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Hyperconversation, augmented dialogue of the mobile world through WhatsApp

La hiperconversación, el diálogo aumentado del mundo móvil a través de WhatsApp

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Abstract

In this paper we present a proposal for defining «the new conversation» which is recorded by the popular messenger application WhatsApp, and it transforms the classic structures of the dialogue. We label it as 'hyperconversation' and attach the features of accessible, complex, spontaneous, extensible, interactive and multi-code to it through an analysis of the theoretical framework. The variables are drawn from an analysis of the user experiences of 23 people in their practices with WhatsApp and the conversation modes from structured interviews which have been systematised using Atlas.ti software. Following the inductive methodological approach based on Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2002: 21-22), we obtained 28 features related to the temporality, spatiality, communicative formats and the social and subjective characters of the application-mediated conversations. In this case, we conclude that the messenger popular technology contributes to setting up community by reinforcing interpersonal relationships (Giang, 2019) and offering other temporal and spatial opportunities for new ways of communication. We highlight the complexity of the reading itineraries (channels, times, spaces) of the «hyperconversation» and how it is composed of parallel and simultaneous conversations, sometimes even asynchronous, occupying the entire on-life experience. It presents a new communication style which is characterised by its mundanity and ubiquity through new formats and multi-codes that make it infinite and extensible. Hence, it appears to be a new culture of conversation that responds to meanings, speaking turns, the duration and overlap of dialogues, the inclusion of interlocutors and even silence.

Keywords

Communication, hyperconversation, onlife, social relationships, virtuality, WhatsApp

Resumen

Este artículo presenta una propuesta de definición de la nueva conversación que se registra a través de la aplicación de chat WhatsApp, y transforma la estructura del diálogo clásico. La calificamos de 'hiperconversación' y, a partir del análisis propuesto en el marco teórico, le atribuimos las características de accesible, compleja, espontánea, extensible, interactiva y multicódigo. Estas variables surgen del análisis de la experiencia usuaria de 23 personas sobre el uso de la aplicación y los modos de conversación, a través de entrevistas estructuradas. Se ha utilizado una metodología inductiva basada en la Teoría Fundamentada (Strauss y Corbin, 2002: 21-22) para un análisis asistido con el software Atlas.ti hasta obtener por saturación 28 características relacionadas con la temporalidad, la espacialidad, los formatos comunicativos, así como el carácter social y subjetivo del diálogo mediado por la aplicación. Se concluye que la hiperconversación, por cuanto la tecnología facilita otras oportunidades temporales y espaciales, es cotidiana, refuerza las relaciones (Giang, 2019) y contribuye a la creación de comunidad. En su nuevo estilo presenta diferentes formatos y, por tanto, es multicódigo, es tanto sincrónica como asincrónica, en presencia o en ausencia, enriquecida, infinita y extensible. Es compleja en itinerarios de lectura, en canales, en tiempos y espacios, son conversaciones paralelas y simultáneas e incluso asíncronas, y ocupan toda la experiencia onlife. La nueva cultura de la conversación trata de responder a los significados, turnos de palabra, la duración de los diálogos, la inclusión de personas interlocutoras, al solapamiento de diálogos e incluso al silencio.

Palabras clave

Comunicación, hiperconversación, onlife, relaciones sociales, virtualidad, WhatsApp

1. Introduction

In the 'conversation society', all communication channels help to build human relationships because, as Fredrick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls and David Weinberger (1999: 6) predicted in the *Cluetrain Manifesto*, 'The Internet is enabling conversations among human beings that were simply not possible in the era of mass media.' And although face-to-face conversations have lost popularity (Turkle, 2017), the truth is that we now maintain enriching, complex, multimedia, asynchronous, infinite and parallel conversations that circulate through different channels and which offer new strategies for maintaining dialogues. These new conversations take place on different social networks, giving rise to parallel ones, as if they were 'multiple communication places within the same app' (Nouwens, Griggio and Mackay, 2017: 727).

Just as we are living in an 'augmented society' (Fernández and Gutiérrez, 2016), we are also maintaining augmented conversations, namely, hyperconversations that, driven by virtual and mobile hyperconnectivity, surpass the spatio-temporal limits of the physical world and in which dialogues are constructed as hypertexts, as an essential logic of mediation in reciprocal, interactive and uninterrupted digital communication (Lévy, 2007). And also because, as in hypertexts, hyperconversations link the written word to visual and sound communication, or a combination of both, with an enormous freedom of reception and a complex remix of dialogues, knowledge, spaces, forms and aesthetics. They are hypermedia dialogues inasmuch as they are developed through links between different digital content, thanks to connectivity, in an interactive experience for those who control the message, beyond linearity, and organise information, according to their own interests, by thematic, temporal or argumentative association, among other options. As in the case of hypertexts, access is multi-sequential and multilinear, as well as transitory, gradual and more or less extensible, depending on the profundity that each person wishes to establish in that interactive communication.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this study is to define the characteristics of hyperconversations on WhatsApp, an app with a user-friendly interface for exchanging instant messages in an intuitive and fluent manner (Resende et. al, 2019: 1), and how they differ from conventional modes of dialogue, on the basis of both a literature review and user experience. Rather than functional elements, mobile devices are the essence of hyperconversations because software not only carries a symbolic weight in them, but also a material value. Actions and conversations relating to diverse personal and professional activities, plus the dialogic roles of different styles and relationships, intersect when mobile devices themselves mediate our communication, information, interactions and mobility. Given its performative value, the study of technology is crucial for addressing social and political issues, for which reason it is necessary to consider devices and protocols and even to ponder on the social aspects of software.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Conversations

A conversation can be defined as 'an informal talk involving a small group of people or only two' (Oxford Dictionary). Although it has a clearly quotidian component in both its interpersonal and social dimensions and, depending on the context, is more or less formal, it is always a process of negotiation of the identity of whoever intervenes in it. Until now, conversations have depended on the social and cultural resources of those participating in them. The context is defined on the basis of social knowledge and categories that are easy to interpret if they form part of a shared culture (Martín, 2016), which regulates speaking times and silences, while also stipulating that there should be no interruptions and that two people should not speak at the same time. Dialogues mediated by an app like WhatsApp are 'a modality of the conversational genre owing to their prototypical structure, dialogic character and interactive characteristics recognised by speakers' (Martín, 2016: 11). It is a type of informal, spontaneous, instantaneous and ephemeral communication, similar to other commonplace types, but which takes place in a digital context in which it spreads thanks to the quantity and variety of social relationships (Fernández and Gutiérrez, 2016) and communication resources, such as emoticons for developing vocabulary (Babaola, 2016: 1), beyond spatio-temporal limitations. It coincides with the practices of collective and public chat apps which could be defined as those of the 'WhatsApp culture'.

