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From Hashtag to History: Social Media, Performance, and Memory in Digital Archives

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Abstract: The *Archivo Covid-19 Perú* is a rapid-response public history project at the *Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos* in Lima, Peru (San Marcos Archive) that collected Indigenous Amazonian pandemic experiences. In the archive, social media posts, oral histories, and hashtags such as #SOSAmazonia and #SOSPueblosTransfronterizos functioned as performative acts of witnessing that confronted state neglect and mobilized collective care. Indigenous actors leveraged online platforms to claim public visibility, pressure authorities, and reframe the pandemic as part of a larger history of state neglect. Simultaneously, archival preservation recreates power dynamics. By selecting, mediating, and recontextualizing ephemeral posts, the archive transforms digital objects into historical artifacts, restaging them for new audiences and interpretative frames.

Keywords: Amazon Rainforest; COVID-19; indigenous perspectives; performance; Peru; rapid-response archive

1 Introduction

Most COVID-19 archiving projects reflect urban, Western, and middle-class perspectives, but the San Marcos Archive in Lima holds a distinct range of experiences, including materials from both the capital city, Lima, Peru, and the Amazon rainforest. Created at Peru's oldest public university, it documents Indigenous Amazonian experiences of the pandemic, voices often missing from institutional narratives. In doing so, the archive invites us to rethink the act of collecting as a kind of performance: Indigenous actors, social media users, and scholars each influence what is remembered, witnessed, and preserved.

When lockdown orders swept the globe in 2020, hundreds of institutions documented the pandemic in their communities.[1] And while epidemics are not new, the collection efforts around COVID-19 were unprecedented: the sheer volume of materials shared across our digital lives brought together artifacts that had never coexisted in traditional brick-and-mortar archives.[2] COVID-19 archives broadened the scope of historical preservation by ingesting memes, music, video games, photographs, podcasts, short-form videos, graffiti, murals, stories, poems, political cartoons, interviews, social media, and more. COVID archives also reflected greater inclusivity, capturing voices from different cities, countries, ages, races, occupations, and lived experiences.

Several institutions approached their collecting strategies with intentionality, explicitly stating in their mission statements or operational guides a commitment to documenting underrepresented communities. The *Library of Congress's Coronavirus Web Archive* built a meta-archive that captures the digital collecting efforts of other institutions. It prioritized materials from and about African American, Asian American, Latino/a/x, and Native American communities.[3] Similarly, the U.S. National Library of Medicine emphasized the experiences of vulnerable populations, particularly those affected by health disparities.[4] At *The Journal of the Plague Year* (*JOTPY*), an international team of academic faculty, staff, and students collaborated to crowdsource the largest collection of COVID-19 artifacts.

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1 An earlier version of this paper was presented in October 2024 at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland; I am deeply grateful to the organizers Ana Contreras and John Polga-Hecimovich and their colleagues Luis Mora-Ballesteros, Perla Sassón-Henry, as well as the bright and inquisitive students whose insightful feedback helped make this article what it is today. Also, thank you to Mark Tebeau and Erin Craft for reading and providing feedback on more recent drafts of this article.

2 Mia Ridge, Samanta Blickhan, Meghan Ferriter, Austin Mast, Ben Brumfield, Brendon Wilkins, Daria Cybulkska, Denise Burgher, Jim Casey, Michael Haley Goldman, Kurt Luther, Nick White, Pip Willcox, Sara Carlstead Brumfield, Sonya J. Coleman, and Ylva Berglund Prytz, "What is crowdsourcing in cultural heritage." In *The Collective Wisdom Handbook: Perspectives on Crowdsourcing in Cultural Heritage – community review version* (1st ed.) (2021).

3 The collection period ran from March 2020 to November 2023. Library of Congress, "Coronavirus Web Archive," https://www.loc.gov/collections/coronavirus-web-archive/about-this-collection.

4 Christie Moffat, "COVID-19 Web Collecting: Reflections at Three Years," https://circulatingnow.nlm.nih.gov/2023/03/02/covid-19-web-collecting-reflections-at-three-years.

