THE DARK SIDE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CASE OF THE MEXICAN DRUG WAR

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MEXICAN DRUG WAR

By

Nilda M. Garcia

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The rapid increase in the use of social media during the "war on drugs" in Mexico, especially in the first decades of the 21st century, has stimulated a growing research agenda in academia. To date, this scholarship has focused primarily on investigating the opportunities social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube offer to civilians as organizing mechanisms, to fill the informational vacuum left by the tightly self-censured mainstream media outlets, and as a tool for survival. Yet, in Mexico, the use of these platforms has taken a darker, more sinister turn. Research exploring the use of social media platforms has largely ignored the fact that these communication outlets also provide major opportunities for criminal organizations to engage in public relations strategies, ease their recruitment tactics, send threatening messages to government authorities, civilians, and to warn off potential rivals. With the intent to fill the theoretical and empirical vacuum, this dissertation answers: What is the effect of social media use on drug cartels survival capacity in Mexico? Is the use of social media empowering Mexican drug cartels?

To my parents Juan and Nilda

with all my love.

To all the innocent lives lost in the

drug war and their families.

To justice and peace.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid increase in the use of social media[1] during the "war on drugs" in Mexico, especially in the first decades of the 21st century, has stimulated a growing research agenda in academia. To date, this scholarship has focused primarily on investigating the opportunities social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube offer to civilians as organizing mechanisms, to fill the informational vacuum left by the tightly self-censured mainstream media outlets, and as a tool for survival. Yet, in Mexico, the use of these platforms has taken a darker, more sinister turn. Research exploring the use of social media platforms has largely ignored the fact that these communication outlets also provide major opportunities for criminal organizations[2] to engage in public relations strategies, ease their recruitment tactics, send threatening messages to government authorities, civilians, and to warn off potential rivals.

The drug war in Mexico is one of the most brutal conflicts in the world. Despite the declared victories from the government, the strategy followed by Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) and currently employed by the Peña Nieto's administration (2012-2018) to combat the drug cartels, has been far from successful. Notwithstanding the efforts of these

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[1] Social media is defined here as websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate on social networking (Oxford, 2017). Available at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/social_media
The platforms used for this study are Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

[2] A cartel is commonly defined as an association of manufacturers or suppliers that regulate and purposely maintain prices high on a product to restrict competition. The Colombian drug cartels such as Cali and Medellin were usually a good example for this definition. Although Mexican criminal organizations no longer fit the definition of "cartels" (since their criminal activities and *modus operandi* have diversified) it is still a common term used to refer to these criminal groups in Mexico. In some cases, the word is embedded on their name, i.e. the Sinaloa cartel. In this dissertation, it is argued that definitions such as cartels, or criminal organizations are no longer adequate to refer to these groups. Nevertheless, in the drug trafficking literature these terms are a common ground when denoting these groups. For this, the terms organized crime, criminal organizations, drug cartels, cartels, are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

administrations, domestic security remains difficult to achieve because of the highly volatile, violent, and extremely competitive environment in which some criminal organizations like the Sinaloa cartel or the Zetas have managed not only to survive, but they have grown in influence, size and power more than others.

Since the militarization of the war on drugs in 2006, the media has played an important part in the conflict. Both, the government and the drug cartels, have for years controlled the flow of information from mainstream media outlets, using it strategically for propaganda tactics. In order to block the criminal organizations from taking advantage of the media exposure, 715 Mexican media channels signed an agreement in 2011 to censor reports about the drug war and to follow the same editorial criteria when informing the public on organized crime related violence.[3] Following this collective response, the use of social media, by both civilians and cartels, boomed in the country.[4] In some areas affected by the hyper-violence triggered by the drug war, social media has been used by the citizenry as an alternative outlet to get information about shootings or blockades. At the same time, some drug trafficking organizations also embraced these web-based platforms as alternative channels of communication to support their enterprises.

The central question of this dissertation is: What has been the effect of social media use on drug cartels survivability in Mexico? The main thesis that guides this study is the claim that a higher level of survivability of criminal organizations has been provided by the availability and use of social media outlets to adopt new organizational strategies.

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[3] The criteria points are available at: http://expansion.mx/nacional/2011/03/24/medios-mexicanos-firman-un-acuerdo-para-informar-sobre-violencia.

[4] In 2000, only 5 percent of the Mexican population had access to the Internet. By 2010, one-third had access to it (World Bank, 2012). As of June 2012, more than 33 million people, 30 percent of the population had Facebook accounts, raking 5th in the world in the number of Facebook users.

In the pages that follow, this project demonstrates that some drug cartels in Mexico have incorporated social media into their strategies, often pursuing different tactics all with the purpose of seeking new paths to dominance. This study finds that the strategic adaptation of social media platforms has different effects on criminal organization's survivability. The empirical evidence suggests that if used efficiently, social media is a tool that benefits and strengthens drug cartels in Mexico, by enhancing both their organizational and operational capabilities. It is proposed here that when used effectively, coupled with the adoption of decentralized structures, these platforms do increase a criminal organization's survival capacity. Nonetheless, if used haphazardly, social media can have the opposite effect. Social media strengthens criminal organizations mainly by enhancing their legitimacy and attracting new recruits. Measuring how much legitimacy or at what rate social media attracts recruits, thereby increasing the survivability of drug cartels is hard to assess directly. However, through statistical correlation analysis I find that, contrary to the argument of various scholars, in the case of the Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas, there was no compelling evidence indicating that their exposure on social media made them more vulnerable for attacks by rivals or the government. In the case of the Caballeros Templarios my findings were not as strong, but still the correlation between social media usage and reported clashes was observed.[5]

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[5] Each case also presented a platform of choice in which the analysis for each case was focused. Twitter, Facebook and YouTube are communication platforms that are different in nature. For example, an account on Twitter can reach more people compared to Facebook which has a 5,000 thousand followers limit. It is important to consider that it is a possibility that some results might differ, in terms of reach or usage, if the study is conducted in one single platform in all cases. The content on Twitter and Facebook do not differed as much across cases. YouTube is the platform that could have presented different results when it comes to attracting targeting by the security forces or rival groups. The analysis here was conducted with the available data.

Using social network analysis, this project gathers a great deal of information about drug cartels which provides fresh insights regarding their organizational network, their central nodes, and the channels through which information flows in these organizations. Through my analysis, I found that in the cases of the Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas, their virtual network was reminiscent to their physical structure. I also found that early detection of emerging cells within the structures of the criminal organizations can be pinpointed. From the vantage of policy and this project, the detection of nascent cells is of significance for two reasons. First, it allows for targeting new cells, before they become independent and powerful cartels. Second, it signals intra-cartel fragmentation which is an indication of vulnerability. Furthermore, the content of the social media platforms analyzed in this study (Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube), revealed the cartels' strategies, tactics, demographics, and information about real time operations.

This dissertation is divided into three parts. First, Part I provides an overview of the rise of the Mexican drug cartels and the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this study. Chapter 1 presents a brief account of the historic legacies that contributed to the rise of some of the most powerful and dangerous drug cartels in the world. The chapter briefly discusses the evolution of the war on drugs in Mexico from 2006 to 2015, the temporal scope of this project. Finally, I provide an overview of the role that the media has played in Mexico's drug war, highlighting the transition from traditional media to the adoption of social media as a major source of information about the drug war by civilians, cartels, and the government.

In Chapter 2, I shift my focus to a discussion of the theoretical framework and methodological approach I adopt, that guide this project. First, I review the

interdisciplinary scholarship that aims to explain the Mexican drug cartel's capacity for survival. The second section surveys the scholarly literature focused on the adoption of social media platforms by terrorist groups such as ISIS, as well as other criminal organizations. In the third section, I review the academic studies that have focused on the role of social media in the Mexican drug war, which diversely to this study, these works concentrate on the civilian use of social media as their unit of analysis. The last section of the chapter sets forth the theoretical expectations and research design of this study.

Part II of this project is comprised of three chapters each present a case study of a particular cartel. These cases studies include my discussion of the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas, and the Caballeros Templarios. The cases I have chosen does not reflect an exhaustive list of all the drug cartels operating in Mexico. For instance, the number of criminal organizations in the country is hard to assess due to their fragmentation and re-amalgamation as new criminal groups. These cases were selected to represent diverse types of criminal organizations in terms of their structures and modus operandi. The selection of the cases was made to measure the use of social media in different types of cartels with dissimilar organizational structures. There are other cartels in Mexico such as the Juarez, the Tijuana, or the Beltran-Leyva, which have been important players in the drug trafficking arena in Mexico. These cases could add another layer of variation into my comparative analysis. However, the cartels such as those previously mentioned have not widely adopted the technological or communications strategies that are needed to adapt to the current scene in the drug business. Their presence on social media platforms is limited as is their influence and power.

Figure 1.1

Main Areas of Influence of the Major Mexican Drug Cartels

Source: DEA (2015) http://www.storybench.org/visualizing-mexicos-drug-cartels-roundup-maps.

Chapter 3 introduces my first case study, the Sinaloa cartel. The Sinaloa cartel is considered the most powerful cartel in Mexico and perhaps worldwide. The organization is best known for its infamous leader Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, who was recently extradited to the U.S. in January 2017. This cartel was established decades ago and has been historically based primarily in the state of Sinaloa on the west coast of Mexico (see Fig. 1.1). In contrast to the other criminal organizations studied in this project, the Sinaloa cartel maintains the essence of the traditional drug cartels in Mexico.[6] This organization,

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[6] The terms "traditional cartels" and "non-traditional cartels" are used in this dissertation to refer to the organizations' *modus operandi*. For example, the Sinaloa cartel is considered "traditional" because it has for the most part maintained the tacit agreements followed by the Mexican cartels for decades: (1) protect the communities in where they operate, (2) do not to kill innocent civilians, (3) respect rival cartel's turf, and (4) generate their profits mainly from drug trafficking activities. "Non-traditional" cartels refer to more recently

despite significant organizational organizational disruptions over the years, such as the capture of their leader El Chapo, has been able to maintain its hegemony among Mexican drug trafficking cartels.[7] Members of the Sinaloa cartel have significant presence on social media. On Twitter, members of the organization, especially those with high ranking positions such as El Chapo and his sons, Alfredo and Ivan Archivaldo, have more than 1.2 million followers combined. My social network analysis of their Twitter network reveals a similar structure to the one the organization holds physically (i.e. hubs-and-spokes),[8] it also exposes some dynamics and characteristics of the cartel. Members of the criminal organization active on social media provide a wide amount of information ranging from their missions and operations to narratives that lead to a parallel story about the cartel that is not generally publicized.

Employing the same analytical approach, chapter 4 focuses on the Zetas cartel. The Zetas is a criminal organization that transformed the drug trafficking business in Mexico. For this work, they are considered a "non-traditional" cartel. This group originated in the state of Tamaulipas, and that emerged from the Gulf cartel, for which they served as their armed wing until 2008-2009. The Zetas are better known for their hyper-violence and brutal fashion in which they conduct their business. They are also known for rapid growth and significant territorial expansion they achieved at the height of their power, circa 2010

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established criminal organizations such as the Zetas, La Familia, the Caballeros Templarios, and the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación. These newer groups do not follow the "rules of the game" and use violent indiscriminate tactics to conduct their illegal businesses. These newer organizations have also diversified their criminal activities (i.e. kidnappings, extortions, human trafficking, piracy, petroleum theft) from which they profit.

[7] There have been some speculations of whether the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación has surpassed the Sinaloa cartel in power (Excelsior, 2015), but to make an accurate assertion the factor of endurance has to be taken into account.

[8] In a "hub and spokes" structure typology the leadership of the organization is shared by various individuals. In the case of the Sinaloa cartel the organizations started with 4 main leaders, each working with their own cells and groups, and enjoying some degree of autonomy (Astorga, 1999).

and 2012. This criminal organization also adopted social media as part of their tactics, using these platforms as a means to sow terror in the areas in which they operate. The adoption of social media platforms by the Zetas' in their areas of influence took a different form compared to that found in the Sinaloa cartel's territories. In this chapter, I argue that not only has social media become a tool for citizens to report on the drug war, but it has also made them another actor participant in the war on drugs. Though the Zetas have lost some strength, and retrieved from some territories, they remain a relevant cartel in the drug trafficking scene in Mexico.

