundamentally communal and communicative, articulating the essence of individuals as inherently interdependent and oriented towards the collective good.

By our being created in the image and likeness of God, who is communion and communication-of-Self, we carry forever in our hearts the longing for living in communion, for belonging to a community. "Nothing is as specific to our nature as entering into a relationship one with another, needing one another," says Saint Basil (2019:13).

In this faith-based perspective, Francis emphasizes the pivotal role of communication in fostering a 'culture of encounter' that promotes cooperation rather than conflict. Against the potential abuse and misuse of modern ICTs, he advocates for a more genuine and compassionate communication paradigm, enhancing the quality of human interactions and, by extension, societal cohesion. Further enriching this discourse, the reflections of various pontiffs and scholarly sources are invoked to delineate both the promising prospects and the intricate challenges modern ICTs present.

Within the ambit of this academic inquiry, an exhaustive analysis of the dataset yielded ten concepts that emerged as significantly recurrent. This section arranges and briefly explains each idea based on its prevalence to describe its significance and implications for the objectives and questions raised by the study. The

ensuing descriptions can provide a nuanced and unitized understanding of the latent dynamics at play, hoping to contribute substantively to the body of knowledge within the ICT literature.

First, the highest prevalence of listening in Francis' WCD messages points to his view that all communication and dialogue begin with attentive listening. Citing scriptures on creation and referencing the sense of hearing as the one favored by God among the senses, he argues that it is key to breaking down the walls that divide people and building authentic relationships. Arguing that refusing to listen can lead to aggression towards the other, he challenged individuals and communities to prioritize listening as a crucial element of meaningful and effective communication.

Listening is the first indispensable ingredient of dialogue and good communication. Communication only takes place if listening has taken place (2022:14).

Second, Francis emphasizes the role of communication in bridging divides and bringing people closer together, and it must be at the service of an authentic culture of encounter. Explaining communication in terms of the parable of the Good Samaritan, he points out that physical and digital communications should foster neighborliness. Effective communication is viewed as a means to share truth, foster relationships, and promote societal peace and justice.

Good communication helps us grow closer, know one another better, and ultimately, grow in unity (2014:2).

Related to the above, Francis offers the family as the model of genuine communication and the setting where individual members first understand the spiritual aspect of communication, particularly in Christianity, which is

infused with love - the love God gives them and that they share with others.

The family is an environment in which we learn to communicate in an experience of closeness, a setting where communication occurs, a “communicating community” (2015:12).

Third, the “heart” represents authenticity and integrity in communication and is closely associated with charity and compassion. Francis writes that, in the Bible, the “heart” is seen as the place of freedom and decision-making and is the inward place of the human encounter with the transcendent. In the context of the benefits and risks of social media and artificial intelligence, he asserts that communication should come from the heart, reflecting sincerity, honesty, and a genuine desire to connect with others. He asked workers in the field of communication to become more aware of their responsibilities and more discerning participants in communication by promoting greater equality, correct information, and a greater awareness of the epochal change that the world is experiencing.

It is the heart that spurred us to go, see, and listen, and it is the heart that moves us towards an open and welcoming way of communicating once we have practiced listening, which demands waiting and patience (2023:1).

Fourth, in the age of untruth, Francis highlights the crucial role of truth in building a genuine culture of encounter, fighting misinformation/disinformation, and fostering commitment to human solidarity and compassion. With the aid of social media technology, discerning the truth and the facts becomes more complex in the face of misleading information and outright

disinformation campaigns. Francis emphasizes that honesty in communication is critical to forming genuine connections and warns against the dire consequences and harms of untruths, fake news, falsehoods, cyberbullying, and disinformation. Stressing the importance of truthful journalism and the responsibility of journalists to report accurately, Francis urged journalists to commit to the truth and careful discernment in order to combat fake news and its negative consequences.

Our primary task is to uphold the truth with love (cf. *Eph* 4:15). Only words spoken with love and accompanied by meekness and mercy can touch our sinful hearts (2016:6).

Fifth, Francis frequently underscores the importance of charity or love, not just as an act of altruism and helping behavior but as a fundamental attitude that should permeate all forms of communication. Charity in communication means expressing mercy, compassion, and respect towards others. It involves listening actively, being empathetic, and ensuring that the dignity of every person is respected and upheld.

