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Goffman and the Mafia: shaping YouTube's technological affordances in the war on drugs

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ABSTRACT

This paper advances the discussion about the interactions enabled through communication technologies by articulating Goffman's theory of strategic interactions and Trevor Pinch's concept of co-presence, and applying them to analyze the way a Mafia's armed wing posted videos on YouTube during the turf war developed in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, from 2008 to 2011. I analyzed the videos and the comments set up below them. Science and Technology Studies scholars have been engaged in a debate about how to study online contents. They agree that STS should advance approaches that only give an account of the semiotic properties of the contents, in order to explore the interactions they enable. However, they don't agree on how this should be done. This study lends support to perspectives arguing that Goffman's theory is still relevant to analyze online interactions, in spite of having written his theory before the expansion of the Internet. I provide examples to argue that, in fact, Goffman was fully aware that interactions could be technologically mediated. I suggest that members of the armed wing shaped YouTube's technological affordances to make themselves accountable to other parties in the war, and available for interaction.

KEYWORDS

Goffman; YouTube; war on drugs; Mexico; co-presence

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Goffman; YouTube; Guerra às drogas; México; co-presença

PALABRAS CLAVE

Goffman; YouTube; Guerra contra las drogas; México; co-presencia

Goffman e o narco: como as propriedades técnicas do YouTube são usadas na guerra contra as drogas

RESUMO

O debate atual sobre a análise de interações on-line na área de estudos de ciência e tecnologia tem dois lados. Por um lado, existe um consenso de que esse campo de estudo deve oferecer explicações que vão além das análises semióticas de conteúdo na internet. O que os estudiosos discordam é sobre quais teorias sociológicas devem ser usadas para esse fim. Neste artigo, contribuo para esse debate, resgatando um arcabouço teórico desenvolvido por Erving Goffman usando informações empíricas da Segunda Guerra Mundial. Embora ele tenha escrito suas teorias antes da popularização da Internet, Goffman estava claro que as interações sociais podiam ser mediadas tecnologicamente. Neste estudo, aplico esse arcabouço teórico, bem como o conceito de

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co-presença de Trevor Pinch, para entender por que um braço armado de uma organização criminosa que trafica drogas usava o YouTube durante um confronto em Ciudad Juárez, México, durante o período 2008- 2011. Este estudo analisa os vídeos que os membros desta organização postaram no YouTube, bem como os comentários subsequentes. Conclui-se que os membros desse grupo armado usaram certas propriedades tecnológicas do YouTube para se tornarem co-presentes e, assim, poder interagir online com diferentes grupos envolvidos no conflito.

Goffman y el narco: cómo se usan las propiedades tecnológicas de YouTube en la guerra contra las drogas

RESUMEN

El debate actual sobre el análisis de las interacciones en línea dentro del área de los Estudios sobre la Ciencia y la Tecnología tiene dos aristas. Por una parte, existe un consenso en que este campo de estudios debe ofrecer explicaciones que rebasen los análisis semióticos de los contenidos en internet. En lo que los académicos no están de acuerdo es en qué teorías sociológicas deberían usarse para este propósito. En este artículo contribuyo a este debate rescatando un marco teórico que Erving Goffman desarrolló utilizando información empírica de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Aunque él escribió sus teorías antes de la popularización del Internet, Goffman tenía claro que las interacciones sociales podían ser tecnológicamente mediadas. En este estudio aplico este marco teórico, así como el concepto de co-presencia de Trevor Pinch, para entender por qué un brazo armado de una organización criminal que trafica drogas usó YouTube durante un enfrentamiento en Ciudad Juárez, México, durante el periodo 2008–2011. Este estudio analiza los videos que integrantes de esta organización postearon en YouTube, así como los comentarios subsecuentes. Se concluye que los integrantes de este brazo armado usaron ciertas propiedades tecnológicas de YouTube para hacerse co–presentes y así poder interactuar en línea con diferentes grupos envueltos en el conflicto.

1. Introduction

Mexico's prominent role in international drug trafficking is a recent phenomenon. U.S. distributors mainly imported heroin processed in France and cocaine from Colombia via the Caribbean. When the U.S. war on drugs strategy shut down the "French Connection" and the "Caribbean Route" between 1970 and 1990, the industry was displaced to Mexico (Friedson 2007). Before this, modest Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs)¹ in Mexico carried out their activities with little violence.

Violence increased dramatically in some states when the former president Felipe Calderón decided to launch a Mexican war on drugs, after having won the 2006 federal election by a slim margin of 0.1%. This strategy consisted on taking down top drug lords, and the police and the army started direct confrontations against DTOs. As a consequence,

¹The colloquial term of "Mafia" is substituted for "Drug Trafficking Organization" (see Beittel 2013).

homicides increased from 10,452 in 2006 to 24,559 in 2016 (INEGI 2019; Rios 2013), although only 4 of the 32 states in Mexico accounted for 84% of all murders (United States Congressional Research Service 2013).

DTOs structures have been interpreted in different ways by researchers, from horizontal structured enterprises, to decentralized flexible networks (Guerrero 2020). However, the *Sinaloa* DTO, which is the case under study, has been mostly identified as of now as an horizontal enterprise with managers that control different branches, from finances to murdering (InSight Crime 2018; U.S. Department of Justice 2019). To execute the latter activity DTOs have armed wings of trained hitmen whose responsibility is to eliminate any group or individual who poses a threat to the organization.