The development of the smartphone has popularised the use of messaging apps like WhatsApp as habitual communication channels, especially among the younger generations, for it allows them to maintain more personal and controlled conversations (Romero and Perlado, 2015). Indeed, mobile devices allow people to communicate with others, without intermediaries: no one now calls people on their landlines, but on their personal telephones. To this should be added the immediacy of personal communication with the possibility of exchanging information in all types of formats (Villafán, 2015).

The advantages of WhatsApp, the most popular app of its kind, include the variety of information formats that it offers users, allowing for the extension of social interactions, even over long distances,

as well as the fact that it is an 'instantaneous, economic communication channel that facilitates continuous contact. This opportunity for constantly receiving information from afar provides us with more opportunities for communicating' (Celaya et al., 2015: 12). As to its disadvantages, the communication context, mediated by screens, has led to the use of languages and resources very different from those of face-to-face and simultaneous and spoken telephone conversations, which influences the coding and decoding of messages evidenced by situations of disagreement, because 'it evolves through multiple turns, since it has not developed linearly, with the different replies of several members who are sometimes even writing simultaneously' (Fernández-Amaya, 2019: 1082). In this respect, it is necessary to consider differences in age, education and genre (Rosenfeld et al., 2018: 21), which have a special impact on the domestic sphere, for, although Taipale and Farinosi (2018: 1) claim that WhatsApp is a tool that facilitates intergenerational family interaction, it is also a source of distraction during conversations, thus undermining interpersonal relationships between friends and relatives (Chan, Yong and Harmizi, 2020: 16).

3.2. Hyperconversations

Code, which is now present in many physical and media experiences, has led to a convergence between texts and readers. Alonso and Arébalos (2009) define the transformation occurring over the past decades as a series of evolutionary stages: users only read (1985-1992); users read and something more (1993-1996); the interactive bubble (1997-2000); the cloud (2001-2004); and, lastly, users are the Web (2004-present). In that process, the way of accessing and selecting information has changed, becoming increasingly more autonomous until breaking the linear sequence. As a result, this new type of conversation has modified the patterns of face-to-face communication, as well as social and conventional forms — as in hypertext — forms of expression and comprehension are now comparable to the mental kind, meaning is negotiated and conversations are no longer determined by a closure or end, but simultaneously channel ideas, experiences, emotions and images.

In the new sociocultural and technological context, hyperconversations are maintained via different channels of interaction and often follow the same hypertextual logic of ordinary 'free reading', which is much more enriching owing to the coincidence of leaps of thought that are connected by the association of ideas through content, comments and fragments of other dialogues, often in multilineal sequences or ones of an arborescent nature. It is a more effective or complex hypermedia or multimedia dialogue that includes the sensorial experiences of audio, video and image in the same communicative action, in such a way that this multimodal combination allows for a comprehensive redefinition, as the original symbols are not only altered in several ways, but also adjusted and modified depending on the situation so as to produce different communicative effects (De Luca, 2021). These aspects contribute to the complexity of hyperconversations which also affects face-to-face dialogues: 'The diversity of meta-communicative markers and functions multiplies the possibilities of intervening in the nature of the communication process mediated by technology, making it more complex and, in the long run, favouring its entwinement with non-mediated daily processes' (Aguado, 2018: 3).

Dialogue is a fragmented, disperse, atomised reality in isolated and heterogeneous content in an endless experience in which audiences seek structures that give it meaning. Hyperconversations allow for approaching disorder, integrating change and its dynamics into a common transformation which can be understood in different disciplines, such as anthropology, philosophy, computer science, literature, sociology, psychology and game theories. Therefore, its approach should not only be multidisciplinary, but also interdisciplinary, always paying due attention to its cultural forms and expressions which are beneficial for the shared practice of mediations (Latour, 1994).

3.3. The characteristics and elements of hyperconversations

Hyperconnectivity (Jenkins, Ito and Boyd, 2015), which is a prerequisite for any hyperconversation, is the field of mediation of relationships in a context of 'ubiquitous sociality' (Aguado, 2018: 4) via mobile devices. Communicative uses, practices and actions can be online or offline, are protracted, strengthen relationships and enhance community building. In reality, it adapts perfectly to the 'onlife' concept (Florida, 2015), an experience in which the digital world merges with its real, face-to-face or analogical counterpart, without there being any clear boundary between the two, thus referring to the ways of doing and being in which there is no distinction between being online or offline.

The concept of 'environment' has been borrowed here from Pink and Hjorth (2014) to contextualise hyperconversations, because it involves broad cultural practices that traverse different moments and spaces with dialogues of an onlife hybrid character. They occur in its different layers of interaction, be they physical or digital, always omnipresent. So, the environment would be the set of factors on the basis of which the actions and permanent presence of people and collectives develop, until becoming unaware of their impact on their lives. In hyperconversations, we are always accessible through apps in which our day-to-day relationships evolve in a process of micro-coordination of 'ambient-mediated sociality' (Ling and Lai, 2016) which broadens the moments and spaces of social life 'resulting in a multiple, ubiquitous and continuous synchrony' (Aguado, 2018: 4).

4. Methodology

The analysis of the communicative practices of hyperconversations is approached from a culturally situated position as a context of the actions, uses and social constructs of new modes of dialogue leveraging the opportunities offered by chat and messaging apps like WhatsApp. Culturally situated analyses interpret interaction and mediation because, as a complex activity, new conversations develop in different dimensions and levels and, depending on the context, can be more or less confidential or open when meanings and significances are being negotiated. This state of affairs is supplemented by the technological possibilities of the apps through which they are channelled, like, for example, the customisation of interfaces and keypads, so as to perform a specific analysis on practices and meanings.

In recent years, app functionality has become increasingly more complex, in parallel with the changes that have been brought about in the mobile environment and, above all, in forms of social interaction, according to the evolution resulting, for instance, from the transition from SMS to instantaneous messaging apps and social networks, which 'have become ubiquitous applications that allow people to easily share text, pictures, and audio and video files' (Rosenfeld et al., 2018: 647). And the same can be said of the creation of voice messages, for in the view of Maros et al. (2020), 'Text messages and images still cannot transmit the tone, urgency, emotion or purpose of the sender, as can the content of an audio file, which limits misinterpretations'. The aim of employing indirect strategies and syntactic modifications is to abide by the rules of courtesy of this social communication medium (Castineira-Benítez and Flores-Salgado, 2017: 1).