Moreover, students tracked emerging archival silences in real time to address some of those gaps as they continued curating and collecting.[5]

Although many COVID-19 archives pursued inclusivity, their collections often reproduced existing social and geographic hierarchies. The Canadian project, *COVID-19 in Niagara*, centered on stories from its local and regional communities. As Tizian Zumthurm and Stefan Krebs revealed in several German-language COVID-19 archives, the materials tend to favor the urban middle classes and portray the pandemic through a romantic rather than a critical lens.[6] Similarly, the CORONAMUSIC DATABASE acknowledges that sourcing songs from the internet and social media skewed its music samples toward "wealthy, industrialized, Western democracies with advanced technological infrastructures."[7] *JOTPY*, too, disproportionately gathered submissions from university-affiliated students and staff.[8]

Even well-intentioned efforts to amplify marginalized voices are mediated through access, trust, and expertise. Crowdsourced and rapid-response archives are shaped by community relationships and institutional networks, functioning as partners in preservation rather than comprehensive historical recordkeepers. For example, historian Denise Bate's work with Native American pandemic materials illustrates this dynamic in *JOTPY*.[9] As a native scholar who was not a member of the specific communities she documented, Bates created a cultural bridge. Her work highlights the layered roles of collectors and curators.

It is important to foreground archives that mobilize their networks to include historically marginalized groups. During the pandemic, social media offered connection and a means to elevate public health concerns in real time. In the Peruvian Amazon, hashtags such as #SOSAmazonia and #SOSPueblosTransfronterizos show that marginalized groups recognized urgent events before formal data-collection institutions. Because hashtags assign meaning instantly, they can affect when an event becomes historically significant. The *Archivo COVID-19 Perú*, created at the *Universidad Nacional de San Marcos* (hereafter San Marcos Archive), curated Indigenous stories from social media that confront state neglect during a public health crisis. This article investigates those digital testimonies, performances, and institutional collecting strategies.

The San Marcos Archive preserves a moderate yet significant body of ethnographic records from Indigenous Amazonian communities.[10] It exposes both the potential and tenuous nature of documenting Indigenous digital activism, showing how born-digital archives transform acts of online advocacy into historical testimony even as they face erasure, ethical concerns, and structural fragility. This study examines how the archive shapes the presentation of Indigenous voices while staging the tensions between preservation and power.

I reinforce this argument via three throughlines. First, I introduce the San Marcos Archive in detail, outlining its creation, structure, and curatorial practices. I then turn to a close reading of the archive's "Violence against Amazonian Communities," collection, analyzing how the selected oral histories, tweets, Facebook posts, and news stories construct narratives of state neglect and community-led public health efforts. Finally, I reflect on the role of rapid-response archives in documenting community experiences and their long-term precarity.

5 Kathleen Kole de Peralta, "Curating COVID-19: A Digital Internship in a Rapid Response Archive," *Collections* 17, no. 3 (2021): 207–16, 211–12.

6 Tizian Zumthurm and Stefan Krebs, "Collecting Middle-Class Memories? The Pandemic, Technology, and Crowdsourced Archives," *Technology and Culture* 63, no. 2 (2022): 483–493, 487.

7 Niels Chr. Hansen, John Melvin G. Treider, Dana Swarbrick, Joshua S. Bamford, Johanna Wilson, and Jonna Katariina Vuoskoski, "A Crowd-Sourced Database of Coronamusic: Documenting Online Making and Sharing of Music During the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021): 1–9, 7.

8 While I generalize here, I recognize the great lengths to which *The Journal of the Plague Year* (JOTPY) went to document marginalized communities. The archive includes oral histories from undocumented dairy workers in Wisconsin, submissions from the Philippines that technically subverted government guidelines on documenting the pandemic, and contributions from both children and adults over the age of 65. These efforts reflect a deliberate attempt to represent groups often excluded from archival spaces.

9 For example, see item 10,564. "Keep her safe," https://covid-19archive.org/s/archive/item/10564.

10 While parts of the San Marcos Archive emphasize Indigenous stories, it is not the only project documenting Indigenous agency in Peru. Situated in Lima's affluent Miraflores neighborhood, *Lugar de Memoria* is a museum commemorating the internal armed conflict between the Peruvian state and the Shining Path – a Maoist guerrilla group in Peru that launched a violent insurgency in the 1980s. Similarly, in a study of local memories of Shining Path in the highlands, Ponciano Del Pino Huamán demonstrates how some Indigenous communities shifted from initially supporting the insurgency to actively resisting it, highlighting their role in shaping the political narrative. Ministerio de Cultura. Ponciano Del Pino Huamán, "Lugar de la Memoria, la Tolerancia y la Inclusión Social," "Communal Minute Books: Writing, Ethnography, and History of the War in Peru in the 1980s," *Journal of Social History* 57 no. 4 (2024): 619–39. There is also a lot of work emerging on historical pandemic, including the recent COVID-19 outbreak. For a discussion of research and projects from Latin America see José Ragas, "History of Pandemics in Latin America," *Isis* 114, no. S1 (2023): S498–S532.

