Life during and after COVID-19

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Introduction

This presentation is based on a previous work that I did with my colleagues Octavio Islas and Amaia Arribas, and grounded on the special report called "Coronavirus Disruption Project: How we are living and facing the pandemic" directed by my friend and colleague Jeffrey Cole, from the Center for the Digital Future.

The text responds to the purpose of analyzing the effects of a prolonged quarantine caused by the spread of **COVID-19, on the perception, understanding, feeling and meaning of human beings**.

The report of the Center for the Digital Future, included a survey, which was applied in April 2020 to a thousand Americans over 18 years of age**. The results allowed to identify the central concerns that affect the social, emotional, and financial life of the respondents.**

The world changed radically in March 2020. The furious spread of COVID-19 even surprised everyone on the planet. **No one had considered the possibility that in the 21st century, a pandemic could stop the world**. The forced quarantine has altered the meaning of our daily life, introducing important changes in the perception, understanding, feelings and values of human beings, imposing a renewed sense of affirmation for life.

Summary of New vs Old habits

spending money

BEFORE COVID — AFTER COVID

As a consequence of the long lockdown due to the pandemic, and to compensate for the anguish and uncertainty, **people are buying more online**, turning to hobbies, **increasing the use of digital media**, **adopting new habits**, and spending more time with family. **Respondents long for the life they led before the pandemic**, highlighting the meetings they had with friends, shopping in department stores, and dining out.

Some findings

During the long quarantine, people **have engaged in some less healthy behaviors**, **overindulging in smoking and drinking**.

As for learning, **it is possible to notice an evident lag in children, due to the difficulties they have with online learning. Virtual education is rejected by the majority of university students. Telecommuting is seen as an attractive alternative,** although it is recognized that home is not an ideal space for work. However most people wish they didn't go back to their offices and continue working from home.

New normality vs old normality

The changes that millions of people have suffered in their quality and lifestyle allow us to anticipate profound transformations in the cultural ecology of societies. **There will be no possible return to the old normality.**

Technological change is ecological (Postman, 1988)

When a new technology acquires importance in a certain culture, it begins to transform it drastically, but always considering the essential elements that once defined it. In this sense, it can be said that society becomes a complex product of technological change.

Photo-Illustration: Joe Darrow

The Coming Disruption Scott Galloway predicts a handful of elite cyborg universities will soon monopolize higher education.
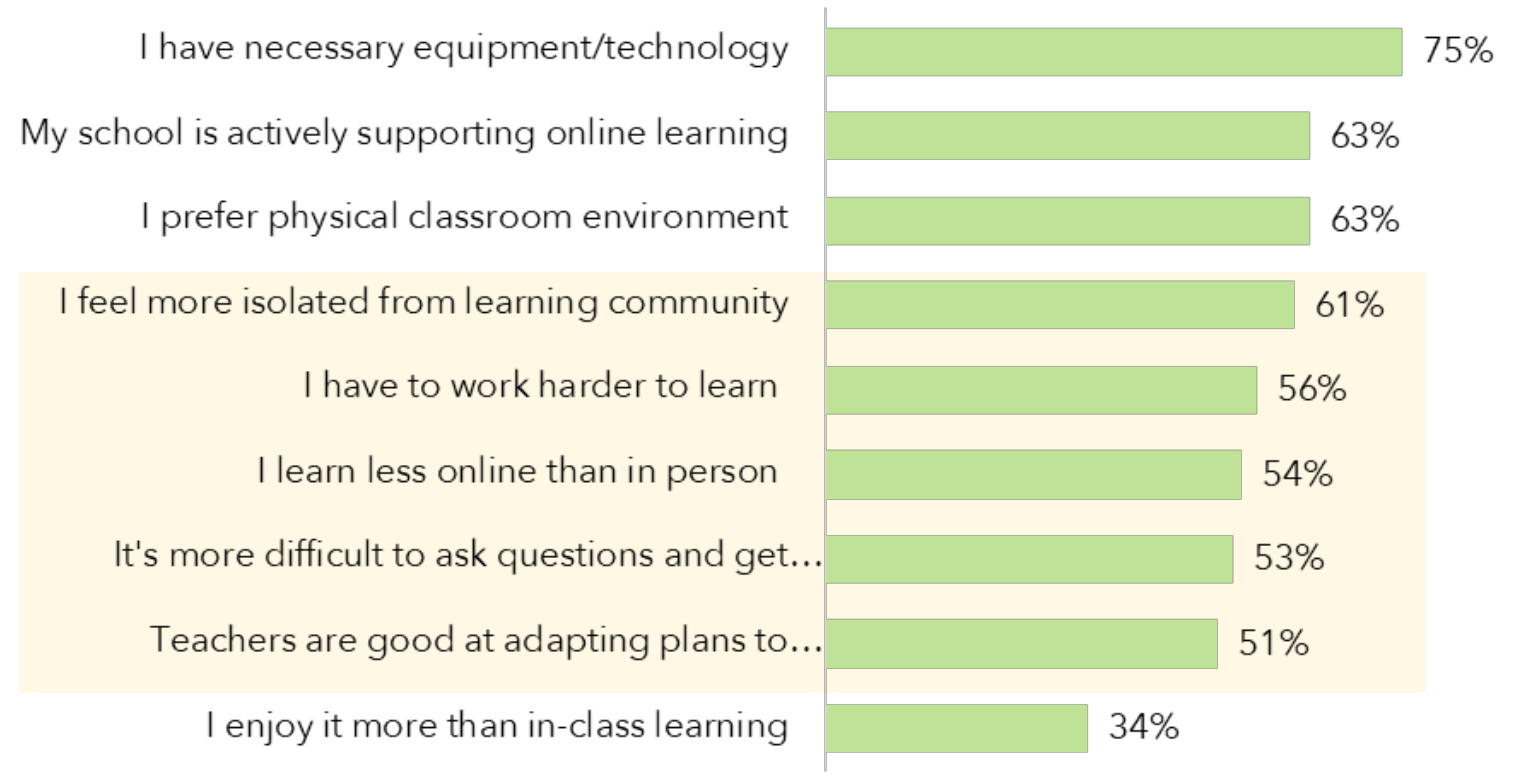
In education, **the effects of the prolonged quarantine have generated significant changes in the perception of teachers and students**. For **most students, virtual classes represent "more work" and "less learning"**.

