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Title: Designers' interpretations in the creation of digital ephemera on social media platforms using the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method

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Introduction

Technology advancements have significantly impacted the speed and efficiency of the design process, leading to changes in content production and dissemination on digital platforms. Consequently, the attention span and relevance of these messages have become ephemeral. This new scenario involves the graphic designer creating messages for digital media, especially in virtual communities. Thus, first, we seek to establish a solid and comprehensive definition of digital ephemera within the context of graphic design. The methodology consists of data analysis through semi-structured interviews conducted with graphic designers from Tijuana and San Diego via conferencing platforms. The data collected is then analyzed using the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method. This research aims to describe and analyze the phenomenon of designing messages with a 60-second lifespan on social media platforms. Therefore, a systematic approach and categorization of concepts are explored across the interconnected domains, ensuring a comprehensive definition of digital ephemera.



"Ephemeral" describes short-lived things, a concept long used in science and academia. Now, it's applied to documents with temporary importance. Exploring deeper into the etymology of the term, Twyman (2008), reveals that the word ephemera is a Greek derivation and comes from the words EPI = through and HEMERA = the day.



In design, it is necessary to consider the concept from the *Ephemera Society* in Great Britain, defined as "*the minor transient documents of everyday life*". As well as the term *ephemeral prints* or *printed ephemera*, founded by Maurice Rickards in 1975.



In digital contexts, ephemerality reflects the transient nature of social media content, significantly impacting modern communication and information interaction. The digital era has transformed our content interaction and cultural practices.



Cassany (2012) mentions that "The emergence of the internet has changed the rules of the game, of paper-based culture, it has facilitated the production, distribution, and access to auditory, visual and written artifacts in an easy, cheap and universal way" (p.21), we can understand the magnitude of this change. These technologies have reconfigured the way people communicate, allowing for greater interactivity and user participation.



Ephemeral content has become a defining feature of modern social platforms like Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram. These platforms emphasize immediacy and transience, creating new dynamics of user interaction. The ability to share information instantly and globally, interact in real-time, and access vast amounts of information is redefining ephemeral communication in the digital era.



Graphic design faces new challenges due to current technological and cultural advancements, which may distance it from its main function: communication. As Davis and Hunt (2017) point out, visual artifacts such as logos or slogans rarely solve complex social problems on their own.



We see an environment where two cultures coexist in a globalized yet focused space, blending Anglo-Saxon and Latin American influences. A similar phenomenon occurs with multimodal interaction, which modifies forms of consumption.



The term *digital ephemera* encompasses a wide range of digital information not intended for permanence. It embodies the ephemeral nature of modern communication, reflecting our digital ecosystem's dynamic and ever-changing landscape.

Methodology

Method

The research used the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) method proposed by Ragin (1997). “QCA provides social science with a case-based method for cross-analysis, combining the benefits of quantitative and qualitative methodologies”. (Escott-Mota, 2018)

Procedure and participants

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The instrument was designed with questions distributed in 3 sections to guide the participants. Only 5 questions related to the topic of ephemeral social networks were analyzed.

Interviewee Profile

The selection of participants included 10 graphic designers located on the cultural border between the cities of Tijuana and San Diego.

Questions

The questions address the relationship between digital media and designers in the creation of digital ephemera.

Interviews

The interviews were conducted using open-ended questions between August and December 2023. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and through video calls on the Zoom platform.

Data Analysis

The ATLAS.ti tool was used, a platform that facilitates pattern coding, thus allowing for the discovery of specific codes, the definition of recurring patterns, and categorization by themes.

Methodology

Table 2

List of most frequently used words

Words	Frequency
Social media	215
Graphic design	164
Contents	86
Designers	58
Profession	41
Visual	38
Attention	33
Communication	30
Platforms	24
Digital	19
Process	19
Creation	18
Language	18
Users	17
Effectiveness	15
Temporality	14

Source: Own elaboration

Results

The co-occurrence analysis was fundamental in identifying the main variables of the studied phenomenon. This process allowed for the systematic categorization and quantification of fundamental concepts that intertwine in five interconnected areas. These areas emerged as the main categories of the study, encompassing the concept of social networks, graphic design, digital content, message, and user attention.

For each of these variables, structured tables were developed that present the terms with the highest frequency or relevance within the specific framework of the research. The data visualization offers an immediate and deep understanding of emerging trends and patterns at the intersection of these concepts. This methodology of data analysis and presentation facilitates a more profound interpretation of the obtained results.