This research analyzes the videos that an armed wing posted on YouTube in the context of a turf war, in addition to the comments set up below them. There are few empirical studies on DTOs use of digital platforms and this research heeds the call of STS scholars to carry out online studies that account for the interactions that digital platforms enable, and not only the semiotic properties of online contents (Pinch 2007). I also aim to contribute to the debate about the appropriateness of Erving Goffman's theory for the study of online interactions (Knorr-Cetina 2005, 2009; Pinch 2007, 2010). This paper supports Trevor Pinch's argument that Goffman was implicitly aware that social interactions could be mediated by "invisible" technologies (2010, 412). But this paper advances this view by reviewing some analyses that Goffman conducted in military and police contexts, where technologies were not only visible, but central to achieve interactions.

1.1. Limitations of the propagandistic approach

Womer and Bunker (2010, 81) point out that scholars have conducted few studies about how Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) in Mexico use digital platforms; this area of research is "for the most part [a] previously unexplored territory." According to Womer and Bunker, the prevalent uses of digital platforms by DTOs in Mexico are as the means to spread propaganda and for social networking. The authors state that subscribers to DTOs' platforms are also members of the same criminal organizations. Nix et al. (2016) conducted a study on DTOs' use of Facebook and they conclude that this digital platform is used for organizational purposes.

In turn, Campbell (2012, 3) conducted a study of DTOs' "propaganda." He defines propaganda as "message[s] delivered by a sender to a receiver" and identifies five types of DTOs' propaganda: spectacles of violence, messages, videos and cyberpostings, music, and censorship of the mass media. Campbell asserts that the videos posted by DTOs on digital platforms have three main functions: to disseminate violent content; to reveal sensitive information of rival organizations and corrupt policemen; and to spread videos with drug ballads (songs that glamorize drug trafficking). He acknowledges that the people who comment on these videos generally get engaged in "taunting volleys," but he does not go further in his explanation of these comments. According to Campbell, the "narco-propaganda" aims to control representations and ideas in society, so that people respect and fear them.

With regard to YouTube, the studies of Womer and Bunker (2010) and Campbell (2012) agree on these aspects: YouTube is a popular digital platform among DTOs in Mexico; the *Sinaloa* DTO is present on YouTube; the objectives of the DTOs who post videos are to distribute propaganda to promote their organizations, disseminate information that is

detrimental to rivals, broadcast violent content, and share drug ballads. To the best of my knowledge there has not been a study that focuses specifically on DTOs use of YouTube, and this is the empirical gap I aim to fill.

Theoretically, I argue that YouTube's technological affordances suggest an interactional approach to the phenomenon, rather than a propagandistic approach. The concept of propaganda has two fundamental limitations: it is centered on the intentions of an actor when communicating information, reducing the importance of the social process driven by this information, and therefore implying that the meaning of a message can be "transmitted" from an actor to another actor. Campbell (2012, 3) suggests that propaganda is a "message delivered by a sender to a receiver," and at the same time the scholar notices that when DTOs post videos on the Internet, commentators set up discussions below them. However, he does not provide more information regarding these discussions.

Although Boczkowski and Lievrouw (2008) underline that media and information technologies and the social interactions they enable have been studied by Communication Studies and Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars, Trevor Pinch (2007) asserts that most of the online studies have tackled only the "discourse" or the "semiotic properties" of online contents. Pinch states that if researchers are to understand the interactions that digital platforms enable, they must consider their technological affordances, that is to say, the technical properties that are shaped by the users.

YouTube is defined as a "distribution platform" for "originally-created videos" and a "forum for people to connect" (YouTube 2013). Pérez Salazar (2008) conducted a study on YouTube where he analyzed YouTube's interactional affordances. He identified that YouTube users that post videos can share their videos with all users or only a select few. Besides, YouTube users can restrict or allow comments on their videos. When the user allows others to comment on his videos, these comments take the structure of a blog that is built just below the videos. The first choice, when a YouTube user decides whether or not to share his videos with all the users is named by Lange (2008, 361) as "the manipulation" of the "physical access." The second choice, when the YouTube user decides whether or not to allow others to comment on his videos is defined by Lange (361) as "the manipulation" of the "interpretative access." Lange asserts that the main intention of some YouTube video makers is to share common affective experiences with other users, not to create high-quality videos. In Lange's (361) words: video-sharing and posting facilitate "socialization among dispersed friends."

Considering that YouTube is a collaborative-content platform and that its users can activate its interactional affordances, an interactional approach seems more suitable than a propagandistic approach for the study of DTOs on YouTube. The analytical framework that STS scholars, such as Pinch (2007, 2010) and Knorr-Cetina (2005, 2009) have suggested and applied for the analysis of online interactions is Erving Goffman's microsociology (1969, 1970, 1972). I will discuss this perspective next.

1.2. STS approach

The debate among STS scholars revolves around whether the internet has changed social interaction to the extent that classic sociological theories are not helpful anymore to understand online interactions (Hogan 2010; Knorr-Cetina 2005, 2009; Miller 1995; Pinch

2007, 2010; Preda 2009; Rettie 2009). Pinch and Knorr-Cetina have emphasized the potential of Erving Goffman's concepts for the study of online interactions. Whereas Knorr-Cetina (2009) argues that in the context of a global world some interactions achieved through technologies challenge three assumptions of Goffman's writings: physical co-presence, territorial relatedness, and a divide between micro and macro social analysis, Pinch (2010) states that Goffman was implicitly aware that social interactions could be mediated by technologies and in doing so he provides two examples, the merry-go-round and the Kitchen's door in the Shetland Hotel.