2 The San Marcos Archive in Lima, Peru

The *Archivo COVID-19 Perú,* created in 2020 at the *Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos* under the direction of historian Marcel Velázquez Castro, is a born-digital repository that captures responses to the pandemic in Peru from March 2020 to early 2021.[11] A team of roughly 11 archivists and students met periodically to review materials. Its curators collected audiovisual community responses. They also preserved cultural artifacts circulating online, such as caricatures, memes, social-media messages, and even images of earlier epidemics, to situate COVID-19 within a longer history of disease.[12]

According to Velázquez Castro, the group collected data from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram due to their popularity among the age groups most affected by COVID-19 fatalities.[13] Indeed, Facebook remains the most widely used social media platform in Peru, making it a strategic choice for capturing pandemic narratives.[14] For the oral histories, the archive team leveraged their own networks to seek individuals with diverse social experiences.[15]

Once a digital object was ingested, the team applied "minimal-curation" metadata typical of rapid-response archives: title, compilation date, compiler, source URL, diffuser (original poster), and a standard archival citation.[16] Additionally, the archive's holdings are grouped into three core collections: Testimonies, Image Gallery, and Sanmarquinos. Although the item descriptions are intentionally sparse, the moments when the archive supplies contextual metadata, such as titling a subcollection "Violence," significantly shape how audiences frame and understand the content.

The "violence" collection channels Peru's recent history of state brutality and civil conflict. Archive director Velázquez Castro, who witnessed the 1990s confrontation between the Peruvian government and Shining Path, recalls that decade as a time of hyperinflation, cholera outbreaks, poverty, civil detentions and disappearances, and genocidal campaigns in the highlands.[17] The legacy of conflict and state repression shapes the violence collection, which records physical attacks on citizens and the systemic harms rooted in racism, classism, and inequitable pandemic policies.[18]

Yet not all Peruvians interpreted the pandemic through a framework of violence, as national crises often generate divergent and regionally specific memories.[19] In the rural Andean and Amazonian regions, where government presence is sporadic or extractive, COVID-19 was interpreted less as authoritarian overreach and more as another episode of corruption and neglect. Reports from Ayacucho, Arequipa, and other Amazonian communities highlight weak medical infrastructure, the misuse of relief funds, and a surge in illegal logging and mining during lockdowns. The implication of the pandemic shifts depends on one's vantage point.[20]

It is precisely this multiplicity of interpretations that the San Marcos Archive attempts to capture; in doing so, it shapes the terms of public memory. Many of its items come

11 *Archivo COVID-19 Perú*. "Nosotros," https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/nosotros.

12 *Archivo COVID-19 Perú*. "Nosotros".

13 Marcel Velázquez Castro, email message to author, March 19, 2025.

14 Saskia Zielińska, "'Monstruos' and 'Mujeres Callejeras,' Covid-19, Gender-based Violence and Discourses of Blame in Peru," in *Pandemic and Narration: Covid-19 Narratives in Latin America*, eds. Luis A. Medina Cordova and Andrea Espinoza Carvajal (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2024), 73–90, 74–75.

15 Marcel Velázquez Castro, email message to author, March 19, 2025.

16 Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias; Mark Tebeau. "A Journal of the Plague Year: Rapid-Response Archiving Meets the Pandemic," *Collections* 17, no. 3 (2021): 199–206, 202.

17 Marcel Velázquez Castro, *Hijos de la peste. Una historia de las epidemias en el Perú*. (Lima: Taurus, 2020). While this chapter focuses only on one portion of the San Marcos Archive, it acknowledges that violence during lockdown, particularly gender-based violence, was a serious and widespread problem in Peru. Unfortunately, the issue was exacerbated by public discourses that blamed individuals rather than addressing underlying gender inequities. Zielińska, "'Monstruos' and 'Mujeres Callejeras,'" 74.

18 Translated by the author. *Se busca registrar cómo los tiempos del miedo de la Covid-19 provocaron reacciones violentas contra ciudadanos desde las autoridades. Por otro lado, también archivamos actos contra la salud pública ocasionados por personas. A escala global, la xenofobia y el racismo se incrementaron; por ello, se documenta la violencia antiasiática*. Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias.

19 Joseph P. Feldman, *Memories before the State: Postwar Peru and the Place of Memory Tolerance and Social Inclusion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 2021).