Results

Table 4

Social media Frequency
Categories table

Social media	Graphic design profession/Designers	151
	Digital content	70
	User attention	62
	Temporality	47
	Message/communication	42

Table 5

Graphic design Frequency
Categories table

Graphic design	Design process	111
	Social media	76
	Digital content	38
	Transformation	32
	Temporality	28

Table 6

Digital Content Frequency
Categories Table

Digital content	Graphic design	59
	Social media	57
	Message/communication	32
	Temporality	29
	User attention	17

Table 7

Message Frequency
Frequency Categories table

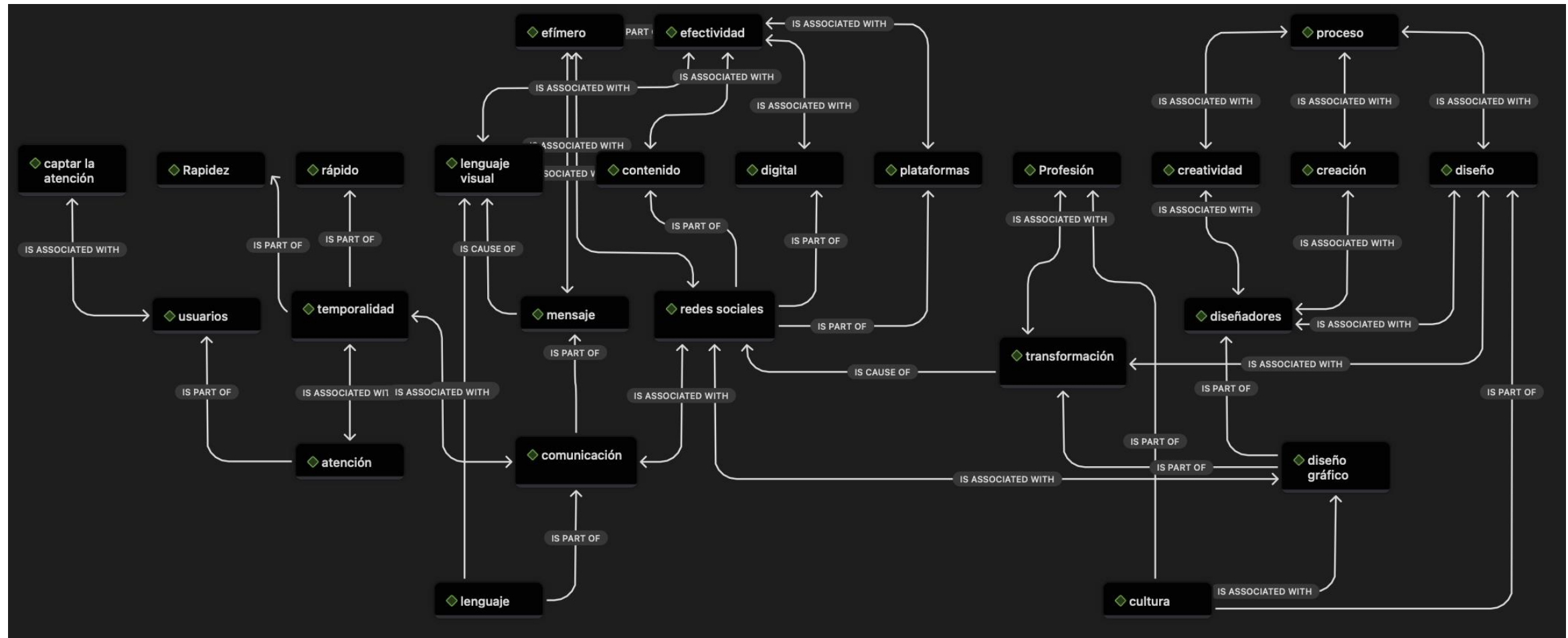
Message	Social media	35
	User attention	32
	communication	29
	Temporality	27
	Digital content	25

Table 8

Attention Frequency
Categories table

Attention	Users	37
	Graphic design profession/Designers	29
	Social media	27
	Digital content	22
	Message	18

Network of concepts found in data analysis of interviews





Perception of the Phenomenon

The identification of categories allowed for the construction of semantic networks of codes, facilitating an in-depth analysis of the interrelation of concepts that encompass the studied phenomenon.

it was evidenced that the effectiveness of ephemeral messages depends not only on their temporality but also on their ability to capture and maintain user attention in an increasingly saturated and competitive digital ecosystem. This dynamic poses significant challenges for content creators, who must constantly adapt their strategies to maximize the impact of their messages in increasingly shorter time windows.