Chapter 5 focuses on the Caballeros Templarios cartel. Based mainly in the state of Michoacán, this criminal organization had its origins from the older La Familia Michoacana cartel, the third most powerful cartel in Mexico before its collapse in 2010. The Caballeros Templarios differentiate themselves from other Mexican criminal organization with their semi-religious believes and rhetoric, even taking their name from the mediaeval Knight Templars that fought to protect the Catholic faith during the middle-ages. As this case study unfolds, it is evident that there is a disconnect between their benevolent discourse and their modus operandi. The cartel inherited the vicious violent ways of La Familia, which they themselves inherited from the Zetas. The Caballeros Templarios have a significant presence on social media platforms like Facebook. But it is their use of YouTube by their last main leader La Tuta, what sets them apart from the other cases. Specifically, the social media strategy employed on YouTube did not benefit the organization as much as the adoption of social media by the Sinaloa and Zetas cartels. On the contrary, I observed that the platform of choice worked at their disadvantage. This

criminal organization has virtually disappeared after the loss of their four main leaders, but some cells from the cartel are still operating.

Part III concludes this study. I first present the main theoretical and empirical findings of this dissertation. Next, I propose some key possible policy recommendations. Finally, I present prospects for future research.

This dissertation is the first systematic attempt to study the presence, behavior, activity, purposes, and strategies of drug cartels in their forays in social media. Social media has become a central outlet in which members of criminal organization provide great amounts of information which in turn offer alternative perspectives that can aid in better understanding these groups. This work seeks to add a new variable to the study of cartels' survival capacity.[9] Furthermore, it proposes the implementation of social network analysis in the study of drug cartels as a tool to investigate the nature of the 'new networked generation' of criminal organizations. Approaching this topic is imperative since the effect of social media as a tool used by criminal networks remains understudied. Proven significant, this variable might be extrapolated to the study of additional cases within Mexico and criminal organization on other countries, such as Brazil, El Salvador and Colombia. Finally, this work draws on the insights of the fields of criminology, social network analysis, international relations, and organizational theory. Because of its interdisciplinary nature, this dissertation aims to contribute to a developing strand of literature in drug trafficking that focus on the effects of technology on criminal organizations.

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[9] Social media in treated in this scholarly work as an alternative variable to explain the survivability of criminal organizations in Mexico. It is worth mentioning that there are other variables that might have a better explanatory power such as: the economic flux of the criminal organizations, their military capabilities and intelligence capacity.

Chapter 1

THE CONTINUATION OF WAR BY OTHER MEANS

Felipe Calderon militarized the Mexican "war on drugs" in 2006, producing high rates of violence, bloody confrontations between cartels, and preeminent levels of collateral damage, all of which still plague Mexico today. The atrocities of the drug war have led to more than 150,000 homicides and about 27,000 persons displaced (Breslow, 2015).[10] Civilians have also suffered human right violations at the hand of the military and entire communities have been abandoned due to the abuses of criminal organizations. Thereby, the strategy implemented by the government throughout this conflict against drug trafficking has not proven successful and the bloodshed across the country seems endless.

As in other conflicts, the media has played a central role in the Mexican fight against drugs, and has been used as a powerful instrument for war. During World War II, the Nazis used the media as a weapon to antagonize the Jews and legitimize a heinous program of ethnic cleansing. In the U.S., during both world wars, the media was used as a tool for recruiting American soldiers, best captured in the famous campaign portraying Uncle Sam with the historical slogan "I want you." The antagonistic propaganda between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War, is another example of the major influence of media during warfare. More recently, terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS have also used media, mainly social media, to fight their wars with similar goals. They have

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[10] The estimates of drug related homicides vary, figures range between 90,000 and 165,000 by 2015 depending on the source and methodology.

utilized them as public relations instruments, to win people's "hearts and minds," and to antagonize Western ideologies to legitimate violence on civilian populations and gain supporters.

Similarly, in Mexico, both the government and the drug cartels have adopted the media to enhance their strategies during the war on drugs. However, in this case its utilization turned to be somehow atypical. In other words, the utilization of social media by the actors involved in the conflict goes beyond recruiting and legitimation practices. During the Mexican war on drugs, the reliability and usage of media transitioned from traditional or mainstream forms (T.V., radio), to new alternative web based platforms better known as social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube). These outlets started to flourish and be used as the medium through which citizens get information about the war. Yet, these communication platforms were also quickly adopted by some drug cartels. This would later transform the landscape of the conflict. The eruption of social media dramatically changed the means and the extent of media use in Mexico, and has been influential on the way the war is reported and "followed" ever since.

This chapter is divided in two sections. In the first part I develop three themes. First, I discuss the factors that contributed to the establishment and strengthening of the drug trafficking business in Mexico.[11] Second, I survey the unfolding of the war on drugs, the strategies taken by the government, and the results of these strategies. Finally, I present an overview on the current state of the war. The second section lays out the transition between traditional and social media usage as a main platform of information during the conflict, as well as its implementation by various actors.

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[11] For a more in-depth account on the history of drug trafficking in Mexico please see Grayson (2010), Grillo (2011), Valdés Castellanos (2013).

Mexico Narco

While the speed and brutal violence with which the drug trafficking phenomenon took over Mexico throughout the last decade is surprising, the existence of drug criminal organizations is not. Historically, Mexico has been a producer of marijuana, opium and heroin. This remained for many years a regionally based activity (Andreas, 2000). It has also served as a transit country for cocaine from other parts of South America, such as Colombia. The country has social, geographic, and political conditions that make the drug business functional and lucrative, contributing to the proliferation of criminal insurgency (Grillo, 2011). For example, its topographical position next to the biggest and most profitable drug market in the world, the United States, places Mexico in a desirable location to conduct the illegal business. The state's institutional capacity is also weak due to high level of corruption, deeply rooted in the system and evidenced by long-standing established relationships between government authorities and organized crime (Astorga, 2004; Valdés Castellanos, 2013; Grayson, 2014; Rios, 2012).

In other words, the problem of drug trafficking in Mexico is anything but new. Tacit and informal agreements between state and drug cartels were established many years ago under the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) regime that ruled the country for 71 years (Astorga, 2005; Valdés Castellanos, 2013). However, during the hegemony of the PRI, there was a sense of relative peace and stability on the way drug cartels operated (Carvajal-Dávila, 1998). According to Astorga (2005), the agreements established between the PRI and the drug cartels rested on a specific understanding on the part of the government that included the following points: (1) illicit drugs were just destined for export and not for domestic consumption; (2) cartel members, or capos, would not seek to hold

political positions or run for office; and (3) decisions taken by the federal government would be obeyed without disputes. Under this system, trafficking organizations coexisted and functioned in a well-ordered fashion, maintaining their operations without major violent confrontations among themselves or the government.

The Mexican mafia began to get more notorious during the 1960s, decade which saw an explosion on the demand of marijuana in the U.S. This was the era of the Vietnam War and the hippie generation. Marijuana became the symbol of youthful rebellion and political dissent. As the consumption of marijuana in the U.S. increased, some Mexican cartels and capos, such as Felix Gallardo known as "El Padrino" (the Godfather), became influential figures in the international arena of the drug business (Grayson, 2014).

In the 1970s, the U.S. interdiction efforts along the coast of Florida and in the Caribbean, made Mexico an important transit country for cocaine. This policy changed drug trafficking routes to the U.S., shifting them through Mexico and the Pacific corridor (Freeman and Sierra, 2005). As a result, Colombian cartels established strong nexus with the Mexican mafia to traffic cocaine making this illicit industry even more profitable. Longtime marijuana smugglers became part of a complex and more sophisticated hemisphere-wide network of drug traffickers, increasing their influence and power (Astorga, 2004).

As a neoliberal agenda was taking over the western world, Mexico signed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), formalized in 1994 during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. With the opening of the U.S., Canadian and Mexican borders for trade, it became more challenging for the authorities to control the crossing of illegal substances through the Mexican-American border. Ultimately, NAFTA created the

conditions for cartels to expand their operations (Gooternberg, 2011; Astorga, 2010; Eiss, 2014; Bagley, 2005; Andreas, 2000).

The signing of NAFTA carried some other unintended consequences. On the one hand, foreign investment benefited the country in some ways. The *maquiladoras* established in border cities offered many jobs especially for women. Also, multinational corporations started founding headquarters in industrial cities stimulating their economies. On the other hand, domestic production, especially in the agricultural sector in the southern part of the country, did not get protected and the industry had trouble competing with imports from the U.S. and the Canadian's markets (McKibben, 2015). The latter led to problems with the agricultural sector and to the rise of the EZLN, a paramilitary group with socialist and Marxist ideals. They were fighting against the adoption of the neoliberal establishment. The rebels claimed that the collective rights historically negated to the indigenous communities were being even more neglected by foreign investment and competition. This segregation pushed some of these communities to look for other means of income and they turned to the drug trafficking business (McKibben, 2015). The lack of job opportunities in the formal sector, in particular for the underqualified and poorly educated, broaden the workforce willing to participate in the illicit industry.

In 2000, democracy took a stand in Mexico when Vicente Fox, the candidate from the opposition party PAN (National Action Party), won the federal election. Since Fox's election, the geopolitics of drug trafficking in Mexico began to shift almost imperceptibly until a new reality struck the country (Aguilar and Castañeda, 2009). For example, the rules of the game changed, the agreements between drug cartels and the PRI that had functioned for generations were shattered. Almost seventeen years later, the drug trafficking panorama

has completely transformed, there was a diversification on the power of political parties across regions and new deals were stablished with different cartels, new criminal organizations arose and violence erupted thorough the Mexican territories. In addition, with the later the social embeddedness of the narco culture, have brought together the elements to create the perfect storm that has hit the country during the last decade.

The Securitization of the War on Drugs

To understand the securitization of the drug war in Mexico, it is important to consider the political context in which Felipe Calderón took office in 2006. Calderón started his administration amidst electoral chaos. A significant percentage of the population believed Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, "El Peje," the candidate of the leftist PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party) was Mexico's legitimate president. Those who contested the election argued that Obrador received most of the votes, claiming electoral fraud on the part of Calderón (Resendiz, 2006).

This political turmoil has led scholars to debate, whether the lack of acceptability towards his mandate was an important factor that influenced Calderon's decision to militarize the drug conflict, as a desperate effort to gain the nation's approval (Aguilar and Castañeda, 2012). What differentiates Calderon's approach *vis- a- vis* his antecessors, is that no former president launched such an aggressive and permanent strategy, involving the military instead of the federal police to fight organized crime (Aguilar and Castañeda, 2009; Carpenter, 2012). Regarding his rhetoric, Calderón highlighted the indispensability of the military to fight against the cartels. Often, during televised discourses, he stated that the battle was essential to stop drug from reaching Mexican children (Carreño de la Rosa, 2011). He framed the problem of drug trafficking and the cartels as the number one threat

to the country's national security, claiming that domestic drug consumption was increasing dramatically and that cartels were threatening to subvert the government.

Even though the drug war was successfully securitized, the justifications offered by the Mexican government have been strongly contested by experts. Figures have shown that drug consumption in Mexico might be rising, but the increase is neither significant nor alarming. The argument that the drug mafia was attempting to displace the government, has been totally refuted by specialists, who have documented that Mexican cartels have never exhibited an intent to do so (Aguilar and Castañeda, 2009). Finally, violence has not decreased, on the contrary Mexico has become a giant graveyard.

Sharing Responsibilities: the Merida Initiative

It is regularly argued that Mexico's drug trafficking problem is a demand-side issue, stemming from high levels of drug consumption in the U.S. In a meeting with former President George W. Bush in Guatemala, Felipe Calderón proclaimed: "while there is no reduction in demand in your territory, it will be very difficult to reduce the supply in ours" (as cited in Grayson, 2014: p. 93). With this statement, the Mexican President was urging Washington to "share responsibilities" and support Mexico in addressing the anti-drug effort (Grayson, 2014).