20 José Arias Gonzáles, Tania Luz Tafur Pittman, and Gloria María Delgado Suaña, "Comunicación del riesgo en salud por COVID-19 desde la percepción de los pobladores de Arequipa en 2021," *Austral Comunicación* 10, no. 2 (2021): 427–40, https://ojs.austral.edu.ar/index.php/australcomunicacion/article/view/591/1513.

"Vaccine-Gate in Peru," A Journal of the Plague Year, February 28, 2021, https://covid-19archive.org/admin/item/38564; Joseph Zárate, *Guerras del interior* (Lima: Debate, 2019).

Ana Watson and Conny Davidsen, "Pandemic State Failure, Hydrocarbon Control, and Indigenous Territorial Counteraction in the Peruvian Amazon," *Frontiers in Human Dynamics* 3 (2021): 65311.

Camila Gianella Malca, "Standoff in a Pandemic: Land Grabbing versus Protection of the Peruvian Amazon," *CMI U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre*, https://www.u4.no/blog/standoff-in-a-pandemic-land-grabbing-versus-protection-of-the-peruvian-amazon.

from social networks that offered vital communication lifelines in geographically isolated areas. However, digital memory is always mediated: platform algorithms privilege stable internet connections, digital literacy, and a knack for performative self-presentation.[21] As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson argue, social media is shaped as much by self-curation as by self-disclosure.[22] This complicates the authenticity often assumed in rapid-response archives: what appears to be raw testimony may be tailored to meet platform norms, audience expectations, or activist strategies. As such, while the San Marcos Archive amplifies Indigenous testimony, it presents an incomplete record, benefiting those who were most visible, vocal, and accessible to the archive's team.

3 Witnessing the Pandemic

The San Marcos Archive preserved several oral histories from indigenous Amazonians living in Lima and the Loreto region. Many appear in the "Violence against Amazonian communities" collection, which documents 44 Indigenous communities that faced limited access to medical care and basic sanitation during the pandemic.[23] To understand what these testimonies do, however, it is necessary to consider the performative dimensions of oral history itself. As Della Pollock reminds us, oral history is not a passive retrieval of facts, but a "charged contingent, reflexive space," in which memory is made present through embodied narration.[24] Every oral history should be understood as a performance. The narrators re-create experiences through speech, gesture, and emotion. These testimonies are co-creative events, collaborations between narrators, interviewers, and imagined audiences that translate memory into shared public knowledge.

A poignant example of this dynamic is Pilar Arce's testimony, a Shipibo-Konibo resident of Cantagallo, an informal urban settlement along Lima's Rímac River. In her June 2020 recorded interview, Arce describes the tension between emerging public health norms and the material limits of daily life in an unincorporated urban zone. She recounts how 400 families shared a single communal water pump, creating long queues to fill buckets and containers. When state health campaigns urged residents to wash their hands every 20 min, Arce recalled, "…where there was no water, it was impossible for us to have all that."[25] Her testimony stages the contradiction between official discourse and lived reality – transforming public failure into a public act of critique and collective witnessing.[26]

Her account embodies a recurring feature of the archive: oral histories that transform personal experience into public critique. Another testimony features Hefferson Canayo, a Kukama sociologist from Nauta, Loreto. Canayo explains that his town of roughly 40,000–50,000 people depends on large supply chains for staples such as rice and bananas.[27] Years of underinvestment in local infrastructure left the region critically unprepared for a public health crisis. Nauta's lone medical post, he notes, lacked beds and oxygen, X-ray machines, and essential medicines. Serious COVID-19 patients had to be shuttled 90 min to Iquitos, where shortages and overwhelmed staff offered little relief.[28] Canayo recalls disorganized markets, unregulated transportation, failed quarantine protocols, and mass resignation among healthcare workers due to a lack of personal protective equipment.[29] "We were totally abandoned by the authorities," he states.[30] Infection rates soared, and oxygen ran out. Here, Canayo enacts the past for the listener, narrating the collapse of the healthcare infrastructure in Loreto and Iquitos as part of a larger history of state neglect.[31]

21 Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 95.

22 Anja Schlosser, "Self-disclosure versus self-presentation on social media," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 31 (2020): 1–6 and Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "Virtually Me: A Toolbox about Online Self-Presentation," in *Identity Technologies: Constructing of the Self Online,* eds. Anna Poletti and Julia Rak (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 70–95.

23 Archivo COVID-19 Perú, "El estado peruano no comprende la gravedad y urgencia de los problemas preexistentes de la región, que además sufre un alto índice de contagios y muertes por el virus," https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias.