This connection implies a fundamental transformation in design processes. As a result, designers find themselves immersed in a constant cycle of adaptation and evolution, where the unique characteristics of social networks exert a direct and significant influence on their work methodologies and creative approaches.

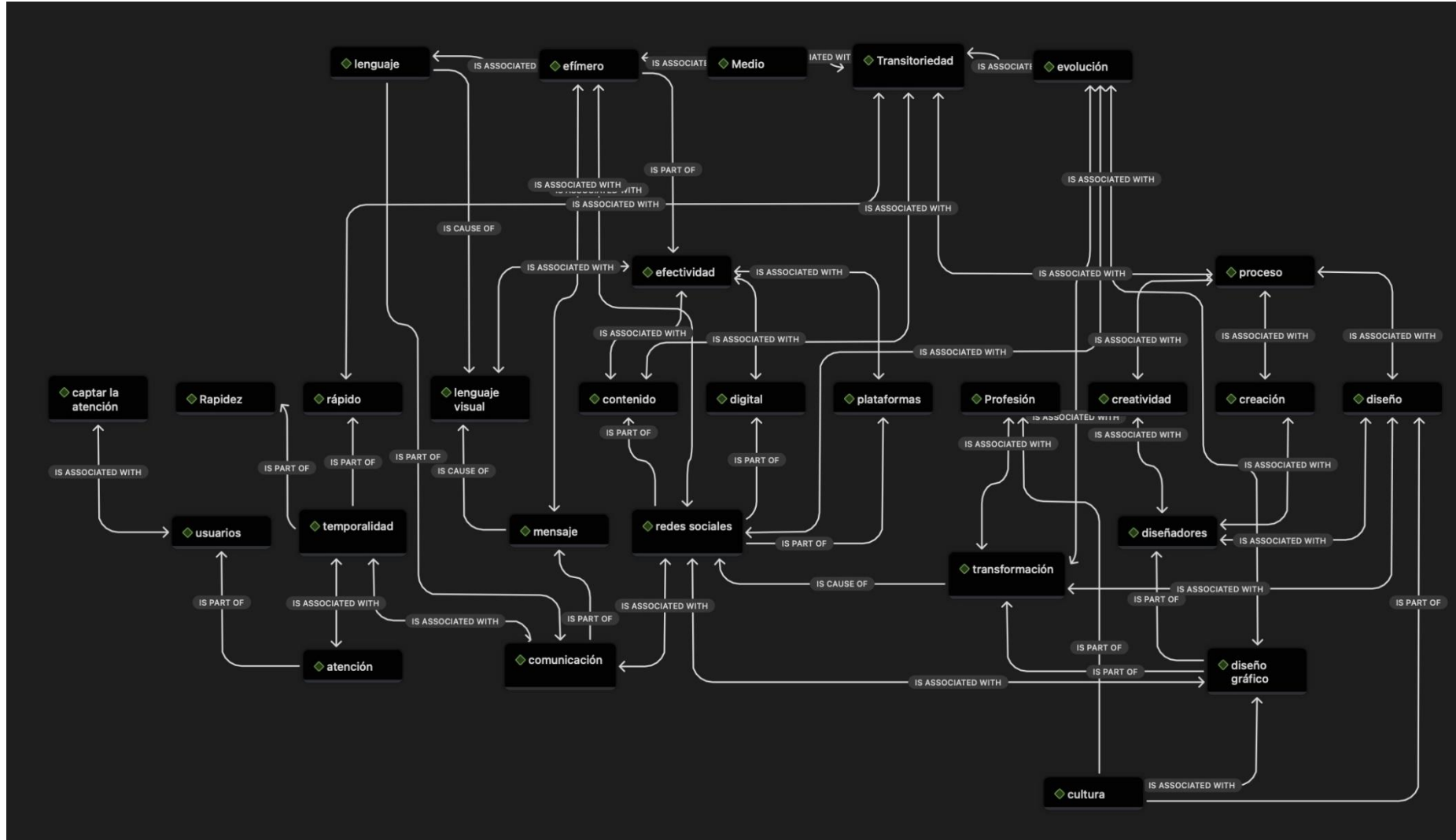
Qualitative Comparative Method

The research is complemented with deductive codes resulting from a previous documentary investigation.