In response to Calderón's challenge, the Merida Initiative was signed in 2007 by the Mexican and American presidents. This approach mirrored the model of *Plan Colombia,* led by the U.S. during the Colombian war on drugs fought during the late-1900s. The U.S. Congress agreed to fund the Merida Initiative with $1.4 billion for training, equipment, justice sector reforms, police capacity building, intelligence and anti-corruption programs (Grayson, 2014). Cutrona has called this approach the *Standard Security Model*

(SSM) imposed by the U.S. throughout Latin America and the Caribbean for counter-narcotic efforts (2017: p. 20). He defines the model as follows:

> A set of policies that promotes the expansion of the military's role in counter-narcotics efforts, applied irrespective of the nature of the target country's drug problem. Underpinned by a harsh counter-narcotics legislation, this model provides aid grants for security purposes; the training of armed and civilians police forces in military operation and strategies; advice, intelligence, and logistical support; and the transfer of weapons, equipment, and services to fight against drug-trafficking. Most important, the SSM frames the drug problem as one analogous to traditional national security preoccupations, often overlooking its economic, social, and cultural dimensions.

The SSM has been the common approach to combat drug trafficking in various South American countries such as Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. This strategy has been highly contested by scholars as of its effectiveness versus the adverse consequences of its implementations, an important one been the negative impact to the environment and degradation of the soil in which chemicals are sprayed to eradicate poppy crops for example.

In addition, the scheme implemented follows the "kingpin" strategy which basically consists of crippling an organization through "decapitating," specifically capturing or killing its leader. The logic behind this strategy is that by taking away the head of the organization, the criminal group will splinter into smaller, weaker groups that are easier to defeat. The kingpin approach proved successful in dismantling the hierarchically structured Cali and Medellin drug cartels, the most powerful Latin American criminal organizations at the time (Bakker, 2012). However, this strategy has not shown the same satisfactory results against Mexican cartels.

 The Merida Initiative never took off as it was expected. Since the attacks of 9/11, the U.S.'s military interests shifted towards Afghanistan, and the War on Terror escalated to the top of the U.S. security agenda. Terrorists groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban were now perceived as a major threat to the American national security. The "war on drugs"

declared by President Nixon in 1971 was supplanted by the "war on terror" under George W. Bush's mandate, the fight against drug trafficking was no longer a priority to the U.S. What is more, the economic recession and health-care legislation, the Mexican military's notorious and repeated violation of human rights, accounted as some of the factors that influenced the U.S. Congress' decision of limiting the allocation of resources towards the Merida Initiative, hurting its chances to succeed (Grayson, 2014).

During the drug war years, some Mexican drug cartels have proven to be highly resistant. Regardless of the setbacks the Merida Initiative did have some effect on the criminal organizations. Constant government harassment of the cartels led to both, the balloon and the cockroach effects, with the shifting routes of drug trafficking back to Colombia and parts of Central America (Bagley, 2012). Looking for safe havens to conduct their operations, some of the cartels have established headquarters in countries such as Guatemala and Honduras, taking advantage of their fragile governments.

From Calderón (2006-2012) to Peña Nieto (2012-2018)

Since the PRI found its way back to *Los Pinos* with President Peña Nieto in 2012, the drug war narrative has been handled a bit differently from his predecessor, mostly in word than in deed. To begin with, the term "Merida Initiative" has vanished from Nieto's official discourse. Peña Nieto has tried to turn his statements away from the conflict, focusing more on economic issues and energy reforms. As if the war on drugs had ended, silence has been his approach (Ramos, 2013).

Yet, there have been instances where it has been impossible for him to ignore the ongoing battle. For example, president Peña address the nation to talk about the disappearance of forty-two students in Ayotzinapan, Guerrero. He made another statement

on the drug war when "El Chapo" Guzman tunneled out of jail, for the second time, after having been in prison for only six months. Peña Nieto, was in Paris celebrating France's Independence Day, accompanied by more than a hundred members of the military and cadets parading through Champs Élysées, broadcasted a short communiqué listing the immediate actions he was taking to re-capture Guzman. He next delivered a brief speech celebrating the "triumph" of the government over organized crime when the capo was arrested once more in January of 2016. Since then, Peña Nieto has made only sporadic declarations about the process for extraditing of El Chapo to the U.S.

From the beginning of his administration, Peña Nieto was extremely critical of Calderon's militarized approach to combat drug trafficking. Nonetheless, the fundamentals of the anti-drug strategy have remained largely the same. One novelty of Peña's approach was the creation of a military force named *La Gendarmería Nacional*, modeled after France's gendarmerie and the national police of several South American countries. The group was supposed to eventually replace more than 40,000 troops (Althaus, 2013). In addition, the President adopted a more arm's-length relationship with the U.S. officials from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and other agencies, which had worked closely with the previous administration (Althaus, 2013).

A Critical State of Affairs

After a decade of constant conflict, the position of the Mexican government on the war on drugs has taken a turn for the worse. Cartels have multiplied and others fragmented creating *cartelitos.* A considerable number of new and more violent cartels arose in different areas of Mexico. There are records of nine cartels and 113 drug trafficking cells currently operating in the country (Santos, 2014). These groups also exhibit more

compartmentalization and have diversified their criminal activities into such crimes as kidnappings and extortions (Garay Salamanca and Salcedo-Albarán, 2012). Some cartels like the Zetas, grew exponentially in power and size, gaining control over more territory (Dudley and Rios, 2013). In 2011, the cartel *Jalisco Nueva Generación* first appeared and is thought to already be as powerful and the main rival to, the Sinaloa cartel. As this cartel is getting stronger, other major criminal organizations have shrunk in power and capabilities (i.e. La Familia Michoacana cartel). Prior to the 2010s, criminal organizations mainly operated in 10 states in the Republic, however, there has been a metastasis of criminal cells throughout the entire country (Santos, 2014). What is more, according to the International Narcotics Control Board (2015), Mexico is presently the world's main heroin producer and the global leader in trafficking the chemicals precursors needed to produce methamphetamines.

The drug war fiasco can be attributed to problems on its execution, coordination and a lack of transparency on the part of law enforcement bodies; and to the desynchronization at the municipal, state, and federal levels. There are instances in which violent clashes have taken place between the military and the municipal police forces, instead of fighting together against criminals. Events like these, painfully illustrates the failure to coordinate federal and municipal law enforcement agencies. A course of action taken by the federal government to minimize this incoordination is the implementation of *Mando Unico,* which aims to centralize the security forces at the state level and regain the ability to work as a cohesive, single decision-making body.

The Media's Censorship and the Adoption of Social Media

Since the beginning of this conflict, traditional media (T.V., radio, journals) played a key role serving as a tool for the government and the cartels to spread their respective messages. As noted previously, the media was strategically used by Calderon's cabinet to construct an image in which the government made case for militarizing the war on drugs. To make this case, the government used printed media, radio and TV spots, showing images of successful military operations. The images consistently showed the military in their uniforms holding their weapons, criminals by their side handcuffed and looking down signaling surrender. Sometimes the broadcasted images presented confiscated drugs, money, guns, and ammunitions laid out in front of the captured cartel members. These images flooded the media during the first years of Calderón militarized approach to the drug war, with the purpose of convincing citizens of its "effectiveness."

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press is not a right that has been particularly embraced in Mexico. The World Press Freedom Index (2014) ranked the country in the 152th place out of 180 countries, suggesting that the media and the information they release are significantly controlled by the government. This same trend continued unabated during the drug war years.

Mexico's media system is unique in that, it does not precisely fit traditional models (Hallin, 2000). For example, the Mexican media does not fulfill with the "watchdog" function that characterized other Western media, using the press as an apparatus for "checks and balances" and government accountability (Waisbord, 1996). Nor does it obey the partisan model in which the press exposes diverse points of view. Rather, mass media in Mexico has been an important part of the political power structure used by the

government as an "ideological state apparatus" (Hallin, 2000). Even though the media in the country is privately owned, it has a tight relationship with the government (Adler, 1993; Hallin, 2000). Mexico is home to one of the major television conglomerates, *Televisa,* in all Latin America and now holds a sizable market share in the U.S. *Televisa* has for many years controlled much of the news and stories that are reported throughout the nation. Until recently, *Televisa's* news division was the only significant producer of broadcast news and has been also a key player during elections (Hallin, 2000). Images of candidates' meetings are edited and manipulated to favor or disfavor their campaigns in exchange for great sums of money (Adler, 1993). Control over the media by the government is also visible when news anchors or personalities are vetoed from *Televisa* after they expose news that compromise the government's reputation. A recent case was the dismissal of news anchor Carmen Aristegui after she reported on the "white house" scandal that involved the First Lady, investors, and government officials. Given the cozy relationship between the media and the government, other contemporary sources of information have been created. One of the first of a series of news publications which established a more independent form of media, is the weekly magazine *Proceso* (Hallin, 2000). This magazine has served as one of the principal sources of information during the drug war along with other forms of alternative press, discussed in greater depth below.

For their part, drug cartels have also used media as an instrument of war. The media has unintentionally helped cartels boost the popularity of the "narco culture" (Estrin, 2011; Cockrell, 2009). In some parts of the country, drug lords have become epic heroes, even saints, like Jesus Malverde, a figure that cartel members venerate and pray to for protection.

The narco lifestyle has become desirable, especially among younger generations that grew up during the war years, and have been exposed all their lives to the popular *narco-corridos, narco novelas,* or T.V. series. The media has glorified and demonized them, but as the saying goes there is no such thing as bad publicity.

Cartels in Mexico take advantage of media exposure. They also control communication outlets in certain areas. Local TV stations or newspapers have closed their doors after being bombed, threatened, or their journalist have been killed by members of the mafia (Lara, 2011). To avoid the cartels to free ride on media exposure, in 2011, 50 major news outlets and other 665 other Mexican broadcasting organizations, signed an agreement proposed by the government. The pact sought to prevent the press from becoming an instrument for criminal organizations to spread their messages and terror (Medel, 2011). Since then, the flow of information regarding the war on drugs has decreased significantly; only a few scattered reports about the war have been available in the national and local news.

As a result, the cartels started to improvise their own news bulletins and broadening their channels of publicity to get the media's attention by throwing human heads in public plazas and in front of government buildings. Another method was the use of the now famous *narcomantas,* which are messages written on blankets hanging off overpasses targeted to rival cartels or government officials. Eventually, the criminal groups started to use internet to spread their messages, creating websites and posting gruesome videos on YouTube of actual beheadings, killings, and torturing of members of rival cartels.

There was a key incident that marked the beginning of the "new normal," when citizens started reporting on social media the remnants of shootings and turf disputes. In

February 2010, former Governor of the state of Tamaulipas Eugenio Hernandez, declared: "There is nothing going on in the northern part of the state," when questioned by the press with regards to the sudden wave of violence that stroke the area at that time, "the citizens are being psychotic," he affirmed (Daño Colateral, 2010: p. 1). In the news, no reports. The nature of the wave of violence experienced by citizens in the border towns of that state was so brutal and shocking, that statements like those of Hernandez and other government officials, ignoring and hiding the severity of the situation, have infused the resentment and exasperation of society. Civilians decided to post videos and images of the violence on social media so the rest of the country and the world could see the reality on the shootings and devastation. Some of the first videos that were reported from the frontlines of the drug war were posted on YouTube by anonymous citizens of Cd. Camargo, Tamaulipas. This city became a war zone over night, when the Zetas' split from the Gulf Cartel and started fighting over important traffic points in this northern state.

It became evident to civilians that the media had been silenced and controlled either by the government, or the drug cartels. It does not come as a surprise that sometimes news involving organized crime reached the Mexican public through reports from other countries, like the U.S. Along the northern border towns, reports of shootings are published on newspapers or reported in T.V. news on the American side of the frontier, whereas on the Mexican side there is nothing conveyed on the media.

In this context, the perceived reliability of traditional news sources fell significantly. From this point on, social media became the routine source for reports and information about violent confrontations between cartels and the military, rival cartels, and street blockades. Social media emerged as a medium to cover the drug war in response to

the informational vacuum left by traditional media outlets. Many Mexicans living in the most violent cities found on these web-based platforms tools for "information and survival" (Cave, 2011). Residents often go to Twitter to see if there has been a shooting on their route to work or on their way to their children's school.