On the one hand, Knorr-Cetina (2009) suggests a new concept for the situations where individuals find themselves through on-screen projections, "the synthetic situation." On the other, Pinch (2010) encourages scholars to dig into the "invisible technologies of Goffman's sociology." This paper supports Pinch's argument, but advances it by bringing up the analyses that Goffman carried out of interactions through communications technologies during the Second World War. That is to say, Goffman did include in his work more than just "invisible technologies," therefore he studied interactions where neither physical co-presence, nor time-synchrony were a requirement.

Erving Goffman (1972, 8) maintained that when individuals are in one another's presence and put cognitive attention to interact deliberately, an "encounter" arises. When individuals or actors are in *co-presence*, that is to say, in one another's presence, they look for information in the other's appearance and recall the social framework or context in order to define the situation of the interaction (1969). Actors utilize an "expressive equipment" to foster certain impressions in others, to present the self.

Pinch's (2010, 420) enhancement of the concept *co-presence* consists of suggesting that we should not understand this notion as bodily encounters anymore, but as the situation when "interactants are available and accountable to each other," this can allow the application of the concept *co-presence* to face-to-face and also to mediated interactions. Pinch argues that although online interactions are computer mediated, they do not take place in a different social realm, offline and online interactions are interrelated. Analyses of social interactions are likely to go from the online to the offline and vice versa, in Pinch's words: "we are after a general theory of all types of interaction (...); social interaction is a feature of both full-bodied life and life online" (420).

Goffman is mainly known for *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1969), however, he has another less reviewed book: *Strategic Interaction* (1970). Here, not only does he present multiple examples of mediated and asynchronous interactions, but also he introduces an entire analytical framework starting out from the premise: "any contact which a party has with an individual, whether face-to-face or mediated by devices such as the mail, will give the party access to expression. Immediacy, then, does not mark the analytical boundary for the study of expression" (1970, 5).

Strategic interactions (Goffman 1970) are those which have fateful repercussions, where every party may try to promote his own interest and to maximize gain. They can be carried out in face-to-face encounters, but Goffman maintained two fundamental premises: First, "important applications of strategic interactions involve participants who are not present to each other, and sequences of moves which are not closely bound by time" (140); and second, strategic interactions are highly influenced by technological developments (27).

Goffman's examples of strategic interactions are borrowed from wars, intelligence agencies, and interactions between police and criminals. In order to illustrate how technological developments are crucial in these interactions he makes reference to how drug smugglers have concealed from the police their activities with different techniques, from hiding drugs in prunes to "obscure corners" in ships (1970, 27). Goffman refers to the participants in strategic interactions as "parties" because individuals are not the only ones that get involved in them but also organizations and even nations. A party is "something with a unitary interest to promote" (86).

According to Goffman (1970) there are two moments within strategic interactions: the first one is decision-making and the second one actual courses of action. In strategic interactions each party is aware that the opposite party will try to devise its decisions in advance, therefore its decisions are influenced by this awareness. The fate of the parties depends on this mutual assessment. To define the courses of action in strategic interactions, the parties get involved in expression games, these are occasions for impression management and information assessment.

Expression games involve fostering certain impressions to influence the decisions of the opposite party. Expression games are informational in nature, however, actual moves or actions that are visible for the opposite party can also be treated as expressions to assess. Goffman (1970, 60) provides an example from the Second World War to illustrate expression games: Holland was occupied by Germany and two English agents parachuted there; German soldiers used the English agents' code book to establish contact with other English soldiers and make them believe that these messages were being sent by "Dutch allies." As a consequence, English soldiers parachuted food and arms into Holland thinking that the "Dutch allies" were receiving them. A German admiral ordered the blowing up of four German ships anchored in Rotterdam to make the English soldiers believe that the "Dutch allies" were active.

In expression games, those who give fabricated expressions will be executing "control moves," that is to say, intentional expressions "profitable to evoke" so as to push a definition of the situation that improves their position in the game (like the Germans did in the last example when they blew up the German ships). Other participants can make "naive moves" taking this information as it appears or questioning it through "uncovering moves." "Control moves" are made to cover, to misrepresent or to intentionally reveal. When a misrepresentation is caught, the dissembler might make "counter-uncovering moves" (Goffman 1970, 14–28). Finally, Goffman argued that game expressions can be set up between members of the same team. In this case, subject and observer are teamed together assessing information, then the expression game becomes a "game of coordination" (17).

2. Methods

2.1. Selection of the case

A turf war or turf battle is an armed confrontation between two or more Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) which compete either for the use of routes to transport illegal drugs to the U.S., or for the control of areas in Mexico to sell them. DTOs use armed wings for turf wars. I chose "*New People*," an armed wing of the *Sinaloa* DTO, because this DTO is

considered the most powerful criminal organization in the western hemisphere (InSight Crime 2019). In this sense, Thomas (2011) suggests that relevance is a valid criterion to justify the selection of a case.