Love, by its nature, is communication; it leads to openness and sharing. If our hearts and actions are inspired by charity and divine love, then our communication will be touched by God's power (2016:1).

In Francis' WCD messages, authentic encounter plays a central role and is portrayed as the ultimate goal of communications. He calls for genuine human encounters where individuals engage with each other with openness and respect. Such encounters are opportunities for mutual growth, understanding, and reconciliation. In this sense, constructive forms of

communication should serve as a tool for fostering a culture of authentic encounters.

The walls that divide us, whether physical, cultural, or ideological, can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another. We need to resolve our differences through dialogue that helps us grow in understanding and mutual respect. A culture of encounter demands that we be ready to give and receive (2014:2).

At the heart of Francis' message is openness in communication. This involves expressing our perspectives and being receptive to others' viewpoints and experiences. This commitment to transparency fosters meaningful conversations and the sharing of innovative ideas and is crucial for overcoming prejudices, promoting inclusivity, and building a more cohesive society.

To dialogue means to believe that the "other" has something worthwhile to say and to entertain their point of view and perspective. Engaging in dialogue does not mean renouncing our ideas and traditions but claiming they are valid or absolute (2014:9).

Francis' WCD messages also pushed for the importance of 'dialogue' as a powerful tool for facilitating genuine interactions, advancing peace, honoring diversity, promoting mutual learning, pursuing truth, and fostering positive communication between people from diverse cultures. His vision for communication is realized through dialogue to foster understanding, build relationships, and promote peace. By listening with the heart, individuals can see each other as persons rather than objects or adversaries, fostering a sense of optimism and encouragement.

Today's great challenge is learning how to talk to one another, not simply how to generate and consume information. The latter is a tendency that our important and influential modern communications media can encourage. Information is essential, but more is needed. All too often, things get simplified, different positions and viewpoints, such as political ideologies or cultural beliefs, are pitted against one another, and people are invited to take sides rather than see things as a whole (2015:11).

Ninth, for better or worse, Francis highlights the modern ICTs' influential role in shaping public opinion and culture that can help and hinder communication within and between families. In the age of social networks, he calls for responsible and ethical media use, urging media professionals to focus on truth, promote positive values, and contribute to the common good. He also highlights the potential of modern communication devices and platforms to connect people and spread beauty, goodness, and truth in communication instead of propagating lies and falsehoods.

Media can help us grow closer, know one another better, and ultimately, grow in unity. Media can help us feel closer to one another, creating a sense of unity in the human family. This unity can, in turn, inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all, motivating the audience to commit to these important goals (2014:2).

Tenth, hope is also a central theme, with Francis urging communicators to inspire and uplift others. In times of crisis or despair, discourses of hope can provide comfort and encouragement. Hopeful communication fosters resilience and helps individuals and communities look forward to a better future.

Hope in the seed of God's Kingdom and the mystery of Easter should also shape how we communicate. This confidence enables us to conduct our work in all the different ways that communication takes place nowadays, with the conviction that it is possible to recognize and highlight the good news in every story and each person's face (2017:11).

These ten concepts or themes collectively address the challenges and opportunities of today's digital and material world, promoting values essential for building a more just, compassionate, and connected society. Together, they constitute Francis' perspective on ICC that centers on three competencies: embracing a spiritual mindset of reality, which involves understanding the spiritual implications of our digital interactions; cultivating empathetic listening, which encourages active and compassionate listening in digital conversations; and communicating truthful information and content with kindness in the age of fake news, deep fakes, and artificial intelligence. We now turn to the progression of Francis' WCD messages across time.

The Progression of Francis WCD Messages

This study section also traces the progression of Francis' WCD messages, underlining the importance of his approach to human communication in the wake of a rapidly changing world and a fragmented media landscape. Tracking how these discourses have shifted helps identify both opportunities and challenges besetting digital communications and understanding the changes that are taking place in a global information age. Each message mirrors the attempts to respond to the evolving communication culture and landscape, seeking to draw a clear distinction between the potential opportunities and threats of the Internet, modern social

media, and what he called “machine learning,” or artificial intelligence. We now turn to our five key observations.