The study of communicative practices in chats has revealed the most innovative aspects of digital transformations, technology appropriation and collective creation, which are permanently questioned in each daily interaction, thus gaining social acceptance. Despite its interest, it is a topic that has not been widely researched, whereby the literature in this regard is thin on the ground, considering the impact of these practices since the advent of the smartphone and apps of this kind (Aguado, 2018). Accordingly, the intention here is to perform an exploratory study on hyperconversations as augmented dialogues, on the basis of interactions via mobile devices, with a reflective approach, involving a process of enquiry whose aim is to assuage the tensions between research and participation. Owing to its complexity and richness, as well as to the subjectivities that it involves, it is an essential field of study and knowledge in social communication, especially when analysing its practices. For which reason, a situated research methodology is employed, insofar as it is coherent with an ethnographic approach to this object of study and inherent to feminist research when it is established as a dynamic relationship between the public and private spheres — which is the scope of hyperconversations — in which to interpret, in a reflective and fluid way, the agency of the subjectivity that contributes to validate knowledge (Benítez-Eyzaguirre and Arencón-Beltrán, 2020).

The research methodology is based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 14 questions about digital conversations and the daily use of WhatsApp, the most popular messaging and chat app in Spain, in dialogues of a different nature. A total of 23 interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon from a subjective perspective, with the aim of defining the hyperconversation phenomenon through the new uses of WhatsApp that challenge the social rules of conventional dialogues, as well as those to which people put the app and the functionalities that are most interesting to them in their daily practices.

Participant selection was carried out using the snowball sampling method: intentional for the sake of convenience and successively, with theoretical saturation limiting the number of interviews conducted. In other words, when subsequent interviews no longer provided any new insights for answering the research questions, this served as a cut-off point.

This type of sampling allowed for identifying a variety of individuals with whom others had links and created spaces of sociability via the app, with the aim of constructing a diverse sample as to age, occupation and place of residence, in accordance with the study's exploratory character. Furthermore, since the study involved addressing sensitive issues relating to the intimacy and privacy of the interviewees, it was the most adequate methodology for finding individuals willing to reveal the secrets of their private communicative practices on WhatsApp.

The snowball sampling technique employed here was of the non-discriminatory exponential type, with the first interviewee providing a large number of references. Each new reference provided more data for the subsequent reference and so on and so forth, until achieving a sufficient number of subjects by theoretical saturation, thus ensuring sample diversity.

The interviewees included 16 women and seven men residing in Cadiz (9), Madrid (3), Almeria (3), Seville (2), Alava (2), Badajoz (2), Ciudad Real (1) and Tarragona (1), in the following age brackets: 21-25 years (9); 25-29 years (3); 30-39 years (5); and 40-50 years (6). As to their occupations, there were three office workers, two teachers, two students, two psychologists, a criminologist, an investor, a shop assistant, a

delivery person, a community manager, a salesperson, a shopkeeper, a publicist, a baker, a stylist, a coach, a nurse and a dancer. The lowest age bracket in the sample was 21-25 years, namely, the most mature generation of centennials, as justified by Kantar (2018), for it is a collective whose members have already consolidated their communicative practices on WhatsApp. While subjects below the age of 21 have been considered as a future object of study.

Hyperconversations develop at different levels, with an occasionally arborescent structure in which devices and face-to-face and online spaces merge and in which people use frames of interpretation resulting from different relationships and experiences, from which shared repertoires that require an interpretative analysis emerge. Accordingly, this study used a grounded theory (GT) methodology consisting of the computer-assisted coding of the interviews in which the subjects described their daily practices. For coding with Atlas.ti 8.0, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) suite specially designed for performing qualitative data analyses, recourse was had to concepts appearing in the theoretical and contextual framework sections, to which were added those that cropped up in the analysis as significant pieces of information provided by the interviewees, which are described in detail in the results section. A definition of this new type of conversation, in addition to its basic characteristics and the variables identified in the discourse analysis, was then elaborated.

The literature review conducted in the theoretical framework section has determined that hyperconversations are accessible, owing to the fact that they are permanently available to all and sundry anywhere in the world. They are complex because they imitate arborescent mental processing, with leaps of thought, multilineal sequences in a fragmented reality in which ideas simultaneously appear. They are spontaneous because they emerge without prior planning. They are extensible insofar as they broaden time and space. And they are multi-code for interlocutors agree on and use different symbols and formulas to understand each other by means of a virtual language.

In view of these inherent characteristics of hyperconversations, how they relate to the other families of codes is analysed below.

Table 1. Codes grouped together in families and their definition

Family of codes	Description
Time	
Asynchronous	It is produced in a different moment or temporal space
Ephemeral	It expires after a short time
Infinite	It is everlasting and serves to store or save the proof of something
Instantaneous	It occurs immediately or very rapidly
Synchronous	It is produced or done at the same time
Ubiquitous	Present, appearing or found everywhere
Space	
Virtual	Multi-spatial or parallel in which one or several of the interlocutors are not in the same physical space
Multi-device	Computer, tablet and smartphone
Ubiquitous	Present, appearing or found everywhere
Face-to-face	The interlocutors share the same physical space
Social family	
Quotidian	It is done habitually or usually
Group	Several people intervene
Informal	Typical of the way in which friends or relatives treat each other, without any formality
Professional	In the workplace

Family of codes	Description
Subject	
Abusive	The abusive use of WhatsApp
Subjective	The message is interpreted or misunderstood depending on the frame of mind or feelings of the receiver
Emotions	This has to do with how it makes people feel or whether or not it elicits any emotion for being mediated by WhatsApp
Control	Markers of control or privacy: read, status, last connection, heard
Personal	In the personal sphere and not in the professional or academic one
Individual	On one's own
Respectful	Non-invasive, for it is often used to ask for permission to start a conversation through another channel and does not require such a direct or immediate response, while also having to do with the greater privacy of not having to become involved in a face-to-face conversation
Format	
Multi-format, multimedia and multi-content	Images, audio files, links, videos, screenshots of one's own or other people's content
Enriching	With added visual, audio or audio-visual references with the aim of enriching the conversation or referring to something, even alluding to a previous message or to another person by employing WhatsApp's different technological features