Ephemeral	Medium	Transience	Language	Evolution
Short duration	Efficiency on the internet	Transience	Visual communication	Preservation of history
Short duration	Temporality on social networks	Collective memory	Interpretation	Transforms production and consumption.
Immediacy	Presentation of information	Adaptability	Authenticity of communication	Digital natives
Content dynamics	Availability on the network	Digital narratives	Perception of information	Communicative transformation

Table 9 *Source: Own elaboration*

Deductive coding of documentary research



Qualitative Comparative Method

For a cross-analysis, the results obtained in this research are compared with the previously mentioned findings. This approach allows for the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences between the collected data and existing literature. This cross-analysis not only validates the obtained results but also provides a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon, placing it in a broader context of research that shapes the definition of the concept of digital ephemeral.

Discussions

As a result, designers face challenges in creating effective visual communications in this rapidly evolving digital environment. They must navigate complex contexts where time influences the effectiveness of graphic solutions. The future of design lies in addressing problems at the intersection of visual, social, and technological systems, expanding the scope of graphic designers' work. This evolution in digital communication and consumer behavior necessitates continuous adaptation and innovation in design methodologies and business strategies to maintain relevance and effectiveness in an increasingly competitive digital landscape.

Travassos and Carmo (2024) assert that consumer behavior and communication strategies have undergone significant changes in the digital landscape.

Travassos and Carmo (2024) further elaborate that "these innovations encompass a wide array of tools and techniques, including social media platforms, big data and analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), video marketing, user-generated content (UGC), and chatbots" (p. 2).

Digital ephemera fits the expanded scope into a new form of communication and expression. Rhetorical studies have evolved and analysis of language and speech include various forms of language, such as texts, art and imagery, and others that can have symbolic importance.

DeGalan (2024), explores music as a language with symbolic and rhetorical significance.

"Symbol making and meaning in their environments, which then influences people to act and think in certain ways" (DeGalan, 2024, p.43).



Annexes

Source: Own elaboration

	Attention	Capturing attention	Communication	Content	Digital	Designers	Design	Graphic design	Message	Process	Profession	Social media	Temporality	Transformation	Users
Attention	0	19	4	6	16	13	12	2	14	0	2	25	1	16	18
Capturing attention	19	0	2	5	4	9	10	2	10	0	0	12	0	4	8
Communication	4	2	0	14	5	7	4	1	29	0	0	17	2	1	3
Content	6	5	14	0	13	14	20	13	18	5	12	41	8	6	6
Digital	16	4	5	13	0	7	18	13	7	0	13	29	2	13	14
Designers	13	9	7	14	7	0	31	4	16	17	6	45	18	20	6
Design	12	10	4	20	18	31	0	53	10	16	38	58	17	32	8
Graphic design	2	2	1	13	13	4	53	0	3	0	37	33	2	12	3
Message	14	10	29	18	7	16	10	3	0	1	1	25	4	5	8
Process	0	0	0	5	0	17	16	0	1	0	0	16	14	15	1
Profession	2	0	0	12	13	6	38	37	1	0	0	15	2	12	1
Social media	25	12	17	41	29	45	58	33	25	16	15	0	19	32	25
Temporality	1	0	2	8	2	18	17	2	4	14	2	19	0	13	3
Transformation	16	4	1	6	13	20	32	12	5	15	12	32	13	0	12
Users	18	8	3	6	14	6	8	3	8	1	1	25	3	12	0