First, there is a pronounced shift from the generic all-things-to-all-people or one-size-fits-all approach by adding new layers of specificity to the confluence of issues shaping the communication sector and its users worldwide, such as disinformation in the form of fake news, cyberbullying, infodemic, eavesdropping, cognitive pollution, and echo chambers. The shift from motherhood statements to specifics suggests recognizing the potential strength of the WCD messages. It establishes them as in touch with the ambivalent impact of ICTs on society, mirroring Francis' theoretical and pastoral understanding of their potential opportunities and hidden dangers.

Today's media environment is so pervasive as to be indistinguishable from the sphere of everyday life. The Net is a resource of our time. It is a source of knowledge and relationships that were once unthinkable. However, regarding the profound transformations technology has brought on the production, distribution, and use of content, many experts also highlight the risks that threaten the search for and sharing of authentic information on a global scale (2019:2).

Secondly, within the “globalization of indifference framework,” there is a challenge for all people of goodwill to rediscover the power of communication woven with compassion. Convinced that communication should convey God's mercy, tenderness, and forgiveness to all, Francis asked communicators to mend fractured relationships and reinstate peace and harmony within familial units and broader communities through their words and gestures. The discourses aim to create a new kind of speech and dialogue in a complex, multiethnic,

pluralistic, multireligious, and multicultural society (2024:9).

Third, there is advocacy for truth and ethics, but it is always against the backdrop of the church's evangelizing task. In response to the growing issue of fake news, cyberbullying, disinformation, misinformation on the net, and artificial intelligence, his discourses from the later years focus on truth, ethical journalism, and the social responsibility of communicators. By repeatedly addressing topics like fake news and the importance of truthful journalism, these discourses promote ethical standards in communication, urging individuals and media to adhere to truth and integrity. They encourage communicators to build social harmony, bridge divides, and foster mutual respect and understanding.

Fourth, there is a focus on personal and authentic encounters in the material and digital spheres of communication. Francis has been increasingly pressing netizens for personal encounters, listening, and storytelling, highlighting the human aspect of communication. Alluding to the family as a model and setting of authentic and respectful communication, these themes illustrate the importance of dialogue and understanding in communication, aligning with Francis' broader emphasis on building bridges and fostering community.

Fifth, there is an emphasis on inclusivity and respect for each other. The latest themes, such as 'Communication and Mercy: A Fruitful Encounter' and 'The Truth Will Set You Free: Fake News and Journalism for Peace,' reflect a growing concern for inclusivity and respect for diversity in communication, promoting a culture that values all voices. They underscore the media's significant role in shaping public opinion and fostering a culture of peace and understanding. They advocate for communication that builds relationships,

promotes understanding, and respects the dignity of every person.

All these highlight the degree to which Francis has calibrated his WCD messages to the changing times and emerging contexts. They provide insights into his theoretical concerns and pastoral priorities over the years, reflecting his approach and response to the issues and challenges of modern-day ICTs. More specifically, they support those in the communications field in navigating and engaging with them effectively and ethically. It is essential to acknowledge that the potential influence or impact of the messages is uncertain. While evidence suggests they could significantly affect communication, we argue that they are overly focused on the communicator's personal or moral disposition. At the same time, as his critics claimed, little has been said and done to address the structural barriers and challenges that can also shape both the opportunities and challenges people face in the digital age. These structural factors include globalization, technological infrastructure, platform algorithms, legal and regulatory frameworks, access to economic resources, media ownership and concentration, educational systems, cultural norms, and expectations. In many ways, all this underlines the urgency for Francis to do more than merely issue message after message. His synodal approach to being and doing church is a step towards implementing all ten most significant themes in his WCD messages. Amid the resistance and criticisms of his critics and doubters, Francis' steady decision to invert the pyramidal and clerical structures of the church speaks volumes about his focus on delivering his belief in a culture of dialogue and encounter.³⁵

³⁵ Gemma Aboy et al., "The Synodal Process in the Dock: A Thematic Analysis of Grey Literature," *Scientia: The International Journal on the Liberal Arts* 13, no. 1 (2024): 85-101.