Source: Own elaboration

5. Discussion

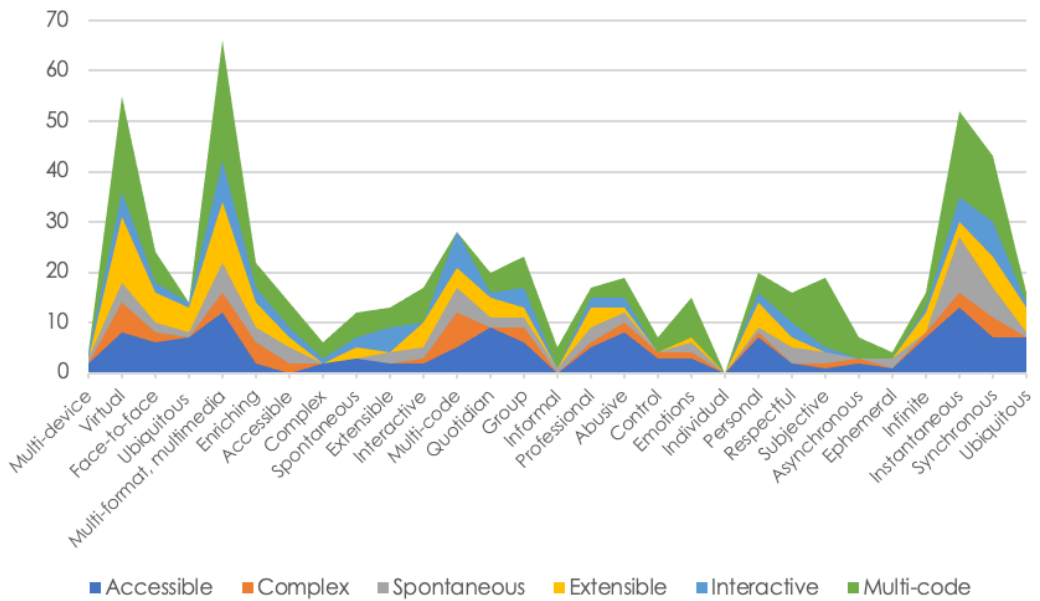
In light of the literature review and the state of the question, the characteristics of hyperconversations^[1] were considered as key concepts that were coded in order to conduct a computer-assisted analysis on the information obtained in the interviews, structured on the basis of the contributions described in the theoretical framework section and, above all, the practices of the interviewees, classified in families of codes, so as to assess the importance that they attached to them. To this end, the results of the analysis of the codes employed and the families into which they fall (see Table 1) are listed below.

Table 2. General results of the analysis of families and codes

Family	Codes included in each family						
Hyperconversation 186	Accessible 46	Complex 11	Spontaneous 18	Extensible 28	Interactive 21	Multi-code 62	
Time 249	Asynchronous 20	Ephemeral 6	Infinite 52	Instantaneous 78	Synchronous 67	Ubiquitous 26	
Space 223	Multi-device 7	Virtual 119	Face-to-face 71	Ubiquitous 26			
Social 154	Quotidian 43	Group 45	Informal 12	Professional 54			
Subject 318	Abusive 76	Control 17	Emotions 67	Individual 13	Personal 58	Subjective 43	Respectful 44
Format 141	Multi-format, multimedia and multi-content 125	Enriching 16					

Source: Own elaboration

Graph 1. General results of the analysis of families and codes



Source: Own elaboration

6. Results. Analysis of the interviews about hyperconversations

This first approach allows for drawing a mental map of the importance of certain categories for defining hyperconversations (186), while in view of the options offered by the app and its uses the concepts were defined on the basis of the contributions described in the theoretical framework section. Seven essential codes were obtained from these variables:

- Accessible ^[2] (46), which refers to the permanent conversation in any time or place, thus indicating the level of penetration of this app: 'WhatsApp's used by everyone from children to grandparents; it encompasses all generations' (OLB39F-M) ^[3]. It is a perpetual resource for users since it is always available: 'I always have WhatsApp open in a tab on my computer and also in my mobile, because sometimes it consumes a lot of data transfer and bandwidth' (DOG43F-A).
- Extensible (28), which describes how hyperconversations develop in time and space, owing to the fact that it is possible to include precise references, like, for instance, 'Your location in real time or normal location, like I'm in such and such a place and you send someone your location' (OLB39F-M), but also when 'You send written messages about what's happening, like, for example, in the place where the group's meeting ...' (STC47M-A).
- Multi-code (62), which relates to the use of different communication codes, including emoticons, which reinforce and enrich the meaning of a message so that it can be easily understood, and to whether or not they are accepted by interlocutors (Chairunnisa and Benedictus, 2017: 125) as a way of digitally expressing emotions (Sampietro, 2021: 2) or maintaining a conversation with voice notes: 'Initially, the fact that you could speak with voice notes surprised me, for I've seen people who, instead of making a call, dedicate perhaps five minutes to writing a note, and the received replies, "Okay" ...' (MJR45H-C).
- Interactive (21), which encompasses the interactive features of technology itself: 'If you're talking to someone on WhatsApp and want to play him a song, you can look for it on Spotify or YouTube and send it to him on the spot, with photos; in that sense, it's much more interactive' (STC47M-A).
- Spontaneous (18), which has to do with the possibility of maintaining a conversation with no prior planning: 'For instance, I'm on the street talking on the phone with my family and want to show them something, so I hang up and make a video call to show them something or to see them' (OLB39F-M).

- Complex (11), which refers to the comments made on a dialogue, when this imitates arborescent thought or produces leaps of thought, multilinear sequences or simultaneous ideas, or is fragmented: 'I can tell it in writing or in an audio file. I can maintain parallel conversations or merge them' (PO44F-M).
- In the analysis, the predominance of the hyperconversation family over the rest of the families of codes was established.

Table 3. Co-occurrences between the codes of the hyperconversation family with the space, format, social, subject and time families

	Accessible	Complex	Spontaneous	Extensible	Interactive	Multi-code	Total
Space	23	8	8	24	9	25	97
Format	14	8	9	17	11	29	88
Social	20	4	8	10	7	16	65
Subject	24	6	10	9	8	39	96
Time	37	9	20	18	14	40	138

Source: Own elaboration

6.1. The time of hyperconversations

The most productive co-occurrences were identified in the family of codes relating to time, with which there were 138, on the basis of the temporal characteristics of dialogues, defined employing the following concepts: asynchronous (7), ephemeral (4), ubiquitous (16), infinite (26), instantaneous and synchronous. In the analysis, the most predominant codes were instantaneous (52) and synchronous (43).