The New "Face" of the Drug War

The singing of the censorship of the media agreement in 2011 and the later boom in the utilization of social media, marks a critical point on how the drug war has developed. In some ways, the dynamics of the drug war and the way the actors interact was altered. Social media outlets became crucial portals through which the actors in the war and those affected by it follow different agendas. The control over the information on social media, decentralized and complex in nature, became yet another space the government and the cartels have come to fight over for.

Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube became some of the principal internet based sites that have become part of the everyday life of approximately 28 million Mexicans. In 2011, Facebook saw a spike in its Mexican users of 154% (Marin, 2011). This same year, three of the most popular blogs in Mexico, *Blog del Narco, Mil Cincuenta,* and *Frontera al Rojo Vivo*, were created to report on the narcoviolence, rapidly becoming favorites among the citizens. After a couple of months, *Blog del Narco* had average traffic of three million visits per week (Saavedra, 2011).

This study suggests that the transition from traditional to social media allowed for the dynamics of the drug war to change, adding civilians as active participants in the conflict. There are some cases that illustrate the inclusion of citizens in the conflict as well. A case in point is the incident referred as the "cyber war" between the hacktivist group

Anonymous and the Zetas. Another case is the near real-time streaming of the assassination of Dr. Maria del Rosario Fuentes Rubio. Still another case, appears to be the first documented murder related to social media users and bloggers, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), in which Maria Elizabeth Macias who reported on the cartels using the pseudonym "NenaDLaredo," was killed. Interestingly, the cases in which the citizenry has been more involved in the drug war through their participation and reporting in social media platforms, is a phenomenon that has been more prevalent in the areas in where the Zetas operate. All these cases are further explored in chapter 4, which is dedicated to this violent criminal organization.

In addition to ending the oppression of mainstream media communication channels. The purpose of the emergent civilian-journalism and cyber activism, was for people to have a clearer vision of the war instead of the fragmented version delivered by the government. A resident of the state of Tamaulipas who identifies himself as @MrCruzStar on Twitter, declared in an interview that the purpose behind these real-time reports is to help minimize the panic among citizens by alerting residents of the affected cities about what parts of the communities to avoid (Rodriguez, 2016). What is more, citizens in these violent areas found in social media the gateway through which they could demand more peace and security from the government for their families and communities and to report on the drug war (Monroy-Hernandez, 2012). Under these circumstances, through social media civilians have established alliances with the government, and sometimes with the cartels.[12]

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[12] Examples of the alliances are also explored on chapter 4. The Zetas.

Conclusions

Mexico has a long history of drug trafficking. The Mexican cartels have embedded themselves deeply into the government, society, and in institutions at high levels. What seems different about current cartels operations, is an increase in the violence they conduct their business. Criminal organizations operating in Mexico were never this brutal. Before, territories where occupied by a single cartel, and in some cases shared distribution routes with other criminal organizations peacefully. The transition of power from the PRI to the PAN ended the détente between the government and the cartels ushering the start of territorial clashes between drug cartels seeking to take over new territories and spreading violence all throughout the country. The drug war did not start with Calderón, it has a long history that includes the U.S. led war on drugs, based on a program of prohibition and eradication. The militarization of the fight against the cartels has brought consequences that authors such as Freeman and Sierra (2005) call the *militarization trap.* This has led to issues such as the violation of human rights, the abuse of authority, and a lack of coordination among law enforcement bodies. The strategies employed so far have left awful collateral damages in terms of blood and treasure that does not compensate for the "triumphs" the government has had in detaining kingpins. It is considered by many a failed war (Aguilar and Castañeda, 2009).

Hence, scholars debate whether militarizing the drug war created the recent extreme violence, or if it was avoidable all together. Overall, the reproduction of an imported paradigm has proven unsuccessful. After billions of dollars and years of antidrug

efforts by the U.S. and Mexican governments, the cartels are still operating and some of them do not appear to be slowing down. It seems like Mexico is not only in the militarization trap, but also a "narco trap."

This chapter outlined the history of drug trafficking in Mexico. The conditions under which the drug war started and the current scenario were discussed as well. The chapter also offers an overview on how the use of the media has been instrumental throughout the conflict by the government, the cartels, and later by the citizens when online social networks came into the picture. In addition, the circumstances under which social media has become a major factor in the war on drugs, were reviewed. The application of the media in the last section has been presented through the lenses of three actors, and the rest of this dissertation will focus mainly on its usage by the drug cartels.

Chapter 2

MEXICAN DRUG CARTEL'S SURVIVAL CAPACITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ENABLING AGENT:
THEORY AND METHOD

There is an extensive body of literature that attempts to explain the survival capacity of the Mexican drug cartels. Studies cover a great deal of ground, including institutional, political, social and economic approaches to explain the phenomenon. Yet none of these works have investigated the implications of social media in the conundrum.

In academia, the perception of social media as a communication tool started with a positive view, seen as an ungoverned space that provides an outlet of exposure usually reserved for a selective group. From its beginnings, scholarly work portrayed the communication platforms as a tool for the masses to raise, becoming important agents of change from below, deepening democracy (Sarukhan, 2012; Howard and Hussein, 2011; Müller and Hübner, 2014). These works developed principally after several powerful mass demonstrations around the world arose, such as the Arab Spring, and protests in Tunisia and Moldova (Morozov, 2009). Empirical evidence suggests that the so called "Twitter revolutions" have been successful at overturning long standing authoritarian establishments such as the Mubarak regime in Egypt.

Nevertheless, as history unfolds, the view of social media and the promising prospects it seemed to offer, have been obscured by the realities the world is facing today. Besides the inability of some Arab countries to reestablish politically, of particular attention has been the raise of extreme fundamentalist terrorist groups such as ISIS or ISIL,

that have found in social media an effective tool of exposure. Paradoxically, the same instrument that helped bring nations to freedom, is the same one extremists have used to terrorize the world. A shift in the literature can be observed. A second wave of works on a less hopeful and skeptical side of social media emerged, focusing largely on its usage by terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State. However, ISIS is not the first criminal group to make use of social media. In Mexico, as described in Chapter 2, the utilization of the web based outlets took a dark turn as well. From working as a platform to fill the informational vacuum and as a mean for survival and protection to citizens, it became an instrument used by the drug cartels to enhance warfare strategies.

This chapter is divided in three main sections. First, a multidisciplinary review of works drawing from the international relations, social network analysis, political science, organizational theory, and criminology literatures is presented. The second section, presents the debate on the effect of social media on criminal organizations. Taking from these works, the third part of the chapter presents the theoretical expectations on this dissertation, followed by the hypotheses, definition of concepts, methods, methodological techniques, and case selection.

Mexican Cartels' Survival Capacity

After a decade of being incessantly targeted, attacked, and persecuted by military operations of two countries (one of them, the U.S., the highest military force in the world) and by rival cartels, criminal organizations in Mexico continue to operate. Additionally, new criminal organizations have appeared, and others like the Zetas and the Sinaloa cartel have become even more powerful. How are these criminal groups so resistant? There are several ways of categorizing the existing models and theoretical frameworks that have

approached this question. Prolific works are situated at the transnational, national and structural levels of analysis. Here they are organized under three main bodies of inquiry: (i) exogenous factors, (ii) domestic dynamics, and (iii) the internal structural topology of criminal organizations.

Exogenous Factors

In the drug trafficking literature two classic paradigms that have tried to explain the consolidation of the illicit business in some Latin American countries, point out to outer forces. As it will be further elaborated in this section, some authors argue that globalization and the adoption of neoliberal regimes opened new opportunities and facilitated the proliferation of drug trade. Others attribute the phenomena to the U.S. involvement on drug policy in the Americas.

Opening the Borders

Criminal organizations benefit from the increasingly globalized international system. As Bagley (2005) posits, criminal organizations have taken advantage of the opening of borders, the liberalization of emigration policies, the spread of high technology and the under-regulation of international financial networks that globalization and free trade brings. This has eased the development of sophisticated drug trafficking organizations.

From an international relations perspective, some scholars believe that the adoption of neoliberal regimes provided fertile ground for organized crime to flourish in Latin America (Gootenberg, 2011). Experts propose that the signing of the North American

Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, by the U.S., Canada, and Mexico contributed to the strengthening of drug trafficking in the region (e.g. Gootenberg, 2011; Astorga, 2010; Eiss, 2014).

Batallion (2015) maintains that the signing of NAFTA reinforced the coexistence of the formal and informal economy that the drug business generates. This is possible due to the impossibility of grasping control over all the merchandise crossing over the U.S. – Mexican 3,145 km border. Trade between the two countries amounts for about $260 billion per year and more than 250,000 vehicles crossing daily (Freeman and Sierra, 2005). The trade policy conducted by both states permits the free flow of goods, but at the same time, such openness allows for the trade of illegal substances. The result of NAFTA is paradoxical in terms of policy, as Andreas (2000) contends, the treaty has led to the creation of "a borderless economy and a barricaded border" (p.1). Also, as presented in the previous chapter, the international trade agreement has triggered negative economic impacts in the country, especially in the agricultural sector. Imports from the northern countries surpassed in competitive advantage the Mexican growers. Under the difficult economic conditions and lack of job opportunities, a lot of this planters turned to the drug trafficking business for income (McKibben, 2015).

Criminal organizations in Mexico also deal with border enforcement operations. Hereafter, some scholars observe that in so doing, the U.S. is only supporting a self-reinforcing cycle (Andreas, 2001; Schendel and Abraham, 2005). According to Andreas (2003) criminal organizations adopt a double-funnel model when states pressure on borders is high. In this case, he suggests, the number of trafficking organizations will decrease, but their sophistication will increase. Similarly, Schendel and Abraham (2005) concluded that

criminal organizations confronting such condition are forced to adapt, and have adopted new technologies to become more specialized and sophisticated on their methods to cross merchandise across the border giving them more leverage.

The U.S. Led War on Drugs

The U.S. has been actively involved in the fighting against drug trafficking in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its counter-narcotics policy goes back to the mid-1980s when the country experienced an outburst of crack cocaine consumption (Youngers and Rosin, 2005; Isacson, 2005; Carpenter, 2003). Concerned about the social and economic consequences of the drug problem in the U.S., President Reagan acknowledged drug-trafficking as an existential threat, justifying the militarization of counter-narcotic policies (Youngers and Rosin, 2005; Tokatlian and Bagley, 2007). The U.S. drug control strategies carried out a model which consists in promoting the expansion of the military's involvement in anti-drug efforts, following a strategy based on "prohibition and eradication." In return of monetary aid and training, the countries that adopt the model are regulated through a certification process that conditions the U.S. economic assistance and support from international lending institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF. *Plan Colombia* and *Iniciativa Merida*, for example, were designed based on the prototype.

Youngers and Rosin (2005) examined the impact of the U.S. led war on drugs in various Latin American countries. They found that the impositions the U.S. paradigm enforce have not proven successful at eradicating crops or minimizing consumption. Rather, the approach has brought unintended consequences that in many cases have stimulated the drug industry even more. For example, the approach has caused what is called the "balloon effect" which consists in the shifting of coca leaf production from one

place to another. In 2000, production in Peru and Bolivia declined significantly, whereas in Colombia increased by 90 percent (Bagley, 2012; Loveman, 2006; Youngers and Rosin; 2005; Gootenberg, 2008). Another result is the "cockroach effect" referring to the dispersion, fragmentation, and displacement of criminal organizations from one region to another within a given country or from country to country. Such dispersion has been especially visible in the cases of Colombia and Mexico (Bagley, 2012; Gooternberg, 2008). In addition, one more inadvertent result has been the shifting of smuggling routes (Bagley, 2012; Tokatlian, 2006). Additional costs of the U.S. led war on drugs in Latin American countries include: environmental degradation, deeper corruption among local police forces, human rights violation, it has been harmful to the quality of democracy, and has worsen economic conditions in some regions (Youngers and Rosin, 2005; Loveman, 2006; Andreas and Nadelmann, 2006).

According to some authors, due to the broadly documented collateral damages of the war on drugs, the delegitimization of the prohibitionist model has grown among the Latin American and Caribbean governments (Ibidem). Still despite of its acknowledged ineffectiveness, the model remains enforced in some countries, including Mexico.

