

Technology and Family Rituals

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Abstract. - This article examines the influence that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are having on family life and on its rituals. The social model of the family has evolved, but rituals keep being an important part of its internal dynamism. Thanks to rituals, family members build the symbolic structure that gives them cohesion and a horizon of meaning. Two case studies are presented to see how families perceive the influence of ICTs and regulate their use. In the first case, some testimonies from families on pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela are examined. The second case is focused on daily dinner. The paper underlines the need to use ICTs wisely so that family rituals continue to fulfill their social function and family communication keeps being integral, empathetic, harmonious, an expression of closeness and encounter. [*rituals, family, ICT, the Way to Santiago, family dinner*]

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Introduction

This article** studies the influence that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are having on family life and on its rituals. The social model of the family has evolved, but rituals keep being an important part of its internal dynamism. Thanks to rituals, family members build the symbolic structure that gives them cohesion and a horizon of meaning. Today, ICTs are omnipresent in family life, and they are also shaping the whole society.¹ They bring us closer to each other, but they can also take us away from ourselves, from those around us, and from our cultural environment (PCSC 2000: n. 29). We need to discern how to inhabit wisely the existential context they create.

The first part of this article illustrates that the family model has greatly changed in recent decades. The second part presents the current importance of ICTs in family life and in its rituals. Finally, two case studies are studied: the family dinner and the experience of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela (3rd part). In both cases, some testimonies from families are analyzed to see how their members perceive the influence of ICTs and regulate their use.

1. *The Family and Its Rituals*

The family model has evolved considerably since the 1950s. At that time, it was considered normal for the family to be a heterosexual couple with children and well-defined roles: The husband used to work away from home, while the wife took care of housework. The family used to be a stable institution, with few divorces and a clear social function. Two decades later, however, this family model was being strongly contested. The feminist movement and some social sectors accused it of reflecting a patriarchal and classist society that needed to be overcome. In the 1990s, the search for

** Index of initials used in this article: **AAS** = Acta Apostolicae Sedis; **ECS** = Ethics in Communications; **FT** = Fratelli tutti. Encyclical letter; **LS** = Laudato si'. Encyclical letter; **OR** = L'Osservatore Romano; **PCSC** = Pontifical Council for Social Communications; **PUA** = Pontificia Università Antonianum; **PUL** = Pontificia Università Lateranense; **UP** = University Press; **WCD** = World Day of Social Communications.

1 “È anche la tecnologia a ‘usare’ l’utente. Ogni strumento ha un impatto su chi lo usa” e sul suo “rapporto con il mondo” (Lynch 2012: 53 and 57). “Unprecedented increase in the use of technology in everyday life” (Hertlein 2021: 374).