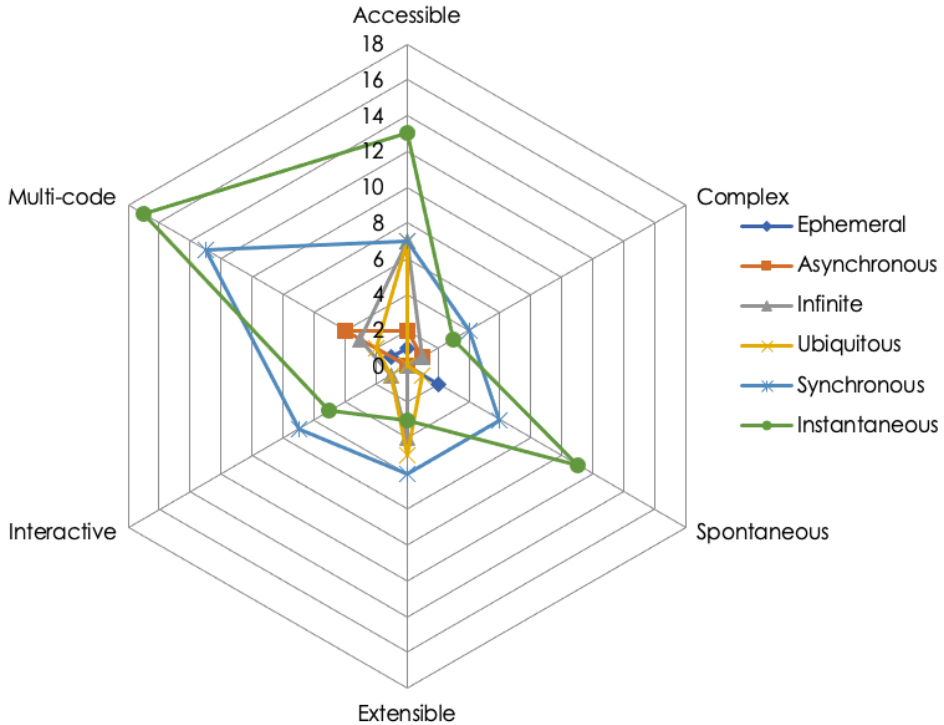
Since the app is always accessible on mobile phones, it contributes to instantaneous and spontaneous communication (11 co-occurrences), while giving rise to the sensation that 'you can communicate with a person whenever you want' (MRO30F-C). It is always available: 'You can withdraw from that meeting and/or class to transmit something important that has just crossed your mind and, vice versa, you can be told something important' (SL30F-A).

Spontaneous conversations include day-to-day images and occurrences: 'It's also a way of familiarising the person with whom you're talking with what you're doing at that moment: "Hey, I'm having a beer!" Or I'm having a drink with someone and I call and say, "Hey, look where we are!", or even to say to my parents, "I'm cooking and look what I'm making"' (VNJ42F-T). They are practices that often guide actions, even consumption: 'There're many people who do ... "Hey, can you send me a photo of what I'm going to buy?"' (MJR45H-C).

Multi-code (40) makes it possible to express things very succinctly: 'The good thing is that you can boil what you want to say down to three words [...], it's quick and efficient' (ESM38F-C). Instantaneous, multi-code conversations (17) combine formats for communication efficiency: 'Writing's tiring for me, but I do believe that photos, audio files and locations are really important' (ESM38F-C).

Graph 2. Co-occurrences of the characteristics of hyperconversations with the family of codes relating to time

Source: Own elaboration



In hyperconversations, synchrony (43) is coherent with dialogues that are extensible (6): ““Let’s meet halfway in such and such a place” and using the live location feature on WhatsApp you can see where that person’s moving and where you’re moving yourself and how you’re gradually meeting up at that halfway point” (OLB39F-M). The synchrony favoured by the app’s features leads to a combination of different modes of dialogue: ‘Being able to chat directly in that way and then being able to make video calls and attach files’ (MRO30F-C).

Hyperconversations are also multimedia (66) and extensible (18), broadening the time and space of their conventional counterparts: ‘It has many advantages. With a call, you can transmit many things, but you can’t show them; you have to use your imagination. Here, you can even save things’ (OLB38F-M). As to their extensible character, they also include some or other daily action (4), chat or occurrence in person (6): ‘If I’m doing something that I really like and mention it to someone at that very moment; or maybe that person asks me something and I reply, “Well, I’m now doing such and such a thing” and I share what I’m doing with that person directly and face-to-face’ (ECR48F-C).

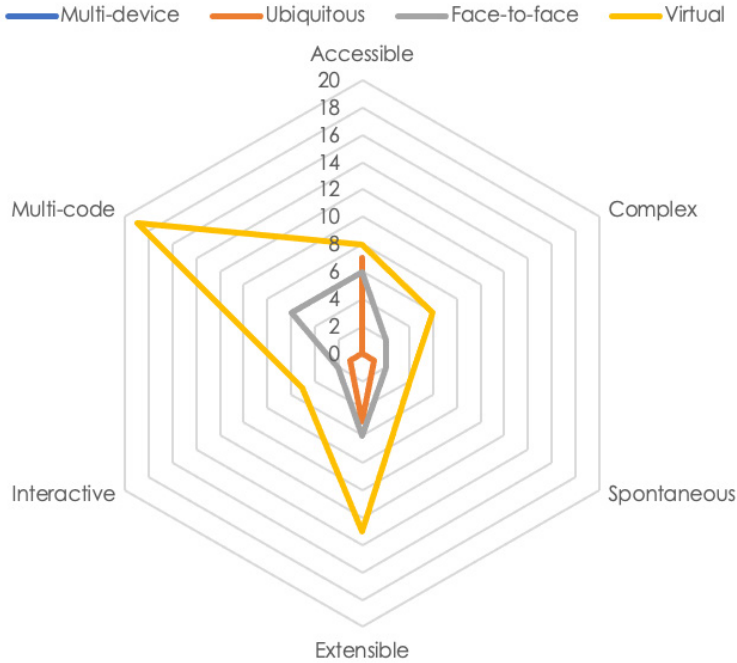
They are also understood as being infinite (16), like a succession of communicative actions belonging to the same thematic thread in undefined time lapses: ‘I’m no longer dying for them to receive it so much, but just post it and expect that they’ll see it’ (VNJ42F-T). Hyperconversations occur at an unspecified time: ‘With WhatsApp, you just post what you want to say in the knowledge that the person in question will reply whenever possible’ (MRO30F-C). Dialogues are now understood as being flexible and open: ‘Mind you, the advantage of WhatsApp is that I can abandon a conversation when I want to, resume it a week later, a month later, just not reply ...’ (STC47H-A).