24 Della Pollack, "Introduction: Remembering," in *Remembering Oral History Performance*, ed. Della Pollack (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 1–17, 1.

25 *Y dónde no hay agua era imposible que podamos tener todo eso*. Martínez Laya, Jesús. "Testimonio de Pilar Arce," (June 2, 2020), Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/testimonios/isa-imw9ty-fu.

26 Della Pollack, *Remembering Oral History*, 3.

27 This dependency began in the 1990s and escalated during lockdown. Beginning with President Alberto Fujimori's administration (1990–2000), declining agriculture and limited state investment left the region vulnerable to disease and malnutrition. Archivo COVID-19 Perú, "El estado peruano no comprende".

28 "Las comunidades amazónica y su organización para enfrentar al Covid-19 y otras amenazas," Martínez Laya, Jesús, "Testimonio de Hefferson Canayo," (June 2, 2020), https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/testimonios.

29 Archivo COVID-19 Perú, "El estado peruano no comprende".

30 Archivo COVID-19 Perú, "un abandono total de las autoridades".

31 "Cosas básicas para salvar la vida de una persona no hay. Cuando una persona está grave en la ciudad de Nauta lo tienen que enviar a Iquitos. OK, y en Iquitos tampoco hay, pero al menos hay ciertas condiciones que pueden ayudar a salvarla vida de una persona." Martínez

Similar themes arose with Juan Villanueva Ramírez, an educator in Iquitos who survived COVID-19. Villanueva recounts that the national insurance plan excluded several essential medicines for treating the virus.[32] As a result, his family was forced to purchase them out of pocket, often in bulk and at inflated prices. He further alleges that regional officials diverted incoming oxygen tanks to private sellers, rather than local hospitals or pharmacies.[33] His account challenges official reports about the pandemic's toll in the Amazon. Villanueva reminisces that the crisis shattered illusions about the national government's commitment to regional healthcare. "Many people did not want to believe that the government had not invested in [Loreto's] healthcare system," he explains. "But with the pandemic, it was clear that the state had forgotten about [public] health here in Loreto."[34] Official statistics listed roughly 300 COVID-related deaths in Loreto. Yet, Villanueva estimates the true figure exceeded 1,000 because scores of people died at home and went uncounted. His experience provides a community-level interpretation of the pandemic, exposing the limitations and political silences embedded in state-produced statistics.

These testimonies reflect the structural neglect that has long constrained Indigenous access to healthcare. State directives, including hand-washing campaigns, quarantine rules, and official case counts, masked disparities on the ground. When regional and state organizations failed to coordinate basic public health services, communities discussed collective action, from public demands for new hospitals to strikes.[35] According to Canayo, local groups immediately recognized the shortcomings of their healthcare infrastructure, stating, "We do not have an adequate health system to respond to a crisis."[36] If the requests were ignored, he noted that they were open to going on strike to force the government to "recharge its batteries and respond to the crisis like the disaster it is."[37] By including these voices, the San Marcos archive countered sanitized national narratives. It offered the public a clearer view of how Indigenous Amazonians navigated the public health crises. The oral histories of Indigenous Peruvians are embodied negotiations between memory, audience, and power. As the next section shows, performative witnessing extends into the digital sphere, where social media users claim public space through hashtags, visual posts, and networked appeals for recognition.

4 Community Mobilization and Digital Advocacy

During the pandemic, Indigenous Amazonians used social media to coordinate aid, articulate grievances, and pressure the state. The "Violence against Amazonian Communities" collection contains 60 curated items, most of which are from Peru's second COVID wave in early 2021. The Facebook and Twitter messages preserved by the San Marcos Archive show how Indigenous organizations combined hashtags, visuals, and direct @-mentions of state agencies and NGOs across various platforms.

In March 2021, the archive curated a tweet from @Cuencas Sagradas (managed by the Amazon Sacred Headwaters Alliance *Alianza Cuencas Sagradas Amazónicas*) featuring ORPIO president Jorge Pérez addressing Health Minister Pilar Mazzetti.[38] Pérez reports fuel shortages, paralyzed air, road, and river transport, and insufficient medical staff in Iquitos. His warning is blunt: if a new variant reaches the city, remote communities will fare even worse. The video ends by claiming that the region has been "totally abandoned" for more than a month. Here, the short-form video format, the minister's tagging, and the platform's public timeline work together to compel a response in the public arena.