The Significance of WCD Messages for Communication

Francis is acutely aware of the all-encompassing nature of today's ICTs, which seamlessly integrate into people's daily lives. He also recognizes their dual nature. On one hand, they have become a vital tool in our era, providing unprecedented access to information and the ability to form once-unimaginable connections. On the other hand, as ICTs have revolutionized how content is created, shared, and consumed, he also highlights the dangers they pose to the genuine quest and exchange of information worldwide. While they undoubtedly present opportunities for knowledge acquisition, ICTs have also become a platform for misinformation and deliberate manipulation of facts and social interactions, often aimed at discrediting others. In this ambivalent digital context, we now explore the potential of Francis' WCD messages on global communication and rediscover the vast potential of modern ICTs, urging caution and awareness of the potential risks and the need for vigilance in navigating this complex digital landscape.

Francis consistently advocates for genuine and transparent communication. Based on the positive use of language, he encourages the faithful to engage in conversations that reflect honesty, empathy, and respect, fostering trust and understanding within and beyond the church community.

It is not enough to be a passerby on the digital highways; "connected," connections need to grow into actual encounters. We cannot live apart, closed in on ourselves. We need to love and to be loved. We need tenderness. These qualities are for face-to-face and digital encounters, reminding us to bring empathy and understanding to our online interactions.

One of the recurring themes in his messages is the idea of creating a “culture of encounter.” As Francis explains, this concept involves reaching out to others, especially those on the peripheries, which refers to the marginalized or on the fringes of society, to engage in meaningful dialogue. It is about breaking down barriers, stepping out of our comfort zones, and genuinely meeting others where they are. Francis stresses that communication should bridge divides and foster a genuine culture of meeting others.

Communication at the service of an authentic culture of encounter focuses on building bridges between people through genuine dialogue and engagement (2014:2).

Francis admits to the immense potential of digital media for spreading the Gospel and connecting people worldwide. This recognition of the power of digital platforms to share the message of love and compassion should inspire those who would take their faith seriously. However, he also highlights the risks associated with digital communication, such as misinformation/disinformation, cyberbullying, which is the use of digital communication to bully others, and the spread of hate speech, which is the use of digital platforms to promote violence or discrimination. He calls for responsible and ethical use of digital platforms to build community and spread positive messages, instilling a sense of hope and inspiration in our digital endeavors.

Since the internet first became available, the church has always sought to promote its use in the service of the encounter between persons and solidarity among all (2019:1).

Francis often addresses the issue of fake news and misinformation in his messages. He urges journalists, who play a crucial role in providing and verifying information, to be vigilant against spreading falsehoods that can harm individuals and communities.

I want to invite everyone to promote a journalism of peace, a form of truthful media that opposes falsehoods, rhetorical slogans, and sensational headlines. This is journalism created by people for people, one that is at the service of all, especially those – and they are the majority in our world – who have no voice. It is about using the power of the media to bring about positive change, to give a voice to the voiceless, and to promote understanding and empathy (2018:15).

Francis emphasizes the importance of respectful dialogue, particularly in disagreements. He encourages open and respectful exchanges that can lead to mutual understanding and growth within the church and broader societal contexts. When used thoughtfully, communication can build bridges, enable encounters and inclusion, and thus enrich society. It is truly inspiring when people carefully select their words and actions to avoid misunderstandings, heal wounded memories, and build peace and harmony. When used with care, words can build bridges between individuals and within families, social groups, and people.

Francis sees communication as a vital tool for evangelization. He urges the faithful to embrace modern means of communication to share Christ's message and witness to their faith in ways that are accessible and engaging to contemporary audiences. This call equips them with the tools they need to spread the word of God effectively.

We have a pressing need in the church for communication that kindles hearts, which is a balm on wounds and that shines light on the journey of our brothers and sisters (2023:8).

Francis highlights the importance of communication in promoting social justice, urging communicators to amplify the voices of the marginalized and oppressed. In light of the rapid advancements in ICTs, he advocates for

authentic human interaction, stressing that these tools should enhance rather than replace meaningful face-to-face relationships. He encourages the use of media to raise awareness of social issues, fostering and mobilizing collective action for the common good, particularly when those in positions of power have abused or misused their authority.