6.2. Space in hyperconversations

The family of codes relating to space yielded 97 co-occurrences, corresponding to the multi-device codes (4 as references to when things are recorded on a computer, tablet or smartphone), virtual (55), face-to-face (24) and ubiquitous (14). Virtual hyperconversations (55) stood out, practically doubling the number of the face-to-face kind (24), a code that refers to a dialogue between people sharing the same physical space.

Virtual (13) and ubiquitous (5) conversations were extensible when the effect of 'bridging the gap' was valued (DOG43F-A), because WhatsApp helps people to keep in touch: 'I've always used it to a certain extent to know how people who I don't see that often are faring' (IPC38F-M); or in the case of 'interpersonal relationships because, for example, if a person's maintaining a long-distance relationship with someone, the most immediate communication channel is WhatsApp, just in case anything happens, even when it happens, like an accident' (VMR22F-C).

Graph 3. Co-occurrences of the characteristics of hyperconversations with the family of codes relating to space



Source: Own elaboration

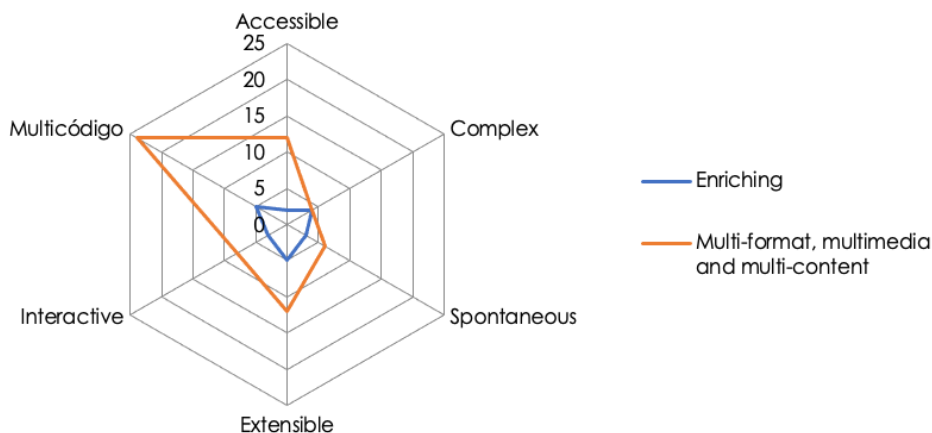
Virtual conversations (119) occur because they are accessible (8) and extensible (13 co-occurrences with the virtual kind) codes that are applicable when those conversations are extended in time and space, and also use multi-formats: 'Sending documents, photos, videos, audio files and receiving them Being able to hold a real meeting or attending an online class, for example, with a teacher' (ESM38F-C).

When the interlocutors share the same physical space and interact, this can give rise to synchrony, since on WhatsApp it is a dual channel when it is face-to-face (24) and, at the same time, virtual: "When I'm surrounded by people and I'm with a friend who I want to tell something without anyone else finding out, I send him a message and he and I reach a mutual understanding' (MPC21M-C). Hyperconversations facilitate face-to-face interactions with the virtual inclusion of those who are in a different place: 'We all know that you can obviously be connected with people who are in another part of the world, include them in conversations, recall moments and people and make a call at that moment. And, although you don't use videos or recordings, you can indeed send written messages about what's happening, for instance, in the place where a group of friends are meeting ...' (STC47M-A). Virtual and group conversations (8) strengthen interpersonal contacts: 'You're in a group ... so, I more or less know how Laura, who belongs to it, is doing, but I wouldn't ring her So, it does help me to keep in closer contact with her, which I believe is pretty much the general state of affairs' (IPC38F-M).

6.3. Format in hyperconversations

The family of codes relating to format corresponds to the technological options of hyperconversations, with which there were 88 co-occurrences. The vast majority of those co-occurrences refer to the concepts of multi-format, multimedia and multi-content (66), encompassing the inclusion of images, audio files, links, videos or screenshots of one's own or other people's content in hyperconversations. Multi-format is one of the characteristics thanks to which dialogues are extensible (12), on occasion as multimedia: 'Sending screenshots of "what's happening", even at work' (OLB39F-M).

Graph 4: Co-occurrences of the characteristics of hyperconversations with the family of codes relating to format



Source: Own elaboration

Multi-code dialogues (24) combine elements that favour the economy of words: 'Being able to send audio files. It strikes me because it saves the sender the time that it'd take to write the same message' (MCR21M-A); and 'We can resolve how ... that's to say, just imagine I'm sending you a file, so that file has to be opened on WhatsApp because I have it on my phone as a photo' (DOG43F-A).

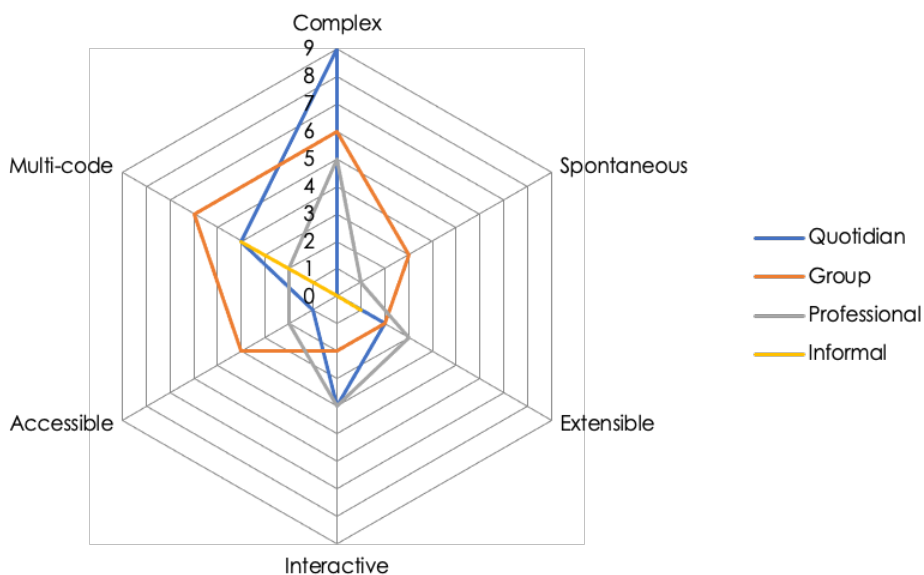
That is how a new enriching conversation (22) is started to obtain further information or to allude to a previous message or to another person: 'Sharing things that perhaps aren't material and cannot be shared in a face-to-face conversation, which's also something really useful that I believe 100 per cent of WhatsApp users employ' (LRE25F-S). A specific case of its referential use is as irrefutable proof of what has been said: 'For instance, when I'm with someone who I really trust and I'm telling her about a lovers' tiff and need to explain to her what that person really said to me or what I said to him, then I show it to her directly [on WhatsApp]' (ECR48F-C). In combination with emotions, it also highlights its referential value for recollections and nostalgia: 'Conversations are saved there, so there're like files, files of personal conversations that you have and which you can retrieve at a given time' (ECR48F-C).