Domestic Dynamics

The domestic conditions in a country in which criminal organizations operate can play a role on their demise or their progress. Scholarship in criminology and political science has identify some internal aspects in Mexico that have shaped its drug business. A factor that is recurrently emphasize as one of the main causes of strength and pervasiveness

of illicit groups, is the symbiotic relationship between state and criminal organizations (Jones, 2011). Other alleged factors are decentralization, party transitions, and internal economic and social-cultural aspects.

State-Criminal Nexus

Studies at the intersection of political and the social sciences have emphasized the connived relationship between the state and criminal actors as a key factor for drug cartels evolvement. Bailey and Godson (2000), for example, concluded that governability in Mexico can be described in general as "fragmented contested political-criminal linkages," meaning that the state and the government have been for many years directly challenged by organized crime. For instance, the "*plata o plomo*" threats by the drug cartels had make governors either work for kingpins or turn a blind eye on their operations (Grayson, 2014). Presenting a distinct perspective, Lupsha and Pimentel (1997) developed a theory that interprets the political-criminal relationship as "elite-exploitative." The model portraits organized crime not as the perpetrators of the state, but instead as "cash cows" that are manipulated and exploited by government authorities, for their own enrichment or to finance political campaigns (Ibid). According to these authors, Mexico fits this model during the PRI era, but it is not strange to present times. Others also benefit from the drug trade, some members of the Roman Catholic clergy accept money and donations from capos, since many of them are very religious (Grayson, 2014). This relationship has been shifting throughout time and research has been redirected on investigating the fluctuating dynamics between the state and illegal actors.

Nature of the State and Institutional Capacity

The nature of the state and its institutions are factors that can shape the drug trafficking business. In the work of several authors, the strength of the state, its type of government (e.g. authoritarian, democratic), and weak law enforcement and judiciary institutions, are amongst the most important determinants for the establishment and survival capacity of illicit group (Williams and Godson, 2002; Thoumi, 1995). Thoumi (1995), for example, asserts that low levels of state effectiveness and legitimacy permits drug trafficking organizations to operate in an environment with a high level of impunity. Following the state weakness argument, Gambetta (1995), when studying the expansion of the Sicilian mafia, found that a weak state holds conditions in where the mafia can easily develop. These groups arise as protectors and providers for the citizens when the government do not fulfill its role. This allowed for the Mafia to legitimized and remain deeply rooted into the Italian social, economic and political life (Williams and Godson, 2002).

Not only is the level of strength or weakness of a state that has been associated with the rise of organized crime, in recent literature it is recognized that the nature of the government can serve as a breeding place for criminal organizations. Authoritarian regimes, where only one political party retains power, are prone to develop organized crime. This is because there is just a small group of people, or the elite, running the country. There is an absence of checks and balances, it cultivates a weak civil society and reinforces patron-client relations (Williams and Godson, 2002; Shelley, 1999). Shelley (1999) and Ledeneva (2006) posit that the informal networks created during a single-party mandate may lead to the pervasiveness of a strong criminal-political relationship even after a

democratic transition. Thus, under this type of regime and governability the rules of the game for trafficking organizations are established, defined and maintain by authorities. Once again, Mexico during the PRI era, is a good example of the later (Pimentel, 1999). In this system, political corruption and bribery become strongly entrenched on many layers from municipal police to high institutional and government levels in where officials highly benefit from the drug trade. Networks of corruption creates a favorable setting for organize crime to operate with immunity (Pimentel, 1999).

Decentralization and Power Party Transitions

Experts claim that in Mexico's history, there are two main turning points in which the state-organized crime relationship altered: the decentralization of the federal government during the 1990s, and the end of the PRI regime. Decentralization gave a more accommodating setting for organized crime to develop, becoming more successful at infiltrating law enforcement institutions at the sub-national level. Cooperative sub-national, especially municipal levels of justice are essential for these groups to succeed (Astorga, 2005; Chabat, 2010; Guerrero, 2011).

Scholars have theorized that party transitions are another domestic issue that influences the strength or survival capacity of drug cartels. According to various scholars, changes in incumbent parties weaken criminal organization's power over a region, affecting their influence and giving an opportunity for other cartels to take over (e.g. Astorga, 2005; Shelley, 2000; Rios, 2013; Dell, 2013; Grayson, 2010). In addition, Trejo and Ley (2013), found that multiparty competition and the democratization of authoritarian regimes affect these organization's vulnerability.

However, Santos (2014) disputes the party transition argument. Due to the rapid

metastasis of criminal networks through the Mexican territory during the last ten years, the

author contends that there is hardly a relationship between this timing and municipal

elections. Nevertheless, the connection is not mutually exclusive. Mexican cartels might

be vulnerable to political party shifts, but they have also show that they can quickly adapt

to power transitions.[13]

Poverty vs. Rational Choice

Works that attribute domestic economic conditions as an element to cartel's

prevalence are significant in the drug trafficking literature. The drug industry in Mexico is

highly profitable, estimates range from $8 billion to $ 25 billion a year (Congressional

Research Service, 2013). Coupled with its geographical location next to the single largest

marketplace for illegal drugs, the United States makes the drug industry for the cartels in

Mexico extremely lucrative. As Zill and Bergman (2014) posit, "[w] hat makes the drug

industry going is its huge profit margin" (p. 2). They argue that criminal organizations keep

operating because they can produce drugs at a low cost and sell them to the U.S. at a huge

profit margin.[14]

Influenced by the economics field, some scholars focus on the opportunity channels

for organized crime that are created under a dysfunctional economy. Economic conditions

such as poverty and high unemployment have been alleged as factors linked to the

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[13] The Familia Michoacana and the Caballeros Templarios can be a good example of Santos' argument. In the state of Michoacán in where these groups proliferated (although, as it will be later explored in chapter 4, these groups have debilitated considerably), it is a state that is known for its political alternation. They have different political parties governing its 113 municipalities (Astorga, 2011). According to Castellanos (2013), the high rate of political alternation has made the political-narco relationships complicated, and violent. However, these groups adapted to such conditions thought their glory days.

[14] For example, methamphetamines cost approximately $300 to $500/ kilo to produce and are sold in the U.S. for up to $60,000/ kilo. Estimating the profits of this industry is challenging mainly due to the differences in regional prices and in the quality of the products.

numerous workforce of the drug trafficking business. According to Rios (2008), the economic benefits of the drug industry are most visible in the employment sector since cartels offer better salaries than many jobs in the formal job market. During the last decade, there are on average close to 3 million people unemployed in Mexico, reaching a high on 2010. In this context, profit from the drug business has been essential to the economy of many municipalities and the source of income for thousands of families (Aguilar and Castañeda, 2009; Zill and Bergman, 2014; Rios, 2008).

The poverty theory has been contended by the rational choice approach. Due to the nature of drug trafficking, the industry employs from low skilled workers to highly educated individuals. Rational choice evaluates the cost-benefit analysis of joining the cartels. This theory posits that it is not because people are poor or uneducated that makes them join the drug cartels, instead it is because the gains of working for the illegal industry are greater than the consequences that comes with it (e.g. short sentences, or not prosecution at all). This attracts an immense workforce,[15] the approximate number of drug employees in Mexico is about 468, 000 (Rios, 2008). Mares (2005) argues that the above is more likely to hold in places where judicial institutions do not apply the rule of law effectively. What is more, based on rational behavior criminals exploit market opportunities that comes with the demand of illegal or scarce goods and services in order to maximize their profits (Gambetta, 1993; Williams and Godson, 2002).

The Narco Culture

Social acceptability is indispensable for drug cartels to survive. Works that focus on social models emphasize the cultural bases of organized crime and the social

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[15] This figure is equivalent to almost three times the number of employees in PEMEX, the largest state-owned company in Mexico (Rios, 2008).

mechanisms in which trust and legitimacy is built between organized crime and the communities in where they operate. Intertwining with the political approach to organized crime, societal explanations focus as well on patron-client interactions (Williams and Godson, 2002). But in this model the clientelistic relations are between drug cartels and the citizenship. Cartels provide common goods, invest in infrastructure, offer jobs, and builds schools and churches, in exchange of loyalty and support from the communities. Guevara (2013) claims that as the acceptance of the cartels grows, so do their capabilities to recruit, idealized the lifestyle, and naturalize the narco society. In Mexico, the narco culture has been reinforced by narco-*corridos*, narco-saints, and narco-*novelas* (Ibid). The narco culture also accentuates a sense of belonging in society, somewhat like "*la cosa nostra*" motto representative of the Italian mafia.

Criminal Organization's Characteristics and Structural Topology

Moving from the external and domestic levels of analysis, another strand of works focus on the actor's attributes (e.g. criminal organization's structures or *modus operandi)*, following a more grass-roots level. Also, in this body of works it is suggested that there is a need to broaden the conceptualization of criminal organizations. The current definition has become unsatisfactory when describing contemporary forms of organized crime, since established characterizations assume more hierarchical-like structures (Williams and Godson, 2002). This current wave or works suggests that the illicit groups should be denoted instead as "criminal networks."

Departing from Hierarchies

It has become a growing trend adopting social network analysis as a more effective and complementary line of research to study the networked structural characteristics of

newer forms of criminal organizations (UNODC, 2010; Sparro, 1991; Klerks, 2001; Krebs, 2001; Morselli, 2009; Giménez-Salinas, 2011; Bakker et al., 2012; Borgatti, 2006; Bueno de Mesquita and Dickson, 2007; Pereyra, 2012). In this realm of research, it is observed that organizational structures have move from hierarchies to flatter structures. Experts claim that structural flatness intensifies the resistance of criminal networks in several ways. For example, Kenney (2007) posits that it increases response time; Weick (1976) argues that it decentralizes decision-making allowing for faster restructuration and adaptability. Flatness eases flexibility, as Duijn et al. (2014) put it, remaining flexible in the key to criminal network's defense against disruption, since these structures are minimally impacted as leadership is removed. This is because they develop mechanisms to insulate central actors of the network, also developing a high degree of redundancy and duplication which is essential for the groups to continue operations (Williams and Godson, 2002).

In the organizational theory field, authors claim that the survival capacity of an organization is determined by internal structural factors. Braithwaite and Drahos (2000) found that flatness and organizational learning capacity are reciprocal constitutive elements. In other words, in flatter structures information spreads faster, making access to knowledge more homogeneous among its units. This shapes a more solid organization in which all its parts are in sync, having access to the same information at the same time.

Some authors have extrapolated the principles from organizational theory to the study of criminal organizations. Klotz and Lynch (2007) and Salcedo-Albarán and Garay Salamanca (2012) state that networks prefer structural flatness and compartmentalization, as highly compartmentalized cells are most difficult to dismantle becoming more resistant. Adding to this position, Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001) and Kenney (2007) hypothesize that

flatter structures make illicit groups more prone to establish strategic alliances with others. For instance, Gower (2008) found that affiliations have proven to make gangs resilient in New Zealand.

Contrary to the former arguments, Sullivan (2009) contends that researchers have overestimated the effect of flat network structures as a strengthening mechanism for criminal organizations. Scholars find compartmentalization as an attribute that might hinder the criminal organization capacity to survive instead of strengthening it. They maintain that a reduced flow of information between the parts can deprive these networks from essential data and intelligence sharing (Duijn et al., 2014; Kenney, 2007).

Modus Operandi

Finally, seeking to explain the strengthening or weakening of the Mexican criminal organizations, academics have also focused on their *modus operandi.* Fernandez Menendez and Ronquillo (2007) ascribe the successful expansion of the *Zetas* to their violent techniques. Nevertheless, Coscia and Rios (2012) dispute such proposition arguing that a violent tactic alone does not account for the reinforcement and growth of the drug cartel since others are extremely violent as well. Rios and Dudley (2013) maintain that it is the cartel's business strategy which allows them to grow more than other criminal groups. Others like Osorno (2014), attribute the expansion of the *Zetas* to their military training background, which accordingly, has gave them distinctive competitive advantage.

In a similar vein, Correa-Cabrera et al. (2015) argue that it is the "paramilitarization" process of criminal organizations in Mexico, referring to the change in operational and institutional practices by the criminal groups to obtain regional or national supremacy over rival groups and state forces, what "has become de facto

legitimized purveyor of violence at the regional level, effectively supplanting the rule of state, and placing socio-political control in the hands of private individuals" (p. 3).

The next section reviews the bulk of works put forward to study criminal organizations and the adoption of social media into their communication strategies.