Discussion

This study aimed to analyze Francis' eleven WCD messages, identify their most prevalent concepts, trace their evolution, and explain their significance to intercultural communication opportunities and challenges triggered by the ICTs. This section will discuss the outcomes and insights from the current study and connect them to current literature. This will help draw cogent conclusions and propose directions for future research endeavors.

One significant insight from this study was about the content of Francis' WCD messages in a way that substantially aligns with and confirms previous WCD messages of his immediate predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, who also addressed the role of ICTs numerous times during their papacy, recognizing both their potential for good and their potential risks. Influenced by their personalities, life experiences, changing sociocultural situations, and those they were exposed to, the three popes seek to shed light on the church's relationship with the forces of globalization and mediatization to stay relevant and effective in its evangelizing task in a multicultural world. Cumulatively, their discourses communicate the ethical dimension of using ICTs and their role as the new public sphere for spreading the Gospels, promoting truth, and

fostering authentic interactions between individuals and groups.

On the one hand, John Paul II (WCD 2005; 2002) likewise spoke about how media could foster mutual understanding and dialogue between cultures but warned of the dangers of media manipulation and spreading misinformation. On the other hand, Benedict XVI emphasized the need for discernment in how Catholics interact with new technologies, ensuring that digital tools communicate Christian values and serve the common good (WCD, 2010; 2005). Francis' WCD messages reflect his predecessors' fundamental themes while representing contextual adjustments.

Drawing from his predecessors' previous discussions on WCD messages, Francis aims to present a theological and pastoral approach to communication rooted in his religious beliefs. He refers to this approach as the “right lens needed to see the true, good, and beautiful in others and the world” (2017:8), inviting his audience to adopt his faith-based perspective of reality. This perspective involves understanding the world and developing ICCs in today's material and digital realms. It encompasses empathetic listening and disseminating truthful information and content with kindness in mass media, digital platforms, and social media.

The second insight was that a clear pattern emerged when we conducted a frequency and distribution count of the words used in the WCD messages. Although they project the overriding theoretical and practical interests of Francis, it also appears that the most prevalent concepts in the WCD messages may be broadly relevant and valuable whether or not one shares his religious beliefs, whether one is a devout Catholic or a secular humanist, and whether one is a journalist or a blogger.

Although they are not spoken *ex-cathedra*, Francis has made his messages accessible and relatable to his

intended audience, with characteristically sober and scripted speech. The insight aligns with previous research and highlights a key challenge facing the church today: effectively communicating the essential elements of faith in an appealing and relevant way, as described by Benedict XVI.³⁶ Other studies identified similar needs to animate the ideas and practices in today's fast-paced, complex environments. Dillon emphasized the importance of the church finding a balance between tradition and change to stay relevant in a culturally diverse world.³⁷ She suggested that the church should seek new ways to connect with the experiences of secularized lay Catholics, particularly in the Western world, by embracing new language, doctrinal thinking, and institutional practices. Moreover, Francis prioritizes a communication style that emphasizes the process of passing on the message (*tradition*), tailored to be more relevant to modern audiences, rather than focusing solely on the content being transmitted (*tradita*).³⁸

The WCD's theological insights aim to respond to the urgent needs and issues in social media and how they connect to the day-to-day life of the people. They are not a theology found in academic journals or conferences, but rather arise from real-life situations. It is a contextual theology to help the church address new challenges and

³⁶ Benedict XVI, "New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue, and Friendship," accessed online: http://www.TheVatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_benxvi_mes_20090124_43rd-world-communications-day_en.html (2009): 25-27.

³⁷ Michele Dillon, *Postsecular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³⁸ Holand T. Sanks, "A Church that can and cannot Change: The Dynamics of Tradition," *Theological Studies* 76, no. 2 (2015): 298-310; Catherine E. Clifford, "Pope Francis's Call for the Conversion of the Church in Our Time," in *Conversion and Church* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 147-177.

adapt to ICTs and social media throughout the next century.³⁹ Faggioli argues that it is crucial to align the fast-paced nature of the modern information environment with the enduring values of the Catholic institutional culture and the ongoing development of Catholicism as a social and cultural entity.⁴⁰ Additionally, Mullerova noted that not only the terminology but also the approach of the popes as ecclesiastical authorities towards the community is evolving in parallel with changes within the community itself.⁴¹