Multi-formats, as well as multi-codes (24), are put to a very creative use when constructing dialogues, inasmuch as they allow for incorporating all types of resources: 'I think it all has to do with attempting to make a conversation on WhatsApp as real as possible. That's why different characters are employed, or gifs are used or you add people, in an attempt to make it resemble what you might tell a person during a real face-to-face conversation' (LRE25F-S). The association with extensible (12) is also significant: 'WhatsApp can supplement a face-to-face conversation, serving to share the photo or link about which you're talking' (JPV24M- B). The inclusion of links in conversations increases the possibilities of reading and interpreting messages and contributes to their complexity (8). The multi-format, multimedia and multi-content codes include examples of using photos, voice notes and links to substantiate what has been said in a hyperconversation: 'If I'm referring to something and the person who I'm talking to wants more information, I can indeed send it to him via WhatsApp' (DOG43F-A). Many people even use it as a personal file or notepad, creating their own exclusive chat channel in which information, data and links are stored for personal use.

6.4. The new social style of hyperconversations

The penultimate family of codes for analysing hyperconversations, which has been designated here as 'social' (81), contains the group (23), quotidian (20), professional (17) and informal (5) codes. As already seen, hyperconversations are accessible (46, in absolute terms) which contributes to make them commonplace (9, in co-occurrence with accessible), owing to the fact that they are less expensive: 'Before, calls were expensive and everyone had a connected computer, etc., but if you have a mobile [...] and if you connect to a Wi-Fi network, you don't even have to use your data transfer' (DOG43F-A).

Graph 5. Co-occurrences of the characteristics of hyperconversations with the family of codes relating to social



Source: Own elaboration

Hyperconversations tend to be of the group (23) and collective kind much more often now, an aspect similar to social networking when, for example, such conversations are converted into channels for disseminating publications, information or news: 'Also sharing files, which is very direct. And how nowadays people are all but continually using WhatsApp, for it's a very quick way of sending a certain type of information to people' (MJR45H-C). Group conversations are channels of collective coordination: 'Creating groups and coordinating them to do something; you can ensure that all those involved receive the necessary information rapidly and all at once' (JPV24M-B).

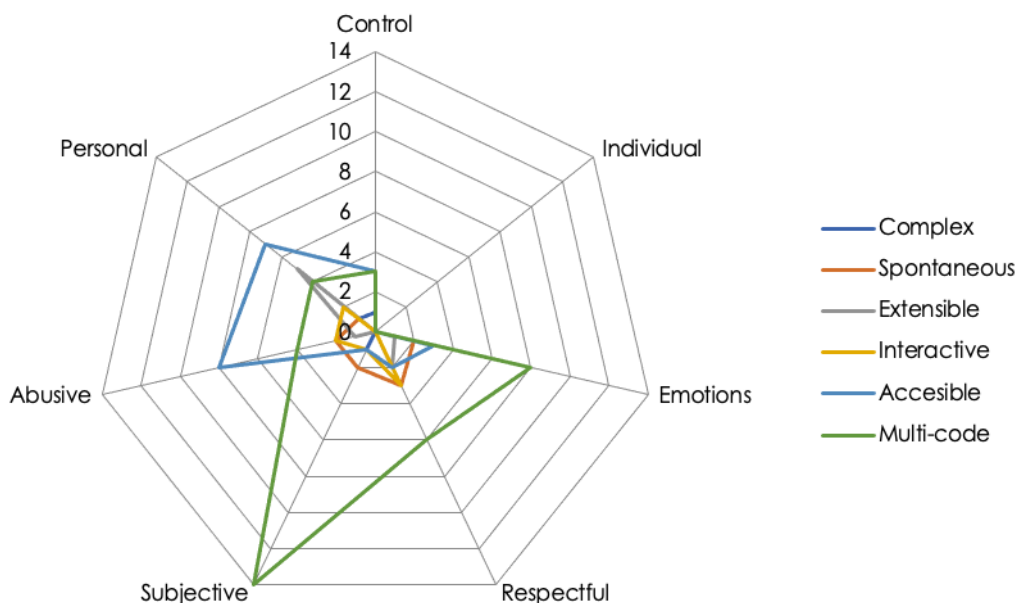
A characteristic that WhatsApp shares with social networks is the use of 'status', which has emerged from Instagram stories: 'I'm very surprised by the fact that it's had a fairly important impact on your contacts, even those people with whom you haven't spoken for ages and who contact you through that status you've created and who leave you comments or tell you things as if it were a social network' (OLB39F-M). It often serves to resume a conversation: 'Like saying, "Look, I'm here, I'm here today"; as it lasts for 24 hours, people look at the status and leave comments They say things ...' (OLB39F-M).

In the association between group and professional characteristics (17), coordination has aspects in common with the collaborative economy and collective solutions: 'For looking for work, because I'm in job seeking groups; for car sharing, because I'm in car sharing groups; I'm in donation, exchange and barter groups' (ECR48F-C). As a matter of fact, as to quotidian characteristics (20), such as habitual or usual, it can be seen how it is believed that WhatsApp is used more frequently than social networks and that it has displaced other more conventional channels in the professional world: 'What's most striking to me is that companies use it and that they might say, "No, no, send me this document via WhatsApp." [...] it's now so normal that it's even used for that purpose, right?' (LRE25F-S). WhatsApp is regarded as a utility that has its advantages in the workplace: "'Hey, do you want me to send you the bill via WhatsApp? That's easy or I'll send you the photos of the products via WhatsApp, because it works really well for me'" (VNJ42F-T). In connection with the group characteristic, conversations are often considered to be abusive (19): 'In groups, people really overstep the mark; they take liberties that weren't allowed before and aren't allowed in face-to-face encounters' (ECR48F-C). The interviewees also underscored the abusive use of an omnipresent app that made users dependent: 'Everyone's far too hooked on it' (ACR29F-C) and 'It now forms such a part of our lives that we can't do without it' (LRE25F-S).