In the following table we can recognize the opinions of American students.

Both **teachers and students must develop new digital skills and competencies for distance learning**. The most important challenge falls on the teacher, and consists of **the design of an effective virtual learning environment**, which means doing much more than just taking the face-to-face class online.

College students miss the campus; remote classes mean working harder, learning less

How much do you agree with the following about remote learning?
(Strongly/somewhat agree)

I have necessary equipment/technology	75%
My school is actively supporting online learning	63%
I prefer physical classroom environment	63%
I feel more isolated from learning community	61%
I have to work harder to learn	56%
I learn less online than in person	54%
It's more difficult to ask questions and get…	53%
Teachers are good at adapting plans to…	51%
I enjoy it more than in-class learning	34%

Neil Postman said, "the teacher of the future would have to orient himself towards the problems of the future, develop his listening skills, rather than speaking; focus on questions, rather than answers; focus more on the reward, rather than the test; and keep an open mind". **The new teacher's job would consist of designing environments in which students can learn to ask the appropriate (relevant) questions** so that they can later invent robust methods to find answers to those questions. The teacher and the new student would have to be proficient in the use of various communication technologies.

(Postman, 1968)

Cultural transformation

The research allowed us to recognize **how people are undergoing drastic changes in their lifestyles**. The report identifies emotional concerns, recognizes the anguish that the feeling of loneliness produces, **the sudden changes in the formation of children in online education**, **in consumption content in the media**, entertainment, shopping habits; as well as the problems and benefits that teleworking has imposed.

All technological change is a trade-off.