Do you think that user attention has changed in digital content on social networks? What is the role of designers?	
Participant 1	Attention, transformation, users, target audience, creation, designers, social networks, impactful connection, audience, message, impactful design, audience analysis, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube.
Participant 2	Attention, digital, social networks, transformation, users, additional element, designer creation, originality, interactions, creative level, audiences, capturing attention, temporality, evolution, strategies, understanding limits, creating decisions.
Participant 3	Attention, digital, social networks, transformation, users, instant gratification, short attention span, negative impacts, digital content, designer creation, clarity, additional resources, virtual infrastructure, content, fast, evolution, design evolution, future generations, capturing attention, effectiveness, user attention, simplification, message.
Participant 4	Attention, digital, social networks, transformation, users, well-directed message, creation, designers, adapted messages, message, temporality, users, audiences, defined audience, target audience, different groups.
Participant 5	Attention, digital, social networks, transformation, users, target audience, metrics, competencies, creation, designers, user attention, reduced attention, short attention span, design, effectiveness, competition, design effectiveness, capturing attention, context, mood.
Participant 6	Attention, digital, social networks, transformation, users, multimedia design, animation, illustrations, creation, designers, additional skills, need for skills, dynamic visual media, design, skills, content, user attention, capturing attention, video editing, social media content, engaging content, engagement, additional skills, versatile skills, crucial role, animation, adopting trends, trends, short videos.
Participant 7	Attention, digital, social networks, transformation, users, content, design, dynamic visual media, impactful design, design impact, user attention, capturing attention, animation, multidisciplinary design, multimedia design, additional skills, creation, designers, engaging content, metrics, adopting trends, trends, changing trends.
Participant 8	Attention, digital, social networks, transformation, users, designer creation, design, message, users, less attention to detail, content creation, effective communication, effectiveness, design effectiveness, effective messages, capturing attention, user attention.
Participant 9	Content, message, process, fast, temporality, users, creation, designers, social networks, attention, digital, designers, well-directed message, direct messages, fast communication, little time, adaptation, capturing attention, saturated profession, saturation, content saturation, transformation, accelerated nature, accelerated consumerism, quick information, clarity, adapted messages, dynamics, efficiency, daily life, digital environment.
Participant 10	Attention, digital, social networks, transformation, users, differentiation, creation, designers, content, message, platforms, users, creativity, capturing attention, low content retention, brand alignment, engaging content, growing platforms, social media platforms, trends, changing trends, user demands, internet, design demands, relevant content, adopting trends, strategies, content ephemerality, less attention to detail, message, maintaining interest, creative planning.
How do you think digital content from different social media platforms impacts the graphic design profession?	
Participant 1	Content, digital, design, graphic design, platforms, profession, social networks, specialties, branding, designers, skills, temporality, motion design, adaptation, video, Instagram, animation, adaptation to demands, TikTok, YouTube, crucial medium, common needs, dynamic visual media, versatile skills, need for skills.
Participant 2	Digital design, platforms, digital platforms, content, Design, graphic design profession, social networks, website disconnection, marketing balance challenges.
Participant 3	Content, digital, design graphic design. Platforms, profession, social networks, design evolution. Connection. Awareness credibility, digital content, design style, educating the public, social media platforms. Importance of Design.
Participant 4	Content, digital, Design, graphic design, platforms, profession, social networks, influencer crossing borders, audiences, communication, quick message, transformation, communication, unique large audiences, authenticity, acceptance.
Participant 5	Content, digital, design, graphic design, platforms, profession, social networks, visual communicators, effective communication, constant updating, work quality, communication, designers message, technology, excessive specialization, limiting curious mind, exploring areas, aesthetic design executors, emerging technologies.
Participant 6	Content, digital, design, design, graphic, platforms, profession, social networks, collaboration, organic collaboration, communication, designers, message, useful tool, creative tools, modern tools, results analysis, metrics, statistics, reach, audience reach.
Participant 7	Content, digital, graphic design, platforms, profession, social networks, Design, adaptation to demands, specific design.
Participant 8	Content, digital, design, graphic design, platforms, profession, social networks.
Participant 9	Content, digital, design, graphic design, platforms, profession, social networks, visually attractive, content, junk, attention, content, designers, users, low content value, content saturation, capturing attention, quality content, difficult user impact, complicated environment, user attention, communication challenge, quality effort.
Participant 10	Content, digital, design, graphic design, platforms, profession, social networks, users, adopting trends, trends, constant, learning, adaptation to demands, physical or digital formats, need for skills, need for innovation, user influences.

Source: Own elaboration



Conclusions

The pursuit of this balance has led designers to explore new techniques and approaches that allow them to capture the viewer's attention in a matter of seconds, without compromising the quality and depth of the visual message. This has resulted in an accelerated evolution in design practices, where simplicity, clarity, and immediacy have become crucial elements, merging with more complex and sophisticated narrative strategies that can unfold rapidly within the limited time frame of ephemeral social networks.

Ultimately, this cross-analysis not only corroborates the validity of the obtained results but also offers a nuanced and holistic understanding of the studied phenomenon, revealing the multiple layers of complexity that underlie the intersection between graphic design and ephemeral content platforms. By situating these findings in a broader research context, it significantly contributes to the definition and conceptualization of digital ephemeral, providing a solid foundation for understanding how these are reshaping traditional paradigms of visual communication.



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