Sinaloa is a North-western state in Mexico whose difficult-to-access areas have historically favored drug cultivation, whereas Ciudad Juarez is a city in the Mexican state of Chihuahua that lies right across the border from El Paso (Texas). Ciudad Juarez is one of the most sought-after areas by DTOs because El Paso, Texas, is used as a transshipment point and staging area for drug distribution to major cities in the U.S. (U.S. Department of Justice, National Drug Intelligence Centre 2011). There are approximately 1100 kilometers between Sinaloa and Ciudad Juarez, the locations are marked in Figure 1.

Before 2008, the *Sinaloa* DTO and the *Juarez* DTO (*Ciudad Juarez* DTO) worked as a team in the transportation of drugs to the U.S. However they started a feud that year after the murder of the son of “El Chapo,”² leader of the *Sinaloa* DTO (Cruz 2008). “El Chapo” sent the armed wing, the *New People*, to Ciudad Juarez in order to take over the trafficking routes and distribution locations in this city. The *Juarez* DTO protected “its territory” with its armed wing, *The Line*, and the former Mexican president Felipe Calderón also sent military troops to contain both DTOs (Beittel 2013). Members of the *New People* posted videos on YouTube during the confrontation.



Figure 1. Location of *Sinaloa* (triangle to the left) and *Ciudad Juarez* (cross on the border between Mexico and the US) in Mexico. Adapted from “Mexico,” by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

²Recently sentenced to life in prison in the U.S.

I chose this turf war because it is relevant, from 2006 to 2012 Ciudad Juarez accounted for half of the homicides in Mexico (Rios 2013). In order to define analytical starting and ending points for this research I took the murder of the son of “El Chapo” in 2008 as a breaking point (Beittel 2013, 12) and the violence decrease in Ciudad Juarez to define an analytical ending point in 2011 (BBC 2012). The Drug Market Analysis of 2011 confirmed that the *Sinaloa* DTO had gained greater influence over areas previously controlled by the *Juarez* DTO (U.S Department of Justice, National Drug Intelligence Centre 2011, 2).

2.2. Data collection and analysis

In this research I am interested in understanding why did members of the *New People* use YouTube in the context of the Ciudad Juarez turf war against *The Line*. In doing so I address two more questions: What were the contents of the videos they posted? And, what online interactions were achieved after they posted these videos and YouTube users commented on them?

My study is a qualitative research as my aim is to understand a phenomenon rather than to measure concepts or seek out causal relationships (Hughes 2006). Schoefield (1993) proposes that qualitative researchers make their findings generalizable through making them comparable and translatable. In other words, other researchers should find the outcomes useful for further comparisons or similar studies. To achieve this goal I will make explicit the methods used in this study.

My method of data collection was documentary research on YouTube. I sought out videos posted by members of the *New People* from 2008 to 2011 that made reference to the turf war in Ciudad Juarez, and that had been posted by YouTube users who identify themselves as members of the *New People* and/or the *Sinaloa* DTO (in their nickname or in their profile picture). After having identified eight videos that satisfied these conditions, a meaningful sample of four was chosen for a deeper analysis alongside a sample of their respective comments. The sampling strategy for the videos was the “judgement sample” (Marshall 1996, 523) that is to say that the most productive videos to answer the research questions were selected. The videos left out from the analysis were repetitive drug ballads with few comments. The sampling strategy for YouTube comments was “saturation” (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The data collection was carried out between the 6th of May 2013 and the 6th of July 2013, in total I collected and analyzed 3819 comments.

The method to analyze the data collected was a combination of the “voice-centered relational method” (Walby 2013), Goffman’s dramaturgical approach (1969) and social relation mapping (Smith 2005; Campbell and Gregor 2002). YouTube comments were coded with NVivo, and the interactions established through the comments were illustrated with a diagram. The data was originally in Spanish, then coded in English, the excerpts that illustrate the findings in this paper are my translation. The participants used slang words which are common in Mafia novels and movies, both, in English and in Spanish language, therefore, it was possible to find expressions that conveyed the same meanings. In order to facilitate the reading of the diagrams I present next a table where I characterize the participants in the interactions achieved (Table 1).

Table 1. Participants in YouTube strategic interactions during the turf war in Ciudad Juarez.

Participants	Characterization
New People	Armed wing of the <i>Sinaloa</i> DTO.
The Line	Armed wing of the <i>Juarez</i> DTO.
"A"	YouTube user who identified himself as one leader of the <i>New People</i> , who posted video 1, and answered most of the comments that the civilians posted.
"B"	YouTube user who identified himself as member of the <i>New People</i> , who posted videos 2 and 3, and answered the comments that the civilians posted.
"C"	YouTube user who identified himself as member of the <i>New People</i> , who posted video 4, and answered most of the comments that other YouTube users posted.
Civilians	YouTube users who identified themselves as residents in the geographical area affected by the armed conflict, who posted comments under the videos. According to the meaning negotiations they performed, they were classified as: inquisitive, supportive, opposing, petitioning, skeptical, and un-skeptical.
Members of the New People	YouTube users who identified themselves as part of the <i>New People</i> armed wing.
Members of The Line	YouTube users who identified themselves as part of <i>The Line</i> armed wing.
Soldiers and Marines (Army)	YouTube users who identified themselves as members of the Mexican Armed Forces.
Members of other DTOs	YouTube users who identified themselves as members of other DTOs operating in Mexico, for example, <i>Tamaulipas</i> DTO.
Members of other Sinaloa DTO armed wings	YouTube users who identified themselves as members of other armed wings working for the <i>Sinaloa</i> DTO, for example Antrax armed wing.