A March 2021 @CuencasSagradas retweet amplifies ORPIO's message through a montage of black-and-white images: a banner morning deceased medical worker, queues for oxygen, and a coffin being lowered into the earth. The caption declares, "What we are asking the state for right now is medicine, oxygen, and medical staff. In more remote areas, the coronavirus is spreading very quickly. Those communities are completely abandoned."[39] The text above the

Laya, Jesús, "Testimonio de Juan Villanueva Ramírez," (May 27, 2020), https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/testimonios.

32 Martínez Laya, "Testimonio de Juan Villanueva Ramírez".

33 Martínez Laya, "Testimonio de Juan Villanueva Ramírez".

34 [La] *gente no creía que el estado no ha invertido en salud. Pero sin embargo con la pandemia ha quedado demostrado incito de que el estado se ha olvidado de la salud aquí en la región Loreto*. Martínez Laya, "Testimonio de Juan Villanueva Ramírez".

35 Laya, "Testimonio de Hefferson Canayo".

36 *No tenemos un sistema de salud adecuado para responder a una crisis*. Hefferson Canayo, "Las comunidades amazónica y su organización para enfrentar al Covid-19 y otras amenazas," Laya, "Testimonio de Hefferson Canayo".

37 *Para que el gobierno de una vez se pongan las pilas y trate de responder a la crisis como un desastre*. Laya, "Testimonio de Hefferson Canayo".

38 The Amazon Sacred Headwaters Alliance coalition encompasses 25 Indigenous groups and three civil society organizations. @CuencasSagradas, "PLan de intervención frente a la COVID-19," [sic] (March 10, 2021), Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=533.

39 *Lo que nosotros pedimos en este momento al estado es medicina, oxígeno, medical staff. En los lugares mucho más alejados el coronavirus*

short-form video reads, "The second wave of COVID-19 continues in the Indigenous communities of Loreto."[40] The caption solicits "help and urgent attention," and is paired with the hashtag #SOSAmazonia and tagged government accounts. The post is a scripted engagement that links local struggles to the regional crisis, while the tags draw a direct line of responsibility. Through digital testimonies, the San Marcos Archive offers a glimpse of how Indigenous voices used social media to confront state inaction.

Social media augmented public outcry and provided a channel to hold politicians and public health organizations accountable. In April 2021, @CuencasSagradas relayed a plea from local politician Pablo Chota for immediate aid in Awajún de Mayoruna.[41] Even without a hashtag, urgency is conveyed through a red alarm emoji and targeted mentions of the health and finance ministries.[42] Public tagging inserts officials into the unfolding story and narrows the distance between remote communities and Lima-based decision-makers. A post from February 2021 by @aidesep_org (Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest) denounced the Ministry of Health for dismantling the community health promoter system.[43] The tweet shows an image of an Indigenous man wearing a mask with the text "Indigenous Alert: Loreto moves from a moderate to extreme risk of COVID-19."[44] This post illuminates how Indigenous organizations used digital platforms to create space for their agendas.

Several tweets appeal to international agencies and to the collective harm caused by government neglect. As the second wave of COVID-19 intensified in February and March 2021, Amazonian leaders and activists used social media to both shame government actors and solicit support. One tweet, shared by @CuencasSagradas, urged the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to implement protocols preventing the virus from reaching isolated Indigenous communities.[45] The tweet criticizes the inadequate responses of the Colombian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian governments, highlighting their failure to mitigate COVID-19 in Indigenous territories. It also introduced a new iteration of the SOS hashtag, #SOSPueblosTransfronterizos (SOS Borderland Peoples), broadening its advocacy to transnational regions and building digital momentum.[46]

Some of the archive's most pointed critiques targeted politicians and first responders who violated public health mandates. A tweet from *Diario La República*, one of Peru's major newspapers, reports on a quarantine breach in Iquitos. It described an illegal party hosted by a student simultaneously enrolled in the police academy. Beginning at 8 p.m. and continuing until police dispersed it at 3 a.m., the gathering drew complaints from neighbors. One resident protested, "My entire family could not sleep due to the scandal they were making in the house. The police arrived just in time. How is it possible that during a pandemic and with the very real possibility of spreading contagion, they are having parties?"[47] This digital artifact captures how social media echoed public frustration, holding individuals publicly accountable while signaling the broader erosion of trust in pandemic regulations. Its inclusion reflects a collecting strategy attentive to how violations of mitigation policies were experienced and narrated as harms to the wider community.