Criminal Organizations on Social Media: The Social Media Paradox

In the social and political sciences, studies on social media grew particularly on topics related to transnational social movements, media and government accountability, political campaigns, and public opinion, among others. More recently, scholarly works shifted towards terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and later ISIS, grabbing academic attention after utilizing the web based platforms to expose their crusade of terror. It was during the summer of 2014 when the beheading of the American journalist James Foley was broadcasted by the terrorist organization via YouTube. The message was targeted to the U.S., expressing their hatred towards the nation's historical involvement in the Middle East. The impressive spread and worldwide attention that gravitated towards ISIS after the cruel act gave birth to a social media model tinted with blood.

A debate evolved discussing the purposes for which terrorist groups or criminal organizations have opted to adopt social media to their strategies and on whether social media strengthens or weakens them. These works are divided on three main parts: (i) social media as an enabler of structural flatness; (ii) social media as a force multiplier; and (iii) as a tool for psychological warfare.

Social Network Analysis

The implementation of social network analysis (SNA) on studying criminal organizations has been used in the social sciences as a method to identify and visualize

through graphs social relationships, groups, giant components, the dynamics of a group and the agents involved (Garay Salamanca and Salcedo-Albarán, 2011: p. 40). In the criminology field, social network analysis has been used to identify structural features of illicit networks (Morselli, 2008), criminal networks resilience (Jones, 2011), criminal networks disruption (Duijn et al., 2014), and to trace networks of corruption (Garay Salamanca and Salcedo-Albarán, 2011).

Flatter Structures and Social Media

Taking from social network analysis, scholars have attempted to examine the effects of technology and social media on what they call criminal or dark networks. There is certain agreement on the idea that with the adoption of technology, criminal organizations have left aside rigid hierarchical structures, adopting instead flatter, more flexible, innovative and decentralized, often cell-like configurations (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001; Kenney, 2007; Pereyra, 2012; Wagley, 2006; Giménez-Salinas, 2012; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2001). As Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001) put it: "[t]oday, the key form of organization on the rise is the network…[the] new information technologies render the ability to connect and coordinate the actions of widely distributed 'nodes' in almost unprecedented ways. Whoever masters this form will accrue advantages of a substantial nature" (p. 5). The reasoning behind this idea is that the adoption of the social web-based platforms permits the organization to operate in a more decentralized manner (Chastian, 2014), in addition to all the other properties that flatter structures present, formerly explained in the previous section.

Conversely, other authors suggest that criminal organizations' (hierarchical or not) exposure on these technological channels does not give the organizations more power, instead it increases the risks of attacks that can result in their demise (Duijn et al., 2014).

Social Media as a Force Multiplier

Existing research also discussed that the utilization of social media platforms may lead to the strengthening of a criminal organization due to the conjecture that these outlets offer them with opportunities such as: reach potential new members, legitimize their actions, and as a tool for recruitment and radicalization. In a report published by the London-based International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR, 2014), researchers tracked the extent to which ISIS could attract foreign fighters through social media. For the period of 12 months, analysts examined more than 18,000 Twitter accounts and found that some users served as "disseminators," which are individuals who are highly influential and effective in recruiting foreign fighters. Thanks to social media platforms, disseminators can be based anywhere in the world targeting wider audiences and making them hard to track. Similarly, Rothkopf (2015) recognizes that social media has served as an effective force multiplier to spread ISIS's ideologies. The author contends that the latter is a leap forward from the hierarchical structured, closed club-like terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda or the FARC.

Stern and Berger (2015) conducted a study exploring personal Twitter accounts of various ISIS members. Through content analysis they found that the terrorist group use their accounts to "brag about military victories, harass their enemies, and rally supporters from their respective regions and around the world" (p.135). These authors recognize that social media has opened the door to alternative types of interaction and have also reinforced

their connectivity which has contributed to the strengthening of the organization. Following the same line of thought, Duijn et al. (2014) propose that criminal organization's exposure on social media channels intensifies their chances of increasing their lines of support since through these platforms easy contact and access to their information is easier and faster to get.

Similarly, Gilsinan (2015) argues that in some cases it is easier for these groups to gain supporters online especially when they find and reach to an audience that it is already radicalized. Aday et al. (2010) found that new media encourage self-segregation and polarization especially in young minds. People usually seeks online information that reinforces their beliefs, this offers an opportunity to induce hatred and prejudice.

Some authors even argue that monitoring the activities of ISIS members and supporters on social media future behaviors can be predicted. Johnson et al. (2016) examined longitudinal records of ISIS online activity on Facebook. They developed a statistical model aimed at identifying behavioral patterns among online supporters. They found that with this information it is possible to predict the beginning of the planning of a mayor violent event. They argue that the increase of connectivity can facilitate the formation of physical organized groups that can be planning a violent attack.

Another strand of relevant theorizing maintains that online participation is not as strong as common wisdom reveals. These studies find that online participation has become a substitute for real action. For instance, many online supporters of ISIS engage with the cause just virtually, avoiding exposing themselves to the risks of field activities (Berger, 2011). Additionally, Berger (2011) and Jones (2011) hypothesize that online networks are not strong, since they produce only "weak ties." In other words, the support followers offer

online does not translate into the physical world. In a study conducted by Babera (2014), the author presents compelling evidence suggesting that social media content in general tends to discourage extremist behavior in the wider population.

In an attempt to quantify the effect jihadis have on social media, Zelling et al. (2013) gathered data over a three-month period from February to April 2012. They tracked empirical information about threats and posts created on jihadi forums especially in Twitter. They found that jihadi ideological penetration in the West or in English-language forums is limited. This suggests that the global jihadi movement is still very much attached to the Arab heartlands in terms of online usage.

Social Media as tool for Psychological Warfare

Even though social media platforms have allowed criminal organizations to distribute powerful messages and sensitive images, experts discuss that such approach can work as a double-edge sword also known as the "social media paradox" (e.g. Farwell, 2014; Dale, 2014; Rothkopf, 2015). Security experts have stated that the Islamic State's success on social media has helped them to keep the number of members and recruits high. On the one hand, these groups show their "good side." For example, ISIS posts pictures and videos of soldiers playing with kittens. Similarly, drug cartels in Mexico like the Gulf cartel uploaded videos on YouTube broadcasting images of members distributing food and clothes for the victims of hurricane Ingrid which devastated the coasts of Tamaulipas and Veracruz in 2013. On the other hand, these groups also post gruesome videos of beheadings, tortures, or rapes to intimidate their enemies and instigate fear in the population. Experts suggests that these types of messages criminal groups distribute in the

cyberspace can be either successful at convincing people they are "the good guys," or it can be also used against them (Farwell, 2014; Dale, 2014).

Lastly, to better understand the role social media plays in initiating, promoting, and spreading political participation, the Social Media and Political Participation Lab at NYU analyzed its role in the Turkish protests of 2013. Following two hashtags associated with the demonstration, *#direcgezipark1* and *#occupygezi*, they compiled a database of 22 million Tweets. Their finding suggests that the study of social media during protests, like the one in Turkey, sheds interesting light into the dynamics of information diffusion and in the organization of collective action particularly when information through traditional media is suppressed.

Social Media in the Mexican Drug War

In Mexico, the study of social media also turned into a prevalent topic among researchers when its usage exploded in the country by the end of 2010. Largely, investigations have been focused on the effects and use of social media by civilians, just a few are dedicated to the use of the internet-based platforms by organized crime. Studies on how drug cartels use social media are mainly limited to journalistic accounts rather than rigorously designed research.

Monroy-Hernandez et al. (2012) conducted a study monitoring the use of social media as a participatory news platforms by people living in armed-conflict environments. Combining content and quantitative Twitter data exploration, the authors present a descriptive analysis on general participation patterns of ordinary citizens. Data was collected for a 16-month period (August 2010- November 2011), in four Mexican cities: Monterrey, Reynosa, Saltillo and Veracruz. The results indicate that a sizeable number of

tweets were reports of violent events that included a specific location. The outcomes also exhibit the rise of citizens as information curators. This indicates that existing media apparatuses are not meeting the public need. The authors conclude that the rise of social media as an alternative information channel has enabled the emergence of civic media curators.[16]

Rios (2012) constructed a model using the Google search engine to trace the behavior of cartels before Calderón took office and the drug war was militarized. Developing a computerized search algorithm, she found in the internet searcher a useful tool unveiling crucial information about the *modus operandi* of various Mexican cartels. Her findings demonstrate that these criminal groups, during the drug war years, have become more expansive and competitive. Her results also suggest that cartels are open to expose themselves online, noticing there is a considerable volume of information about these groups floating around the cyberspace.

Some authors have argued that social media has become another field of battle between drug cartels, government, civilians and self-defense groups (e.g. Eiss, 2014; Monroy-Hernandez, 2014; Correa-Cabrera and Nava, 2011). For example, Kan (2013) followed and analyzed the case of an online clash that took place during the fall of 2011 between the Zetas and the hacker international group Anonymous. The drug cartel kidnapped several members of Anonymous during a demonstration in the state of Veracruz. The latter group threatened via a YouTube video to publicize and expose the cartel's entire operating network, from taxi drivers to top politicians, unless they freed their abductees. The author states that even through both actors used the digital domain to fight what he

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[16] *Information curators* refer to the people or accounts that receive, respond to, and retweet dozens of posts from other accounts disseminating information (Monroy-Hernandez et al., 2012).

calls a "cyberwar of the underworld," the incident had public consequences that left the Mexican government as a spectator. He proposes that this type of conflict reveals that non-state groups have vulnerabilities that can be exploited via cyberspace. In this case, the Zetas appear to be molded with an infrastructure that makes them susceptible to cyberattacks. Kan concludes that the ultimate release of the Anonymous hostages demonstrates that this form of coercion can be successfully targeting this type of organization.

Based on the literature reviewed above, the next section describes the theoretical expectations, the research design of this project and the study cases that will be examined to conduct a comparative analysis.

Theoretical Expectations

Drawing from the theoretical framework presented above, two main propositions guide this research. These hypotheses complement each other since it is possible that a single case study can present a combination of the two.

H_1: *The higher the social media activity, the higher the survival capacity level of a*

criminal organization.

If criminal organizations in Mexico present high activity in social media, then it should demonstrate a higher level of resistance towards organizational setbacks. The organization should take less time to resume illegal activities, demonstrating a higher level of adaptability and minimal impact on their operations when leadership is removed.

H_2: *The higher the social media activity, the lower survival capacity level of a*

criminal organization.

If criminal organizations are highly active on social media, then they face more exposure. More attacks from the military, rival cartels, or other actors (civilians, self-

defense groups) towards the organizations should be observed. The higher the number of attacks less criminal activity should be reported for these criminal groups. The cases should take longer or might not be able to resume their criminal activities.

Research Design

This project does *not* imply causation. The study is *not* trying to prove that social media causes criminal organizations' survival. Rather, the objective is to explore the effect it has con their level of survival capacity. This section presents the scope and methodology, along with the variables, indicators, concepts, and the case studies chosen for the analysis.

Scope and Methods

The case under examination is Mexico under the context of the drug war. The scope of this research covers from 2006 to 2015. To gain deeper understanding on the effects of social media on drug cartels' survival, a comparative analysis of three criminal networks is conducted. The organizations under study are: the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas, and the Caballeros Templarios. A within-case analysis of these illegal organizations was approached to draw an in-deep description of each case. More specifically, each criminal organization was examined through process-tracing, a methodical tool used to identify stages in a causal process between the independent variables and the outcome (George and Bennett, 2005). This analysis progresses inductively to determine the ability or incapacity of the drug cartels to respond to organizational *shocks*, defined here as *events that can cause a disruption on the criminal organization* (Duijn, 2014).[17] The three criminal

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[17] These events may or may not result on the ability of these organizations to conduct their tasks, and in the significant slowing down of decision making processes and operational capabilities.

organizations were compared following the rationality of structured focus comparisons (George and Bennett, 2005).

This dissertation focuses only on criminal organizations operating in Mexico. A single case study analysis as a methodology has its limitations. A critique to this approach is the issue of external validity or generalizability due to the nature of the data. Such a drawback can be compensated by the strategic selection of cases (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). Three different criminal organization were selected to insure variability. The case of Mexico under the context of the drug war was chosen because it presents a distinctive event in where social media has not favored the civilians as organizing mechanisms as empirical evidence suggest on other cases; but rather, has been used against them and its opportunities exploited by some drug cartels.