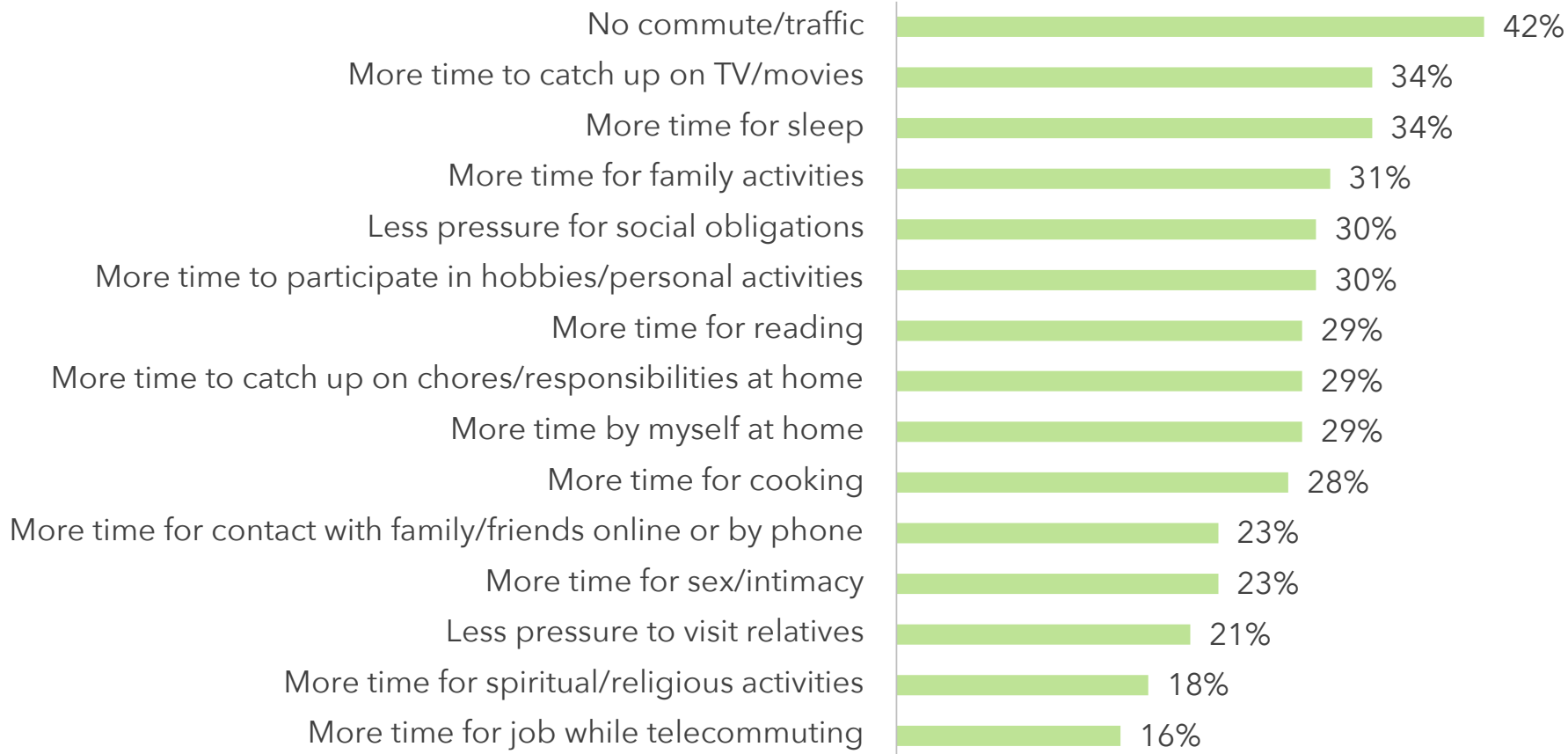# Americans miss their routine and their freedom. Friends, dining out, and shopping top the list.

To what extent do you miss these activities? (Miss a lot)

Activity	Percentage
Going where I want and doing what I please	66%
Visiting with relatives/friends I see regularly	52%
Dining in restaurants	48%
Visiting with relatives/friends I see occasionally	46%
Close personal contact	40%
Travel	38%
Shopping in brick-and-mortar stores	35%
Casual personal contact	35%
Having set routines in my life	33%
Going to work	31%
Working out at a gym or outside the home	30%
Watching/listening to live sports	29%
Attending live events	29%
Going to the movies	23%
Drinking/socializing in bars	20%

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Hobbies, digital media, and family time fill the days.

What do you enjoy during the pandemic? (Enjoyed a lot)

No commute/traffic	42%
More time to catch up on TV/movies	34%
More time for sleep	34%
More time for family activities	31%
Less pressure for social obligations	30%
More time to participate in hobbies/personal activities	30%
More time for reading	29%
More time to catch up on chores/responsibilities at home	29%
More time by myself at home	29%
More time for cooking	28%
More time for contact with family/friends online or by phone	23%
More time for sex/intimacy	23%
Less pressure to visit relatives	21%
More time for spiritual/religious activities	18%
More time for job while telecommuting	16%