Related to the above, the WCD messages typically center around a central theme or teaching, drawing from Scripture, Tradition, and other reputable sources to balance continuity and change in theological reflections that are fundamentally kerygmatic.⁴² Francis often incorporates everyday images, stories, and analogies to illustrate the essential values of Christianity. These discourses are known for their accessibility, use of personal anecdotes, and emphasis on compassion, mercy, and the joy of the Gospel. The language is formal yet approachable, crafted to resonate with a diverse audience, rich in symbolism, and addresses contemporary issues in digital societies, such as the spread of fake news, disinformation, and cyberbullying. This aligns with Mullerova's position that not only is there a change

³⁹ John L. Allen, *The Francis Miracle: Inside the Transformation of the Pope and the Church* (New York: Time Home Entertainment, 2015).

⁴⁰ Massimo Faggioli, *The Liminal Papacy of Pope Francis: Moving Toward Global Catholicity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), 45.

⁴¹ Müllerová and Franc, "What is Changing in Papal Communication with the Rise of Social Media?"

⁴² Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2015).

in how the popes address the Catholic community, but there is also a change in thinking in society and culture.⁴³

The third pivotal discovery in the analysis was the manifestation of Francis' leadership style through his WCD messages, which distinctly embody his compassionate, humble, and reformist approach.⁴⁴ Beyond his words and deeds, Francis is depicted as a humble, broad-minded, and wise observer of current events and prevailing attitudes and approaches. These communications consistently advocate for interaction predicated on authentic human connectivity and empathy. Francis emphasizes the importance of engaging with others on a personal level, as opposed to relying on shallow and fleeting digital exchanges, thereby reinforcing the value of genuine human relationships in the digital age (WCD, 2022:1; 2021:1). This emphasis on face-to-face relationships, compassion, and empathy reveals his pastoral care and a desire to bridge divides, showing his warm, down-to-earth personality.⁴⁵

In his evolving WCD messages, one thing remained consistent throughout. Francis kept stressing the need for dialogue over conflict, transparency, and integrity in communication. He urges communicators to give voice to the voiceless and counter negativity with hope amid a toxic digital environment. His leadership style reflects a commitment to social justice, compassion for the marginalized, and embracing modern challenges while promoting dignity and respect in communication. The humble and compassionate image that Francis projects can resonate well in the digital world, where audiences

⁴³ Müllerová and Franc, "What is Changing in Papal Communication with the Rise of Social Media?"

⁴⁴ Pope Francis & Austen Ivereigh, *Let us Dream: The Path to a Better Future* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2022).

⁴⁵ Francis and Ivereigh, *Let us Dream*.

have become less cerebral and more visual, more responsive to the communicators' deportment or bearing than to the intellectual adequacy of their arguments.⁴⁶ Thus, an idea shared by an image can have a far more significant impact than text. Napolitano emphasizes the physical in-between state of Francis' persona by describing him as a "criollo pope" who can "use both intimacy and distance through media."⁴⁷ Francis stressed the significance of keeping church doors open to the digital world, allowing people from all social classes to access it, and enabling the Gospel to reach everyone.

According to Martini, the Catholic Church and the media are portrayed as practical tools for evangelization and promoting the Catholic agenda.⁴⁸ Francis encouraged individuals to confidently embrace the digital realm, emphasizing the church's active involvement in communication to engage with people and facilitate their encounter with Christ. This aligns with previous findings that the church needs to enter the digital space to become active creators of online religious communities or, instead, co-creators of this new culture.⁴⁹ This is particularly urgent as the media has become a primary

⁴⁶ Randy David, "How TikTok is Shaping Politics," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2024), accessed April 27, 2024 @: <https://opinion.inquirer.net/176828/how-tiktok-is-shaping-politics#ixzz8oUyMlfan>; Yiyi Li and Ying Xie, "Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words? An Empirical Study of Image Content and Social Media Engagement," *Journal of Marketing Research* 57, no. 1 (2020): 1-19.

⁴⁷ Valentina Napolitano, "Francis, a Criollo Pope," *Religion and Society* 10, no. 1 (2019): 63-80.

⁴⁸ Martini, "The Catholic Church and the Media," 167.