3. Results

3.1. Video 1 (*Matapuercos 2008*): "The Pigs-Killer." Song with written messages³

Scene one is introduced with the message: "This is what happens to my enemies. To those who didn't believe it." After this, a list of policemen accused by the *Sinaloa* DTO of favoring the activities of the *Juarez* DTO is presented, alongside pictures of targeted policemen and pictures of crime scenes. The second scene is introduced with the message: "I have sent others to jail." Later, photos of members of *The Line* that had been arrested are presented.⁴ The third scene is introduced with the message: "There are others that are about to fall," and photos of top leaders of *The Line* are presented. The video ends with a message to the Mexican government: "Don't let the pigs fool you. We did not threaten the governor nor the 5th military general officer. We just want to get rid of pigs in Chihuahua. For a Chihuahua free of pigs, yours faithfully, The Pigs-Killer."

The three scenes are musicalized with two drug ballads. The last song narrates the career of "El Chapo" (the top leader), but the first song is utilized as a form of expressive equipment. The self is portrayed as somebody powerful and astute with phrases such as: "Nobody knows what exactly The Pigs-Killer's profession is (...) sometimes he dresses up like a lawyer and other times he wears military-style uniform." The self-attempts to define the situation by making explicit his mission "to get rid of pigs," that is to say, to eliminate members of *The Line*, and his affiliation is explicitly acknowledged: "The Pigs-Killer is affiliated to the *Sinaloa* Cartel." At the end of the video, the self establishes the Internet as the media to know about the *New People's* activities: "All the relevant news is published by The Pigs-Killer on Internet, before any media."

³*New People* members nicknamed members of *The Line* as "the pigs."

⁴Drug traffickers investigate rivals' activities and provide this information to the police through anonymous police reports.

The total number of comments analyzed in this video were 3020 out of 27800. The online interactions established through comments are presented (Figure 2).

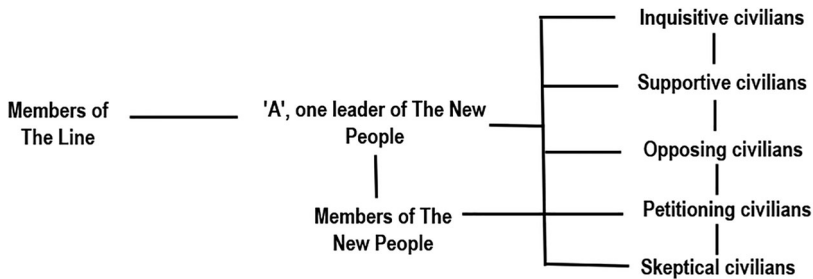


Figure 2. Achieved online interactions after video 1 was posted.

As instances of these interactions I will present these excerpts:

Petitioning civilian: "... do not damage businesses. If you are going to kill somebody wait for him outside (...) do not damage the city."

A: "My dear friend (...) wherever is a pig, I will be there, and I will try to do the least damage possible ... "

Inquisitive civilian: "... we are afraid as there is a rumor that the *Sinaloa* Cartel will kill people during the Independence Day celebrations ... "

A: "My dear friend do ignore these rumors, everything is false."

Skeptical civilian: "why did you remove my comment? ... "

A: "I do not remove comments even when they are offensive (...) the word censorship is not in my vocabulary (...) that is why this forum is for people to voice their opinions (...) Kind regards to all the peeps working with the *New People* and those who want to join us do send me a private message (...) those who want to sell our products pop by the office ... "

In the last excerpt it is possible to identify that "A" was recruiting new members through comments on YouTube. In response, members of *The Line* threatened possible traitors. "A" also asked for information through comments:

Member of The Line: "I'm looking for fucking traitors that will be killed (...) fucking assholes, the *New People* will not win!"

A: "Peeps working for the *New People*, please do send me the data I asked you through private messages (...) Civilians, if you have information about pigs send me a private message."

Through comments on YouTube civilians were also given information, and they often discussed the good will of the *New People*:

A: "I've just assaulted a pigs' office (...) I'm going to take these pigs and investigate them for being kidnapers ... "

Supportive civilian: "You're welcome in Chihuahua, please eliminate all the fucking 'liners!'"

Opposing civilian: "Do not let this bastard fool you; the *Sinaloa* Cartel is the same shit that other cartels (...) once they have won, they will start to abuse people."

Finally, members of *The Line* and members of the *New People* discussed who was going to win the turf war. "A" tried to coordinate members of the *New People* during these discussions:

A: "Members of *New People* I ask you to ignore what rivals post here and focus on what we need to do ..."

Member of the *New People*: "Release the code that was used by the orange and pepper in the x branch."

3.2. Video 2 and 3 (CdJuarezNoticias 2010a, 2010b): interrogation to Mario González, brother of the Attorney General of the state of Chihuahua⁵

The interrogation was posted originally in two parts, in two different videos; these videos will be considered two scenes of one unit of analysis. The actors in the scenes are: the interrogator (off-stage), Mario González the interrogated, and five men leveling large fire-arms at the head of the interrogated. The interrogated is placed in the center of the room, handcuffed in a chair. The men that surround the interrogated wear military-style uniforms and black masks. In the first scene the interrogated acknowledges working for the *Juarez* DTO as intermediary between the criminal organization and the Attorney General, his sister. The interrogated states that his sister is bribed to favor and cover up the activities of the *Juarez* DTO. In the second scene, the setting and the actors are the same; this time the interrogator asks the interrogated for names of policemen and civil servants that collaborate with *The Line* and the *Juarez* DTO.