Regional news organizations leveraged social media to spotlight and circulate public safety breaches. One curated tweet by @proycontra–managed by *Diario Pro & Contra,* a regional newspaper based in Iquitos, condemns the lack of social distancing among local youth. The archive features a February 2021 article documenting large groups of students crowding around a street as students flooded in and out of

está avanzando con mucha velocidad. Las comunidades están totalmente abandonadas." @CuencasSagradas "Plan de intervención frente a la COVID-19." (March 10, 2021). Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias.

40 *La segunda ola del COVID-19 sigue en las comunidades indígenas de Loreto.* "Plan de intervención frente a la COVID-19," Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias; https://twitter.com/CuencasSagradas/status/1369706184144457732?s=20.

41 @CuencasSagradas, "Pedido de auxilio del pueblo Awajún," (March 2, 2021) Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=534; To see the full post with video: https://twitter.com/CuencasSagradas/status/1366846702985052169?s=20.

42 @CuencasSagradas, "Pedido de auxilio".

43 The Interethnic Association manages the Twitter handle @AIDESEP for the Development of the Peruvian Rainforest (*Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana*). "Promotores de salud comunitaria en Loreto," Archivo Covid-19 Perú (February 8, 2021) https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=530.

44 @AIDESEP, "Promotores de salud comunitaria en Loreto," Archivo Covid-19 Perú (February 8, 2021), https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=530.

45 @CuencasSagradas "Salud de pueblos transfronterizos amazónicos," Archivo Covid-19 Perú (March 24, 2021), https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=531.

46 @CuencasSagradas, "Salud de pueblos transfronterizos amazónicos," Archivo Covid-19 Perú (March 24, 2021), https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias; For the full post see https://twitter.com/CuencasSagradas/status/1374725993211039751?s=20.

47 @larepublica_pe, "Policía interrumpe fiesta," *Pro y Contra: Noticias desde la Amazonia Peruana* (November 13, 2020); "Policía interviene fiesta," (January 4, 2021). Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias.

the surrounding university campus.[48] Another tweet by *Diario La República* criticized passengers in Naranjal, Loreto, for disregarding biosecurity measures. The report described passengers at the Naranjal bus station wearing masks incorrectly or not at all, disregarding occupancy restrictions intended to curb viral transmission.[49] In both cases, social media circulated the stories across various networks, engaging larger audiences.

5 Performing in the Feed: Visibility and Power

The case of *Comando Matico* illustrates how digital witnessing converged with physical action during the pandemic. Whereas earlier examples show how social media circulated critique and exposed neglect, *Comando Matico* demonstrates how visibility could mobilize care. Their activism moved between online circulation and on-the-ground healing, linking public testimony to collective responsibility and reframing Indigenous response as an alternative ethic of care.

Comando Matico articulated a model of performance grounded in care, reciprocity, and collective responsibility. *Comando Matico* is a grassroots organization of Shipibo-Konibo leaders in Yarinacocha, Ucayali. The group formed in the wake of a severe outbreak in Cantagallo, where reports indicated that roughly 70 % of its residents contracted COVID-19.[50] To physically contain its residents, the Peruvian national police and military erected fences around the settlement, effectively restricting access to potable water, food, and medical care. In response to state control and scarcity, *Comando Matico* mobilized to gather and distribute medicinal plants from the Amazon, particularly the *matico* plant, used in herbal vapors to ease respiratory symptoms. The archive documents how members assembled and sent care packages to Cantagallo residents, translating Indigenous knowledge into collective action. As Roger Mondaluisa Sinuiri explained, "We said enough with the deaths of our Indigenous brothers," framing their intervention as an ethical response to state inaction rather than mere emergency relief.[51]

As important as these material interventions were, their significance depended on circulation and reception. *Comando Matico's* actions unfolded within a digital milieu that amplified, interpreted, and reframed them. Audiences entered the performance through engagement. Local and global publics circulated, reacted to, and interpreted COVID-19-related posts. Every share, like, or comment extended the visibility of Indigenous experiences and co-produced their historical meaning. Online observers became witnesses. Scholars and activists later joined. In doing so, the archive restaged the event: what began as a real-time mobilization turned into a curated artifact, subject to new audiences and analytical frames.

The dissemination of Indigenous pandemic responses forced the Peruvian government to confront how the pandemic unfolded in the Amazon. Posts from Huascayacu in Awajún documented self-imposed quarantines and demands from state organizations.[52] This strategy forced digital proximity by juxtaposing Peru's most influential agencies and politicians with the disempowered.[53] When Peru launched the Indigenous COVID-19 Command in June 2020, it marked a partial recognition of Indigenous demands. A Facebook post congratulating the initiative doubled as a performative endorsement, reinforcing the expectation of accountability.[54] In this way, the San Marcos Archive preserves the multi-layered interactions that inform and transform the collective memory surrounding the pandemic in the Peruvian Amazon.