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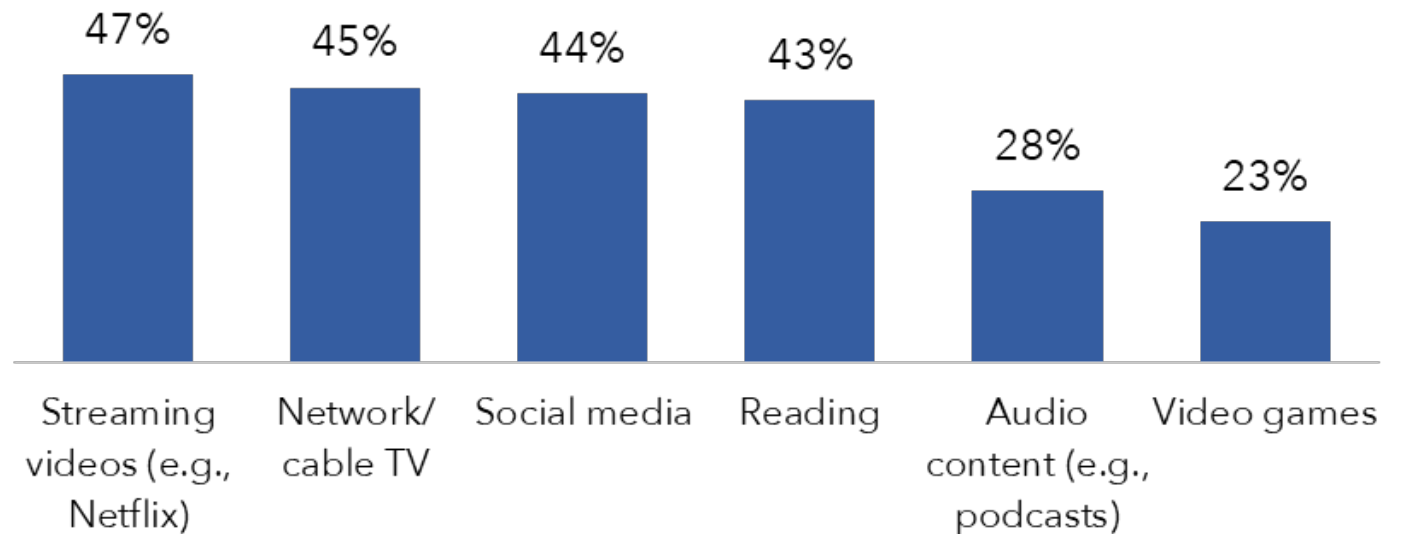# Time on conventional and digital media

The time spent on conventional media has increased significantly. According to the report, **conventional media are used primarily for distraction and entertainment, digital media are used to obtain information**. For many people, the quarantine represented a significant extension of free time. **The growth in the consumption of content in conventional media** (cable or satellite television 45%), **as well as in new digital media** - watching streaming content (47%), interacting on social networks (44%), and listening to podcasts (28 %) - has increased considerably. Also entertainment (playing video games 23%).

However, the report showed that, in those under 35 years of age, **the habit of reading has not undergone significant changes.**

Content consumption is at an all time high.

How has your time doing the following been affected?
(Increased a lot/some)

*Those **under 35** drive increased media consumption across all channels except reading*

*

| Streaming videos (e.g., Netflix)	Network/ cable TV	Social media	Reading	Audio content (e.g., podcasts)	Video games
47%	45%	44%	43%	28%	23%

Disinformation

The audience of the traditional mass media faced the problems of lack of information because of the fewer number of sources which covered news events, and for other processes such as censorship, self-censorship, and agenda setting. **Now**, with digital technologies, **the problem is that we have information overloaded**, **and** consequently **information is difficult or impossible to assimilate for some people.**

The problem is information glut, not information scarcity.

Now the **gatekeeping role** that the legacy media newspapers and network television news once played **falls to all of us**. Today, everyone assumes the position of publisher.

Technology has democratized the process of making, or making up, news.