In this unit, the self utilizes the military clothing and the arms as the main expressive equipment, *New People* aims to foster the impression of being a strong and organized group which will bring justice to the civilians by exposing the links between the local government and the *Juarez* DTO. The total number of comments analyzed in this unit were 146 out of 146. People that commented on these videos were civilians deliberating about the authenticity or inauthenticity of the video, and about the veracity or falseness of the information. There were also drug traffickers' supporters and detractors. The next diagram illustrates this (Figure 3):

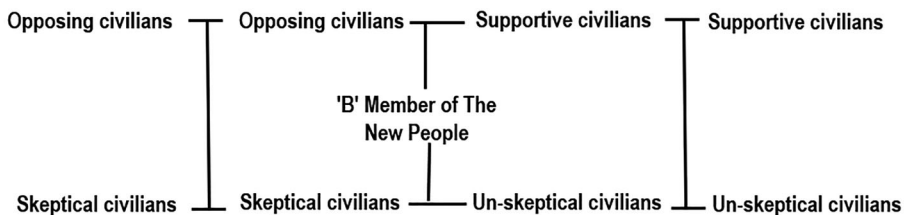


Figure 3. Achieved online interactions after videos 2 and 3 were posted.

⁵10 days after having kidnapped and murdered Mario González, members of the *New People* were captured by the police, they acknowledged to have posted the videos. The videos were removed soon after that but were posted again by a local news channel (Mexican Federal Police 2010).

As instances of these interactions I will present these excerpts:

Skeptical civilian: "I do not support any cartel but at 33 seconds and at 5:20 you can hear the cards that he is reading, this is false in my view."

Un-skeptical civilian: "Yes, it is true that the interrogation does not seem spontaneous (...) However, I wouldn't doubt what he says (...) the Attorney General was such an incompetent person."

Supportive civilian: "Thanks to these guys, they are achieving justice with this."

Opposing civilian: "This is the most retarded comment I've ever read, these guys are drug traffickers (...). They are battling for Juarez to bribe [policemen] and make money through illegal activities, they are not achieving justice; they are exposing their enemies (...)"

3.3. Video 4 (Gentinueva 2011). Greeting from members of the New People to a man nicknamed "The Buchanan's"

In the first scene, fourteen men handle large fire-arms in an arid terrain as the setting. The leading actor is placed in the center of the group and shouts a greeting: "Hey! My friend 'The Buchanan's'!". After the shout, all the actors in the scene shoot in the air. The second scene is a written message: "Kind regards from the *New People*." The large fire-arms, the masks, and the bulletproof vests are central objects of the expressive equipment. The self fosters an impression of coordination and cohesion.

The total number of comments analyzed in this video were 653 out of 1003. The interactions achieved through comments are illustrated next (Figure 4):

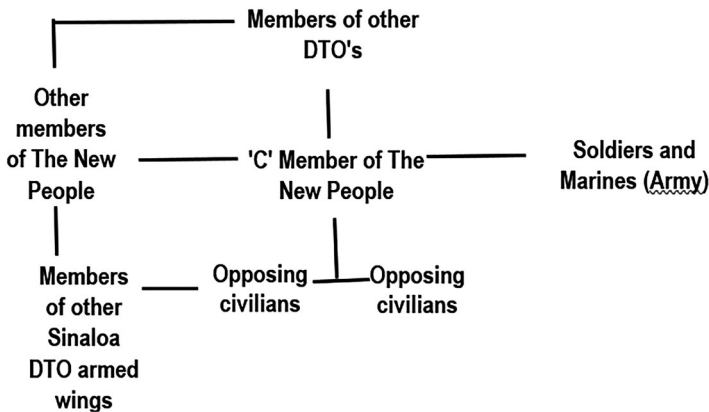


Figure 4. Achieved online interactions after video 4 was posted.

Members of the *New People* posted comments supporting the activities of the group. Members of other *Sinaloa* DTO cells also posted comments cheering the organization. They often engaged in discussions with members of rival groups regarding the superiority of their organizations. The next excerpts are presented as examples:

Member of the New People: "Ready to fight!"

Member of the New People: "Let's go New People! Let's go *Sinaloa*!"

Member of the Antrax cell (Sinaloa DTO): "We all with the boss El Chapo!"

Member of rival cartel: "Just assholes from Sinaloa (...) Let's go Tamaulipas! The cartel with real men!"

Only civilians repudiating drug traffickers were identified in the comments of this video. People who identified themselves as members of the Mexican Army, in their nicknames or in their profile pictures, also replied comments. The next excerpts are examples:

Opposing civilian: "You assholes, why don't you find a job? Ignorant peasants, you're a blight on Mexican society, fuck you!"

Member of the New People: "(...) fuck you! They are brave! (...)"

Soldier (military): "hahaha, now every asshole that uses drugs and has a gun believes that he is brave. (...) you wouldn't resist half a day of training in the army spongy kid (...)"

Member of the New People: "Sinaloa rules!"

Marine (military): "Sinaloa? Cut the bullshit mother fucker(...) 4RN marines rule! If you want to fight I'll wait for you ..."

4. Discussion

a) Expression and coordination games through YouTube.