This work is about adding a new variable to the study of criminal organization's survival capacity. Other variables such as the opening of international markets, the cartels' access to the U.S. drug consumption market, corruption, government decentralization, party transition, and the profitability of the drug business, among others, cannot be ruled out. However, my research design maintains these variables constant since all of the drug cartels studied here have the same access and exposure to the latter conditions.

The Dependent Variable and Indicators

Criminal organization's survival capacity is the dependent variable (DV*)* in this study. Survival capacity is defined as: *the ability of a system or network to adapt and keep functioning despite organizational setbacks*. The assessment of the dependent variable was conducted on two stages. First, a database on the cartels' confrontations was constructed.

The data was collected through archive research in El Universal.[18] The news reports chosen to include on the datasets were the ones in where the confrontations explicitly implicated the cartel under study. Examining the actors with which each cartel battles gives a good indication of the symmetrical or asymmetrical capabilities of their rivals compared to theirs.

The second stage on examining the survival capacity of the cartels centers on organizational *shocks* or setbacks they faced during the timeframe of this study. More specifically, the types of shocks analyzed are: (i*) Mexican government military operations that led to the death or arrest of capos or an important leader*; (ii) *U.S. enforcement operations that led to the death or arrest of capos or an important leader*; (iii*) joint operations between the Mexican and U.S. government that led to the capture or death of capos or an important leader*; and (iv) *intra-cartel clashes that resulted on internal fragmentation, and the capture or killing of main leaders or capos*. Shocks will be evaluated in a diachronic fashion since each criminal organization has received a different number of setbacks at different points in time.

Indicators of *survival capacity* are depicted from the activities that make the criminal organization visible (Bakker et al., 2011). The level of survival capacity will be assessed looking at the variation of: (i) *violence* (drug related homicides), (ii) *criminal*

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[18] El Universal was chosen as the main source to get the data on confrontations for several reasons. This newspaper has national coverage in Mexico, has been one of the newspapers of more circulation withholding a reliable trustworthy source or news. In 2001, the newspaper launched its website that covers the content on the newspaper and added new multimedia sections. El Universal's portal is one of the most visited Spanish-speaking news outlet worldwide with 507 thousand users log in a day, and 5.2 million visits per month. Although El Universal was one of the media outlets to sign the *Iniciativa Merida,* discussed in the previous chapter, the journal established its own code of ethics when covering organized crime maintaining that it is still their responsibility to diffuse truthful information about the drug war. Promote civil society denunciation but without advocating for violence.
The criteria El Universal follows is available at: http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/criterios-ante-violencia.

activities (kidnappings and extortions).[19] The indicators for adaptability are: (iv) *changes in their structure* and (v) changes in their *modus operandi.*

Throughout the drug war years, the cartels have expanded and contracted around the Mexican territory. For this, the data on violence and criminal activities considered are the figures registered on the states that the criminal organizations have had the most influence and the most presence through time. These indicators are examined before and after major organizational disruptions, each case study is different, for this, the periods of time under study varies. In other words, in some cases it was possible to monitor their activities before and after shocks for a longer period of time. A model proposed by Bakker et al. (2014) to study dark networks resilience was utilized and modified for this purpose (see Appendix A).

The case studies will be classified in three main categories that encompass different levels of survival capacity: (i) *cartel that has remained dominant despite of shocks* (high)*; (ii) cartel that has been able to restore from shocks* (medium/high) evaluating also the time it took to restore*; (iii) cartel with no ability to recover from shocks* (low)*.

The Independent Variable and Indicators

The independent variable (IV) in this project is *social media usage* defined *as the criminal organization's ability to be present, active and interactive on web based social platforms, creating an effective footprint that allows them to have a base of fans and followers.* To evaluate the IV, three main social media platforms will be explored: Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Due to the nature of this study, these platforms will be

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[19] There are other criminal activities criminal networks have turned to besides the indicators mentioned above. These activities include human trafficking, illegal extraction of fuel, and money laundry (Santos, 2014), liquor sales, prostitution, pirated DVD and CD sales, and petroleum theft.

used for different purposes and will be manually coded. This process also presented a different dynamic. There is a variability from the cartels on their platform of preference. Each case study was adapted to their usage, and different platforms were used depending on the case, this is explained and justified in each corresponding chapter. To ensure anonymity, a fake Facebook and Twitter accounts were created, from which the accounts used for the analysis of this dissertation were followed and friend requests were sent.

The analysis for this variable was also performed in several stages and contingent of the platform under analysis.[20] The first stage was to conduct a social network analysis (SNA) on each case. A social network analysis was utilized since it is a tool that helps to visualize and uncover networked structures. The visualization of a social network allows to analyze the characteristics and dynamics of the actors involved and to identify the nodes with higher centrality or clusters within a network (Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán, 2011: p. 40). The software Node XL was used to construct the databases and conduct the analysis. In this study, each point in the networks is considered a *node.* Each node represents an agent or individual that it is part of the network. These nodes can be: *cartel leaders, cartel members, rival cartel members, politicians, civilians, news anchors, or members of Mexican security forces*. The lines connecting two nodes are defined as an *edge*. Edges indicate the social relationship between nodes. The arrangements of nodes and edges can be visualized in a *graph*, in which a general picture on the way the network is composed (Otte and Rousseau, 2002: p. 442).

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[20] Each case study presented different challenges and approaches. Depending on their social media platform of use and individual strategies. These specificities are discussed more in depth on each corresponding chapter.

To identify the most relevant nodes on the networks presented in this study, two main measures of centrality are calculated: *direct centrality* and *betweenness*. As Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán (2011) state: "In order to determine how relevant a node is for the potential conformation of a network, it is not enough to pay attention to the amount of connections; it is also necessary to evaluate the centrality indicator of betweenness" (p.43).

The node with the highest degree of centrality is the node that concentrates the most connections with other nodes in the network. In this case, nodes with a high degree of centrality are the actors which present the most friends and followers on Twitter or Facebook. Central nodes hold a privileged position of influence within a network (Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán, 2011: p.41). These nodes with central positions can serve as disseminators of information. The second measure of centrality used in the study to identify the most relevant nodes in the social media networks is *betweenness*. Betweenness is conceptualized as a structural bridge. Although the nodes with high betweenness do not necessarily concentrate the most number of edges, these are the nodes that connect the entire network together. They allow the flow of information where there is a structural hole, working as an arbitrator of the information and an intermediary on social relationships. In sum, calculating these two measures of centrality the indicators will establish: (i) the agent with the largest number of friends and followers on their Twitter or Facebook accounts, and (ii) the agent with the highest concentration of individual links.

Once the accounts with high degrees of centrality and betweenness were identified, these accounts were evaluated over a criterion to minimize the issue of account veracity. After analyzing hundreds of accounts some patterns of real profiles stand out. The

following criteria was followed when choosing the accounts to monitor usage and content: (i) *the account shows clearly their association with a particular cartel*; (ii) *the person in the account declares a position within the organization* (i.e. sicario)*, (iii) *they tag other principal accounts related to an organization in posts and pictures,* (iv) *they show consistency in their content and context*, (v) *content of messages and images,* and (vi) *geographical positioning* (on the accounts that displayed it).

The analysis and data gathering on YouTube was slightly different. To find the videos that corresponded to each cartel a general search of the criminal organization was conducted through the platform's search engine. Later, the *most relevant* filter was applied, using the videos with more views and reproduction for this study.

For the content analysis on the three platforms, social media utilization is evaluated in four dimensions: (i) *presence,* (ii) *activity*, (iii) *purpose,* and (iv) *effectiveness*. As with the DV, this variable will also be monitored during: (i) *the time between criminal organizational shocks;* and (ii) *the before and after the signing of the media agreement to censure drug related news in 201[21]* (see Appendix B).

Case selection

Three criminal organizations are analyzed in this dissertation. These cases were selected because they represent variability on their survival capacity and social media usage. All of them have experienced exogenous and internal shocks, thus they may differ in their type of response, level of adaptability, and ability to recover from organizational

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[21] The indicators and criterion for presence and content analysis were chosen and applied depending on the information available for each platform. For example, in Facebook in order to have access to an individual account a "friend request" should be send and accepted by the other part. On Twitter information is more accessible just "following" any account. Also, each individual can apply a series of privacy settings to their profiles. The content in YouTube is mostly open to the public. There are some restrictions on age when content in inappropriate to certain audiences. Thus, the latter did not affect my research process and data gathering.

setbacks. Some present high rate of dispersion and growth and others have lost influence. Some have resort to alliances; others have divided, and others almost disappeared. They also present different structures. The cases presented studied are: the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas, and the Caballeros Templarios.[22] Each individual case is evaluated mostly internally under the ceteris paribus assumption.

Data collection and Methodological Challenges

Data such as drug-related homicides, kidnappings and extortions, will be obtained from governmental institutions reports from the Justice Attorney's Office (PGR) and INEGI. Archival data, secondary resources, scholarly journals, and national and international periodicals will be examined. Police reports, presidential speeches, will be examined to survey major military operations and clashes between cartels in order to select the most significant shocks for each criminal network.

The data available for this project presents important limitations. The accessible databases present methodological concerns in regard to the categorization of drug-related homicides. The data published by INEGI or PGR presents variations on the criteria of what constitutes a drug war related homicide (Correa-Cabrera and Nava, 2011). Also, there are questions about the effectiveness on the official recognition of intentional homicide victims (Heinle et al., 2017). Yet, according to a special report from the University of San Diego, these two of the official data sources on intentional homicides in Mexico have been

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[22] There are other interesting cartels in Mexico that can be studied that present great power and exposure on social media platforms such as the *Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion* which was considered also as one of the cases to explore. However, this cartel remains strong, even at a par with the Sinaloa. This project wanted to study cartels with different levels of survival capacity. The Sinaloa cartel was chosen as the cartel with high level of resistance because its longevity in the drug trafficking arena offers a more extended period of time for the analysis.

constantly documenting the data, and the general trends between these two sources are closely correlated (Heinle et al., 2017).

Another challenge this research faces is that the study of online social media is relatively new and there is no consensus on how to conduct it. One major methodological concern with analyzing these web based platforms is that it is difficult to set up the boundaries of the network or the "boundary specification problem" (Duijn et al., 2013). There is also the concern of account authenticity which will be dimmed following the sets of criteria stated above.

Conclusions

This chapter was divided into two main sections. The first part presented a review of a comprehensive body of works and various research designs in three main areas. The first are works that attempt to explain Mexican cartel's survival capacity. The second body of literature sheds light on the usage of social media by criminal organizations, in particular terrorist groups like ISIS, for recruitment and indoctrination purposes. Finally, a review of studies focusing on the role of social media in the war on drugs in Mexico was laid out. The second section of this chapter presented the theoretical expectations, research design, methodological techniques, and the case studies selected for this dissertation.

Despite the initial contributions in the literature, a holistic look at these bodies of scholarship present some understudied areas. The questions remain: is social media influence exaggerated? Does it instigate peace or conflict? Is it an instrument that stimulates criminal organizations' power? Explanations to this question are still quite limited and inadequate. It can be observed, by the review of works presented in this chapter, that most of the studies that focus on the utilization of social media by criminal agents are

mainly centered on the way social media has been used by terrorist organizations like ISIS and jihad activities online. The use of social media by the Mexican drug cartels have been overlooked by scholars and has remained limited to journalistic accounts.

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold. The first is to fill in the gap in the literature by adding a new variable to the study of criminal organization's survival capacity offering a systematic study on the use of social media by the Mexican drug cartels. The second purpose, is to propose an alternative methodological approach.

Chapter 3

THE SINALOA CARTEL

El Chapo Guzmán. @ElChap0Guzman · 21 Dec 2015
Una vez me preguntaron que porque me gusto la vida fácil, y contesté, nada es fácil, porque si fuera fácil cualquiera fuera narcotraficante.