48 @Proycontra. "Jóvenes ya no respetan distanciamiento social," (February 2, 2021). Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=525.

49 @larepublica_pe, "Pasajeros no cumplen medidas de bioseguridad en el transporte público," (February 3, 2021). Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=524.

50 Jess Cherofsky, "Respuesta indígena ante la COVID-19," *Cultural Survival* (September 14, 2020). Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=513.

51 Jess Cherofsky, "Abandonados por el gobierno, los Pueblos Indígenas del Perú lideran una poderosa respuesta a COVID-19," Cultural Survival, September 14, 2020, https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/abandonados-por-el-gobierno-los-pueblos-indigenas-del-peru-lideran-una-poderosa-respuesta.

52 One such example is a Facebook post shared by the group "Pueblos Amazónicas en la Pandemia de COVID 19" (Amazonian Villages in the COVID-19 Pandemic), which details the self-quarantine measures taken by the Indigenous community of Huascayacu in Awajun. Pueblos Amazónicas en la Pandemia de COVID 19. "Ministerio de Cultura," (June 8, 2020) Archivo Covid-19 Perú, https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/galeria-de-imagenes/violencias?id=203.

53 Jess Cherofsky, "Abandonados por el gobierno".

54 Pueblos Amazónicas en la Pandemia de COVID 19. "Ministerio de Cultura".

6 Indigenous Histories and the Uncertain Future of Digital Archives

The San Marcos Archive curated Indigenous responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly through the "Violence Against the Amazonian Communities" collection. This repository preserves a sequence of public performances through which Indigenous communities, state actors, audiences, and scholars shaped how Peru's pandemic was witnessed and remembered. Through curation, select stories were absorbed into the archival infrastructure. Ephemeral posts became historical objects intended for wider public engagement, a virtual encore that extended their life beyond the immediacy of crisis.

Yet digital preservation remains precarious. While digital archives can democratize historical preservation, they face a constant risk of erasure. Unstable platforms and impermanent formats render such collections vulnerable to corruption and obsolescence. Posts vanish, hyperlinks decay, and institutional priorities shift. For example, to conserve server space, the San Marcos archive relied on screenshots and hyperlinks rather than storing full data files. Over time, several links have broken. Even more alarming, in early 2023, the San Marcos Archive went completely offline for months due to shifting institutional priorities. While the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine saved snapshots of the site on January 26 and September 26, 2022, these were limited to initial landing pages, omitting the full repository of over 2,000 items.[55] In March 2023, the San Marcos Archive director confirmed that the site would remain offline indefinitely, stored in the cloud, with no concrete plans for data recovery or re-archiving.[56] While the archive was later restored, its disappearance underscores the fragility of digital humanities initiatives.[57] Structural instabilities pose another challenge. The materials typically depend on corporate ownership and maintenance: if platforms delete, restrict, or collapse, our digital artifacts follow.

Virtual vulnerability does not lessen ethical responsibility; it intensifies it. Archives deepen power asymmetries if not accompanied by sustained stewardship and collaboration. Digital preservation removes items from their original contexts, altering their meaning. Therefore, to document is to intervene. Hashtags such as #SOSAmazonia and #SOSPueblosTransfronterizos endure not by chance, but through deliberate archival preservation. However, curation risks enacting a new form of disempowerment: capturing voices in the name of public history while failing to steward or return what was taken. The question then is not whether these digital performances become historical artifacts, but *how*, *when*, and *by whom* their significance is sustained when the performances end.

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55 Internet Archive Wayback Machine search for the URL prefix: https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe, https://web.archive.org/web/*/https://ac19p.unmsm.edu.pe/*.

56 Marcel Velazquez Castro, e-mail message to author, March 2, 2023.

57 A vanishing archive reminded me of an incident several years earlier (when I was a graduate student): the theft of manuscripts from Peru's *Biblioteca Nacional* (National Library). This moment echoes a pattern in which Peruvian historical records are effaced from institutional custody and public memory. Cristina Fernández, "Robos y pérdidas en la Biblioteca Nacional," *El Comercio* (September 18, 2016), https://elcomercio.pe/lima/robos-perdidas-biblioteca-nacional-260339-noticia/.