Empirical data suggests that the online interactions established through comments were between members of the *New People* and other members of the *New People*; members of the *New People* and civilians; members of the *New People* and members of *The Line*; members of the *New People* and members of other rival DTOs; members of the *New People* and members of the *Mexican Army*; members of the *New People* and other members of the *Sinaloa* DTO; civilians and other civilians; civilians and other members of the *Sinaloa* DTO; and civilians with members of the *Mexican Army*.

The main question that guided this research was why members of the *New People* used YouTube during the turf war in Ciudad Juarez. Based on the empirical findings I suggest that *New People* used YouTube in the context of a strategic interaction to set up expression and coordination games in order to foster impressions that influenced the decision-making of other parties, and in doing so, to promote personal gain (Goffman 1970). "Control moves" were carried out during expression games: cover moves, misrepresentation moves, and revealing moves. A revealing move aims to intentionally inform a course of action, this is the case of the first video: "The Pigs-Killer." In this video, members of the *New People* revealed that they would take over Ciudad Juarez, a territory controlled by the *Juarez* DTO. Here they warned they would kill every person collaborating with *The Line*, the armed wing of the *Juarez* DTO. *New People* presents itself as a group of shrewd people.

The expression games continued with comments below this video. Members of the *New People* aimed to give the impression of being a group with "social responsibility." For example, with comments such as: "I will try to do the least damage possible" or denying rumors about attacks to civil society. Their intention was only to take over the trafficking routes controlled by the *Juarez* DTO, and consequently to wipe out its armed

wing *The Line*. The purpose of nicknaming the members of *The Line* as “pigs” is to foster the impression that these other criminals were involved in additional illicit activities apart from illegal drugs, for example kidnapping or extortion. *New People* was not interested in that, and in fact they expressed in some comments the intention of taking justice into their own hands: “I’ve just assaulted a pigs’ office (...) I’m going to take these pigs and investigate them for being kidnapers.” By giving the impression of being a socially-responsible organization they promoted a private interest, to convince society to collaborate with them: “Civilians if you have information about pigs send me a private message [on YouTube].” However, although a party will try to foster particular impressions, other parties can suspect them of misrepresentation and execute uncovering moves (Goffman 1970, 18). The next civilian’s comment is an example: “Do not let this bastard fool you; the Sinaloa Cartel is the same shit as other cartels (...) once they have won, they will start to abuse people.”

Coordination games were also set up through comments on this video. The member of the *New People* who posted the video organized activities through comments: “those who want to join us do send me a private message,” “peeps working for the New People, please do send me the data I asked you through private messages.” This finding is similar to the results of Nix et al. (2016) of DTO’s use of Facebook.

The second and third videos with the interrogation of Mario González, the brother of the Attorney General of Chihuahua, are also an expression game that aimed to reveal an offline action. The kidnapping of Mario González was an offline action, and as Pinch (2010) suggests, analyses of social interactions are likely to go from the online to the offline and vice versa. In these videos the interrogators execute a covering move to conceal their identities by wearing masks (Goffman 1970, 15), however, by holding powerful guns and wearing military uniforms, the *New People* presents itself as a strong and well-organized group. They try to foster the impression that they do a good deed by disclosing the collusion between the *Juarez* DTO and some members of the local government. Some commentators made naive moves (11): “Thanks to these guys, they are achieving justice with this.” But negotiations of meaning show up through uncovering moves (Goffman, 18): “these guys are drug traffickers (...), they are not achieving justice; they are exposing their enemies,” “I do not support any cartel but at 33 seconds and at 5:20 you can hear the cards that he is reading, this is false in my view.”

The fourth video, where members of the *New People* send a greeting to another member of the *Sinaloa* DTO, aims to set up a coordination game. That is to say, it aims to organize activities and to provide a common ground for action across multiple settings. Comments to this video illustrate: “ready to fight! You know! A-4,” “we all with the boss, El Chapo!”. Although the *New People* presents itself as brave by holding large caliber weapons, uncovering moves (Goffman 1970, 18) are made by some viewers: “why don’t you find a job? (...) you’re a blight on Mexican society.” Facing uncovering moves, members of the *New People* executed counter-uncovering moves (19): “They are brave!”. Members of the Mexican Army commented: “now every asshole that uses drugs and has a gun believes that he is brave (...) you wouldn’t resist half a day of training in the army ...”

Members of the *New People* established expression and coordination games during a strategic interaction by posting videos and comments on YouTube.

b) *YouTube's technological affordances, co-presence, and online encounters*

As Goffman (1970, 27) suggests, technological developments must be considered in strategic interactions. During the turf war in Ciudad Juárez, members of the *New People* posted videos on YouTube, and with technical choices they made their selves accountable to other parties and put their selves up for interaction (Pinch 2010). Not only did they give open access to the videos to all YouTube users, but they also gave open “interpretative access” by allowing all YouTube users to comment on them (Lange 2008). The empirical findings of this study differ from previous studies who considered that only members of the same criminal organizations participate in these interactions (Womer and Bunker 2010). In this case, interactions were established among members of the same criminal organization, civilians, rivals, and even members of the army.