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, Pope, *New Technologies, New Relationships. Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue, and Friendship*, accessed online: http://www.TheVatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/communications/documents/hf_benxvi_mes_20090124_43rd-world-communications-day_en.html (2009).

source of spiritual information and experience.⁵⁰ Francis sees it as an exciting challenge and urges the church to approach it with renewed energy and creativity as it strives to share the beauty of God with others.

Francis' WCD messages have attempted to address nuanced, pastoral, and increasingly critical ways the opportunities and challenges posed by the ICT vis-à-vis the need to enhance communicators' ICC. First, the competency to embrace a faith-based perspective of reality will help journalists report with integrity, educators analyze pluralistic realities ethically, pastors understand diverse cultures, and the general public appreciate shared values of justice and peace. Second, the competency to learn empathetic listening will help improve coverage of sensitive issues, like migration and human trafficking. It will encourage educators to adopt respectful dialogue, deepen the pastoral presence of pastors, and nurture the general public's understanding in a polarized world. Third, the competency to speak truth in charity, particularly in situations of conflicts, will protect journalists from built-in prejudices and biases, foster nuance for educators, encourage compassionate communications for pastors, and promote responsible sharing for the general public. These three core competencies can create a framework for intercultural communications that weaves spiritual depth, emotional intelligence, and ethical responsibility. They can empower communicators to forge relationships across cultural divides and contribute to a more empathetic and truthful discourse in the public sphere. These are the competencies Francis communicated, lived, and practiced during his magisterial and pastoral life. He

⁵⁰ Stig Hjarvard, "The Mediatization of Religion: Theorizing Religion, Media, and Social Change," *Culture and Religion* 12, no. 02 (2011): 119-135.

spoke from the heart.”⁵¹ Because of this ability to speak from the heart, Oldenburg saw him as a practitioner of rhetoric *par excellence*.⁵²

Limitations of the Study

This study has a few admitted limitations. Even so, it remains essential to acknowledge the inherent constraints characterizing this study, particularly our self-imposed restrictions concerning the corpus of discourses subjected to our content analysis due to limitations of time and resources. The potential for our subjective interpretations to have swayed the analysis must be addressed; this concern was mitigated through our use of the member-checking process and the critical friend methodology. Additionally, the discourses we analyzed were shaped by contemporaneous events and issues prevailing during their delivery. Efforts were made to contextualize each message within its broader socio-political and cultural milieu to decipher the situational determinants influencing their content and style.

Despite the limitations above, this study systematically explored the relevance and applicability of the discourses delivered by Francis for individuals navigating their quest for direction, purpose, and meaning within a globalized and digitalized world. This exploration surfaced the theoretical and practical needs fulfilled by Francis' WCD messages, addressing the existential dilemmas of those who work in communications amidst rapid cultural and technological changes.

⁵¹ Christopher J. Oldenburg, *The Rhetoric of Pope Francis: Critical Mercy and Conversion for the Twenty-first Century* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), xiv.

⁵² Oldenburg, xvi.

Conclusion

The study is based on a conceptual content analysis of Francis' WCD messages from 2013 to 2024 to shed light on the challenges and opportunities posed by the rapid rise of ICTs in a globalized and digitalized landscape. It is divided into three phases. The first phase involved analyzing the texts to identify and quantify the most prevalent concepts or terms. The second phase included an in-depth study of the evolution of these concepts, along with the selection and categorization of their correlates. This analysis offered three insights into the evolution and general structure of Francis' WCD messages about ICTs, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intersection between religious faith, communication, and ICTs in the modern world. These efforts reflect the church's ongoing commitment to shaping the impact of ICTs in these turbulent times.

Francis' skillful use of rhetorical stratagems, encompassing the employment of metaphors, narrative storytelling, and appeals to emotion, meticulously deconstructs the efficacy of his methodology in articulating faith-oriented perspectives. This analysis unpacks his ability to engage with a broad spectrum of demographic groups, including participants within the communicative process and individuals external to religious or secular institutions. It offers the essential dispositions to acquire ICCs.

Finally, the messages emanating from Francis' WCD communicative efforts provide a robust framework for cultivating ICC skills underpinned by the foundational principles of respect, empathy, truthfulness, and charity. These principles are indispensable for the realization of effective and cohesive intercultural dialogues.

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