Most trusted sources of general news and information worldwide from 2011 to 2020
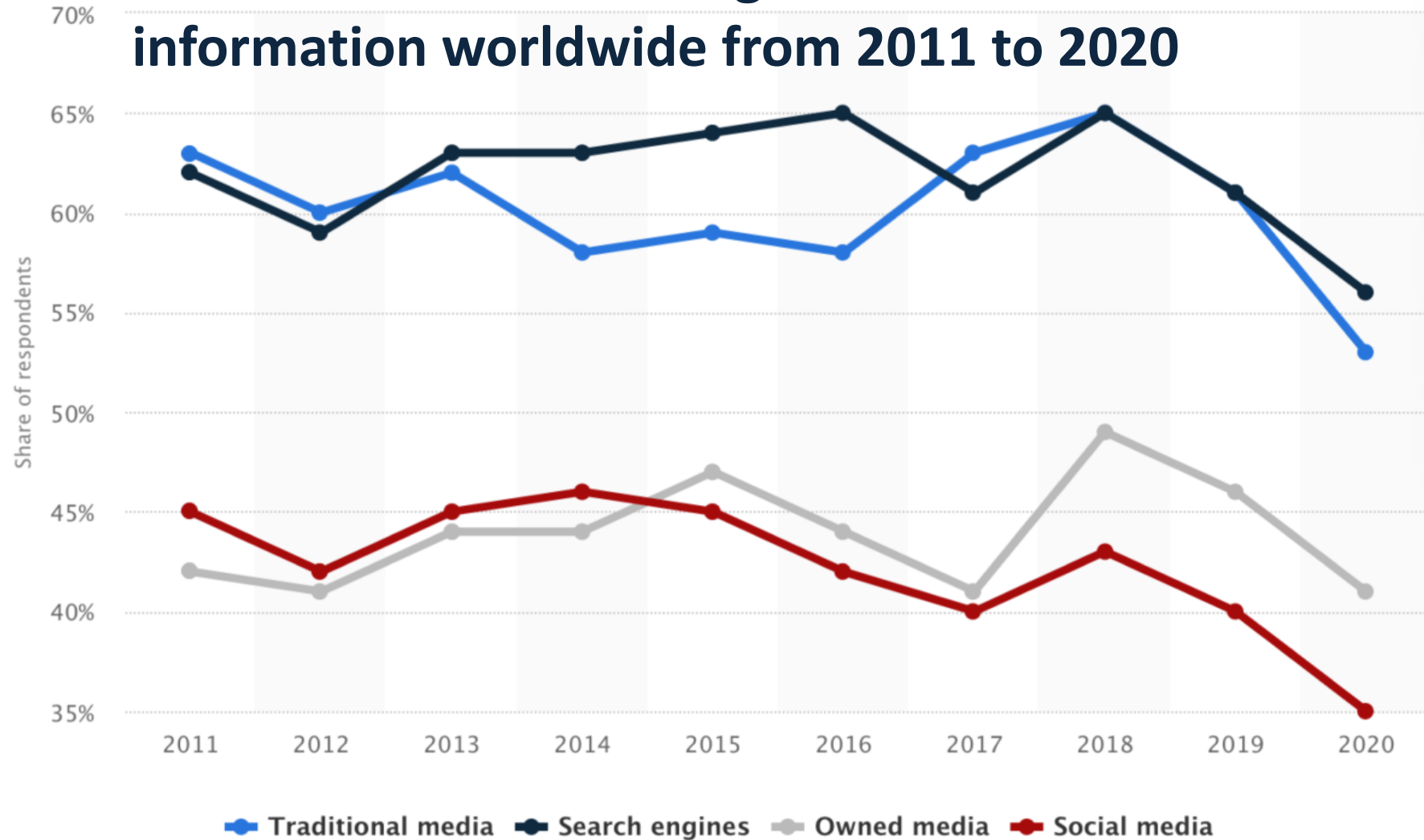
Conclusions

Technological change, Postman (1988) anticipated, always involves positive and negative effects on culture. The prolonged confinement has produced temporal, spatial, bodily and role sensory biases, as well as sensitive changes in the abstraction of the environment.

The spread of COVID-19 and the prolonged quarantine have imposed profound transformations on the lives of millions of people, as well as on the cultural ecology of societies. People share concerns about their lives, and increased loneliness and feelings of anxiety can be seen since the beginning of the pandemic. Many people live in fear: fear of contracting the virus, of going to stores, of saturating hospitals, and of a prolonged spread of the pandemic. However, the impact of the coronavirus not only affects psychological or financial imaginaries, it will also affect environmental imaginaries.

Conclusions II

In an ecosystem, a kind of dynamic equilibrium is always established. This explains the different types of relationships that the various entities of a system have within a given environment. Any alteration in the balance of the system is produced by some change in the entity or in the relationships that are maintained in a specific space and time (Bejan, 2012)

To anticipate the results of an ecological change triggered by technological impact, the focus on flows (people) and their relationship with entities (technologies) within a given environment (ecosystem) is very useful. Only in this way will it be understood, with a certain degree of certainty, how flows (people) will seek more efficient ways to flow (develop) in a specific environment (ecosystem). Finally, it will be possible to understand how people's perceptions, habits, customs and general actions will be modified to ensure their own evolution.

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