Civilians, for example, carried out informational assessments in an attempt to define the situation of the offline strategic interaction (Goffman 1970): “we are afraid as there is a rumor that the *Sinaloa* Cartel will kill people during the Independence Day celebrations.” In response, civilians got negatives from the *New People's* members: “everything is false.” Other parties in the strategic interaction also commented on these videos and answered to the *New People's* calling for interaction: “4RN marines rules! If you want to fight I'll wait for you ...” Parties in the strategic interaction where *co-present*, available and accountable to each other through YouTube, a technology which enabled online *encounters* (Goffman 1969, 1972; Pinch 2010).

In addition, attempts to develop future offline interactions (Lange 2008; Pinch 2007) were also made when the member of the *New People* who posted “The Pigs-Killer” video wrote in a comment: “those who want to sell our products pop by the office.” YouTube also allowed other associates of the *Sinaloa* DTO to overcome physical distance and interact when they posted comments to motivate other participants: “Let's go Pigs-Killers!”. YouTube then enabled “socialization among dispersed friends” and reaffirmation of pre-existing social relationships (Lange 2008).

In summary, YouTube's technological affordances were activated for interactional purposes enabling online *encounters* to the parties involved in the turf war of Ciudad Juárez. Through expression and coordination games, the parties in this strategic interaction were “available and accountable to each other” at a distance (Pinch 2010, 420).

c) *Contents and construction of meanings*

Campbell (2012) suggested that when DTOs post videos on the Internet they disseminate violent content, reveal sensitive information about rival organizations and corrupt policemen, and spread videos with drug ballads. This statement is corroborated with the contents that members of the *New People* posted on YouTube. However, Campbell and Womer and Bunker (2010) maintained that these contents were “propaganda,” a “message delivered by a sender to a receiver” (2012, 3), but the empirical findings of this study show that YouTube users discussed meanings and definitions of the videos, challenging the *New People's* expressions. For example, when viewers questioned the veracity of the interrogation of Mario González: “this is false in my view.” Therefore, the parties in the interactions constructed meanings through an interpretative process.

The concept propaganda was created in a period of time where communication technologies lacked interactional affordances (Lasswell 1927), but YouTube has affordances such as the possibility to allow users to comment below the videos. This creates a blog where people discuss the contents of the videos, a “forum,” as defined by “A,” the leader of the *New People* who posted the first video. More than message delivering, members of the *New People* intended to define the turf war situation and to construct and negotiate meanings with other YouTube users.

Campbell (2012, 9) argues that DTOs post videos with violent content to inspire fear, however, in the case of the *New People*, members of this group only used a threatening tone in messages addressed to members of *The Line*. The tone used in messages to civilians was not a threatening one: “my dear friend (...) I will try to do the least damage possible,” “I do not delete comments even when they are offensive (...) that is why this forum is for people to voice their opinions (...)”.

The contents posted by members of the *New People* on YouTube and the interactions that were established with comments indicate that more than looking to “advertise” their organization (Campbell 2012; Womer and Bunker 2010), they sought to make their selves accountable to other parties in the context of a war. Members of the *New People* made their selves available to other parties for interaction.

5. Limitations

The selection criteria of the case was relevance (Thomas 2011). Therefore, the results of this paper cannot be generalized to all Drug Trafficking Organizations operating in the world. But they can shed light on similar phenomena occurring in the context of the Mexico-US war on drugs. However, it is noteworthy to mention that during the data collection I found similar videos posted by people identifying themselves as members of “Sacra Corona Unita,” a DTO operating in Italy. DTOs operating in Mexico still use digital platforms. This provides opportunities for future scholars to complement and replicate this research.

6. Conclusion

Members of the armed wing *New People* posted videos on YouTube making technical choices that activated YouTube’s interactional affordances: giving access to the videos to all YouTube users, and allowing all YouTube users to comment below the videos. Therefore, they gave YouTube users physical and interpretative access. The analysis shows that interactions were achieved through comments between members of the *New People*, civilians, members of *The Line*, members of the Army, and members of other DTOs.

By shaping in this way YouTube’s technological affordances, the *New People* attempted to blur the lines between legality and illegality, either fostering the impression of being a socially responsible criminal organization that would try not to affect civilians during the turf war, or by promising civilians to take justice into their own hands for the abuses perpetrated by *The Line* and corrupt officials.

The *New People* tried to negotiate the interpretation of their illegal activities in Ciudad Juarez by interacting with civilians, acknowledging the pursuit of an illegal aim, that allegedly, would try not to interfere with civilian’s interests. Civilians negotiated meanings with members of the *New People* through comments where they asked for more information

about their activities, formulated specific petitions, doubted the veracity of the videos, uncovered their real criminal motivations, or supported their incursion in the city. I identified six types of civilians, according to their meaning negotiations: inquisitive, petitioning, skeptical, un-skeptical, opposing, and supporting.

The concept of propaganda is limited to understand the *New People* armed wing's use of YouTube. Beyond a one-way message delivering, members of the *New People* made themselves available for interaction. YouTube users accepted, challenged, and negotiated their expressions.

YouTube enabled online *encounters* among the parties in the context of a strategic interaction with fateful consequences. These online *encounters* were occasions for impression management and information assessment, that is to say, for expression games, but also for coordination activities among members of the armed wing. Through YouTube, the parties involved in an armed conflict were *co-present* to each other at a distance.

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Alin Ake-Kob is currently researching the use and development of sensors and audio-video apps for care services in Norway. She is Norway's representative in The European Cooperation in Science and Technology for the Management Committee of the network: Privacy-Aware Audio- and Video-Based Applications for Active and Assisted Living.

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