6.5. The subject in hyperconversations

Lastly, regarding the family of codes relating to subject (96 co-occurrences), the most significant associations were between the abusive (19), personal (20) and subjective (19) codes, while also relating to those of control (7), emotions (15) and respectful(16).

Graph 6: Co-occurrences of the characteristics of hyperconversations with the family of codes relating to subject



Source: Own elaboration

The conversation is subjective (43) because the message is interpreted or misinterpreted depending on the frame of mind or feelings of the receiver. Messages are interpreted subjectively due to the difficulties posed by this new style of communication: 'The impossibility of understanding irony and such, the refusal to do so ... although, come to think of it, in reality that's compensated to a certain degree by emoticons' (IPC38F-M). Some of the interviewees were of the opinion that the app's new features helped to avoid confusions: 'WhatsApp has that option for replying to a specific message. [...] I understand that it was introduced owing to user demand, because there were sometimes conflicts of that kind when conversations weren't understood adequately, right? So as to avoid errors' (OLB39F-M). Personal assessments (20) were interpreted in terms of emotions (15) and the transformation of the most intimate communication: 'My conversations on WhatsApp, above all, the longer ones or those that I maintain most, have to do with emotions; either with people with whom I have a relationship or with friends or relatives or whoever I'm telling personal, intense, deep and humdrum things' (ECR48F-C).

In the family of codes relating to subject, those of control (7) and respectful (16) were much more important: 'I believe a negative aspect is the lack of privacy that we have with respect to the messages we send and the content we disseminate and the fact that we can be included in groups to which we don't really want to belong' (LRM23M-A). The control markers created by WhatsApp, which inform about the availability or reception and reading of messages, really put the interviewees off because they sometime gave rise to thorny situations in personal relationships: 'The blue tick and the last time of connection ... I know people who've activated it because it's irrelevant to them, but I think that privacy should be reinforced, for I even know of unpleasant situations to which that kind of information has given rise' (VMR22F-C). The rules of courtesy of face-to-face conversations have changed with some users feeling exposed to annoying or offensive comments: 'I believe it's because people discover a sort of anonymity in WhatsApp or social media groups to let off steam' (ECR48F-C). For others, telephones have become an obstacle for face-to-face conversations: 'In the main, when I'm with people, I try to avoid using my phone, looking at it, consulting it, because it's something that annoys me, it's something that's interrupting me' (OLB39F-M).

7. Conclusions

Conversations that were unthinkable in the mass media age have since become commonplace, versatile and transformative, as well as broadening our connectivity and forms of socialisation. This new reality has been defined here as 'hyperconversation' on the strength of 28 characteristics that have emerged from the experience gleaned by users from their dialogic communication on WhatsApp. It is a new communication style, comprising synchronous or asynchronous, face-to-face or virtual, enriching,

extensible, infinite, hybrid conversational forms, which combines different levels of interaction and a different style of socialisation. Immediacy and the possibility of interaction and association are key issues of this process in a context of reciprocal and prolonged mediation, as defended by Lévy (2007).

Hyperconversations are more accessible and spontaneous. However, dialogues are more personal and subjective, since they break the cultural rules of face-to-face conversations whenever they are virtual and asynchronous. These exchanges no longer require the same level of attention as phone calls. There are now parallel and simultaneous conversations, without there being social reproof for being discourteous. This new type of conversation is subjective and unfettered, chats begin and end and are abandoned and resumed without any rules. We silence boring or hostile conversations and reply whenever we deem fit or simply refuse to do so.

Software has a performative value because it changes conversational dynamics with other resources and temporal, face-to-face and social modes. The findings of our study include the creation of new parallel channels for dialogue, the power of extensible conversations and the referential value of chats. And this is so because hyperconversations are complex as regards forms of reading, codes and formats, time and space, while affecting online experience as a whole (Floridi, 2015). This new kind of conversation combines face-to-face and virtual aspects, defined by some interviewees as 'the real and online self' (STC47M-A). Meanings are constructed through negotiation, while an enriching experience, in comparison with traditional non-verbal communication, is created with web resources or user-generated videos through a network of connections with other chats. Intuition, implicitness and intertextuality often guide both reading and writing practices through the association of ideas. Users have made the most of the communication advantages, while creating new forms thanks to a connectivity that broadens time, space, scenarios, contacts and emotions. A shared culture attempts to cater to meanings, speaking times, the duration of dialogues, the inclusion of interlocutors and the overlapping of conversations within what could be defined as the 'WhatsApp culture'.

The dialogic relationship of hyperconversations shows that fusion of culture and metaculture as parallel spaces of interaction, in which a new sensorial and vital experience takes place. Communicative actions encompass all the dimensions of an augmented sociality thanks to a technology that facilitates a long-term synchrony, ubiquity and continuity (Aguado, 2018), opens up new spatial opportunities and strengthens relationships through processes of micro-coordination.

But hyperconversations that prompt us to perform multiple tasks, shorten our attention span and make us avoid personal contact and reflections now abound. Face-to-face dialogues or even phone calls are now infrequent, while conversational forms and possibilities have mutated with the advent of new technological developments, such as double-checking, which reveal the silences and conflicts in relationships and the stress suffered by those participating in them (Blabst and Diefenbach, 2017: 1). These new forms of control (Aguado, 2018), which pose a threat to privacy, are repudiated by those using apps of this kind, while dialogues endure. Owing to their infinite, accessible, spontaneous, extensible and ubiquitous nature, hyperconversations require respectful and courteous ground rules based on the social negotiation of replies, silences, durations and interruptions in order that they should not be regarded as abusive.

8. Specific contribution of each author

Contributions	
Study conception and design	Author 1
Documentary research	Author 1
Data collection	Author 2, Author 3
Critical data analysis and interpretation	Author 2
Draft revision and approval	Author 1, Author 2

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11. Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Notes

1. In capital letters, the name of the family of codes on which the analysis has been based, in which each family encompasses a number of characteristics that describe the field of analysis and which are shown in Table 2.
2. In brackets, the number of times that the recorded statements coincide with the definition of the code or characteristic used for analysing the results of the fieldwork.
3. In brackets, the code identifying the interviewee, which is formed by the initials of the person in question, followed by his or her age and sex and, after the hyphen, the initial of the province where he or she resides.