4.9K 11K

Better known for its main leader the infamous Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, the Sinaloa cartel is often cataloged as the largest and most powerful drug trafficking organization in the world with presence in about 50 countries spread through the U.S., Latin America, Europe, West Africa, South Asia, and more recently, Australia and the Philippines. The organization controls from 40 to 60 percent of the total drug trade in Mexico (Insight Crime, 2016; Beittel, 2013). The territories of their domain include mainly five states: Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua (also known as "the Golden Triangle"), Baja California and Sonora.

The Sinaloa cartel got international attention in 2009 when El Chapo Guzman was listed in *Forbes* magazine as one of the wealthiest people in the world. That same year,

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[23]"Someone asked me once why I chose an easy way of life, I answered, nothing comes easy, if this lifestyle was easy, anyone could be a drug trafficker." This is the last post published in El Chapo's official twitter page @ElChap0Guzman on December 21, 2015. It has been retweeted 4.9 thousand times and was liked by 11 thousand followers.

Time magazine named him one of the "most influential people" listed under the category of "leaders and revolutionaries" along with President Obama and German chancellor Angela Merkel (Grayson, 2014). Later, he made headlines of important journals when he jailbroke for the second time from a maximum-security prison in Mexico. More recently, and just before his third recapture, he made international headlines once again for his scandalous meeting and interview with Hollywood star Sean Pean and Mexican actress Kate del Castillo. The interview was published on the Rolling Stones magazine, and the series of text messages between him and the actress regarding a movie deal went viral. This year, his extradition to the U.S. on January 19, 2017, also made headlines all over the world. After all of these scandals, the organization's popularity on social media grew significantly during the last years when hashtags such as *#ElChapo* or *#LiberenalChapo* (*#freeElChapo*) became Twitter and Google trending topics.

This chapter asses the Sinaloa drug cartel. The first section presents an overall profile of the organization, its history, structure, *modus operandi* and its present state of affairs. The second section analyses the survival capacity of the organization. Through indicators of violence to measure cartel presence, it is observed how the cartel has responded to organizational shocks. Previously specified, these shocks account for the capture or killing of important members. The third section explores the cartel's presence and usage of social media platforms, followed by the analysis and conclusions.

A Cartel is Born

The Sinaloa cartel, also referred as the Federation or the Blood Alliance, splintered from the Guadalajara cartel in the mid-1980s. The Guadalajara cartel was one of the most powerful in the country, commanded by Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo *"El Padrino"* (the Godfather), who later became El Chapo's mentor.

In 1989, El Padrino was captured by the Mexican authorities, consequently the cartel disintegrated. The remaining leaders of the cartel met in Acapulco, Guerrero, where a repartition of territories and routes each leader would control was established. By the end of this gathering, the Tijuana, Beltran-Leyva and Sinaloa cartels where born. The new rules of the game were simple: respect the turf of their counterparts, both friends and enemies, and comply with the tacit agreements between them and the government. On the years to come, these cartels would become infallible enemies and the protagonists of bloody turf wars (Keefe, 2012).

Out of the three cartels, Sinaloa is the one that grew the most powerful, an important factor for them is that their domains are desirable territories to any drug trafficking organization. The state of Sinaloa has been the ancestral land and cradle of the most famous narco legends in Mexico such as Rafael Carlo Quintero, Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, and Hector Luis "El Güero" Palma. Laying between the *Sierra Madre Occidental* and Mexico's west coast, the state's topography entails vast mountainous territories and fertile grounds. Here, the crops of marijuana and poppy grow easily and can easily be hidden. Their geographical location, often called the "opium central," makes the area ideal for transportation and logistics.

Structure and Modus Operandi

The cartel of Sinaloa is configured as a "federation" rather than a vertical, top-down syndicate. Experts also call this structure "hub and spokes" (Insight Crime, 2016). In these kind of organizations, power is not concentrated only in one person at the copula, instead, it is shared by various leaders. The Sinaloa cartel was founded and managed by four main drug lords: "El Chapo" Guzman, Jesus "El Mayo" Zambada, Juan Jose Esparragoza

Moreno "El Azul," and Ignacio "El Nacho" Coronel. These associates worked in conjunction, but at the same time enjoyed a degree of autonomy. They had leverage to function on their own and conduct their operations separately (Grayson, 2014).

The organization's *modus operandi* is based on cohesion and an intrinsic web of bribery of politicians, police, judges, and prosecutors. The Sinaloa cartel dominates routes from the northwest of Mexico to Central America and control important traffic points like Tijuana, Mexicali, Nogales, Cd. Juarez, and Veracruz. They also operate in about 80 cities in the U.S. (Ibid). The organization has distinguished itself for their eclectic and sophisticated methods to traffic drugs. They use planes (commercial and private), container ships, fishing vessels, boats and submarines to translate the illegal drugs across borders. Also, they use catapults, cannons, and the famous tunnels between the U.S- Mexican borders. Not only the cartel has been known for their creativity on crossing the illegal merchandise from country to country, but they have also established marijuana plantations in the U.S. (Keefe, 2012).

Their main sources of revenue are, cocaine, marijuana, and heroin. In addition, they dominate the methamphetamines or synthetic drug market. They have clandestine laboratories in Nayarit, Jalisco, Michoacán, Colima, and Baja California. They have also diversified their activities and have invested in the formal business (Grayson, 2014).

The Cartel Today

The cartel has lost most of its main leaders. The only one that is still alive and free is El Mayo Zambada, and maybe El Azul, whom presumably died from a heart attack in 2014, but his death was never confirmed officially. The other key leader, Ignacio El Nacho Coronel was killed by the Mexican Army in 2010 and El Chapo was captured again on

January 16, 2016, and extradited to the U.S. a year later. But despite the important setbacks the organization has faced it remains powerful, expanding over the Mexican territory and seeking new market opportunities in China and Japan.

There has been a lot of speculations in regards with El Chapo's recapture. Many experts agree on the argument that his arrest would not change or affect much the performance of the cartel. The reason been that the network the organization has created is so intrinsic than even without his leadership, their smuggling infrastructure is more likely to endure regardless of who takes his place (Keefe, 2012). El Mayo continues to operate the organization along with Guzman's sons Alfredo, Ivan Archivaldo Guzman and El Chapo's right arm, Damaso Lopez "El Mini Lic," taking over his plaza (Janowitz, 2016).

Even though the capture of El Chapo has not shown serious repercussions on the criminal organization yet, there are signs of intra cartel conflicts and a generational struggle. The repartition of El Chapo's domains have become conflictive between the Guzman brothers and Damaso Lopez, fighting for Guzman's legacy. It is believed that El Mini Lic was behind the recent kidnapping of Alfredo Guzman by the Jalisco New Generation cartel (releasing him days after). After this event, frictions between the two counterparts started to intensify (Excelsior, 2017). There have been also disagreements between the ways the *narcojuniors*[24] are running their part of the business, and between the veterans, especially with El Mayo Zambada. Also, intra cartel rivalries and disputes

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[24] *Narcojuniors* is a term use to refer to the children of older drug traffickers. Unlike their parents, they have been raised in wealth. They like to expose themselves and their exuberant lifestyle. They express their pride of being narcos and do not follow the tacit agreements established decades ago among the cartels and the government. They do not have the principle of giving back to their community. Neither have they maintained a low profile as did most of their antecessors. They are a new generation of kingpins who are less cautious about causing turf wars, and resort to more violence when conducting the business (Martinez, et al., 2013).

have been reported as well as other attacks against the Guzman's family. These circumstances point to tensions within the organization which can in the future lead to fragmentation.

Survival Capacity: A Fierce Organization

The Sinaloa cartel has suffered important disruptions, but they have not affected significantly the solidity of the organization. In chapter 2, several explanations to such outcome are provided, including economic, social, cultural, and exogenous factors. Nevertheless, all the other drug cartels in Mexico share the same conditions. So, what makes the Sinaloa cartel more resistant than others?

In order to address the question, this section examines the survival capacity of the cartel. The first part presents the cartel's clashes, how much they fight and with whom. The second presents a model assessing their level of violence (homicides) and criminal activities (kidnappings, and extortions), and their response to organizational shocks.

The Confrontations

The relative peace the cartels enjoyed for many years started to be disrupted once the PAN took office under President Vicente Fox's mandate in 2000. Agreements where violated and new cartels arose. However, it was until the conflict against drug trafficking got militarized that drug related clashes and violence detonated all over the Mexican territory. This section explores the clashes the Sinaloa cartel has faced during the war years. To achieve this, archive research of all news involving the Sinaloa cartel reported on EL Universal from 2006 to 2015 were monitored and captured. The reports chosen for the analysis denote only the ones containing detailed information about the confrontations where members of the Sinaloa cartel were involved. El Universal's archives contain 4,831

news related to the Sinaloa cartel, only 305 of the reports were on confrontations in where the cartel is specifically involved. The analysis below is based on those 305 notes. Graph 3.1 illustrates the shares of conflicts the cartel has faced from 2006 to 2015.

Graph 3.1.

Sinaloa Cartel Reported Clashes 2006-2015
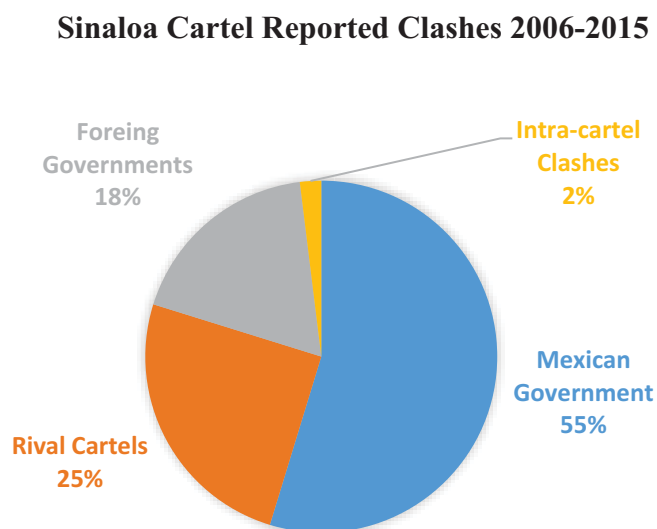
As it can be observed, more than half of the attacks and confrontations of the cartel have happened against the Mexican government.[25] The second group with which the organization has battled the most are rival cartels, especially the Zetas and the Juarez cartel, more in particular with its armed wing "La Linea," covering 25 percent of the clashes the cartel has experienced since 2006. Foreign governments account for 18 percent of the confrontations. Most of the attacks from foreign governments have been executed by the U.S. security forces reported mostly on the state of Arizona. Other countries include: Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the Netherlands, Argentina, the Philippines and Spain. In recent years, the involvement of

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[25] Various security forces in Mexico are included under the term "Mexican government" these are: Federal and municipal police, the marines, the army, the AFI, PGR (Attorney general's office), SEDENA (Homeland security), and the Ministerial police.

foreign governments has increased. This can be an indicator that the cartel has established strong roots on those countries or that a more aggressive anti-drug has been adopted by other countries.

Overall, these clashes have instigated the loss of many lives, including narcos, security forces, and innocent people. Some of these battles have cause extreme harm to the organization. The bloody conflicts take place within urban areas at any time of the day, others occur on remote places where the noise of the battles echoes on the mountains and the riddle bodies meet their final resting places.

Most of the combats the cartel has been participant concentrate on the states of Sinaloa, Baja California and Chihuahua, followed by Jalisco and Mexico City. The data also shows that the cartel's quarrels have varied throughout the drug war years, they have fought with some actors more than others, and that some years have been awfully violent and others relatively peaceful. For example, in 2006, the organization was mainly targeted by the Mexican army. During 2008, by the Federal Police. The year 2010, was extremely violent for them, they were constantly targeted by the army, the federal and municipal police. This same year, the Zetas split from the Gulf cartel and started to expand their territories causing an escalation of brutal confrontations. Starting in 2012, the cartel started to undergo more attacks in foreign countries. It is also apparent that the Marines became their worst enemy during 2015, and that they fight the most during the summer months.

This section demonstrated that the Sinaloa cartel has been constantly targeted by different actors, foreign and domestic, during the last decade. How has the cartel been able to survive and remain strong under constant vigilance and attacks? The next section

explores the way the cartel has reacted towards clashes that resulted in mayor setbacks to the organization.

Major Organizational Shocks and the Sinaloa Cartel's Response

As mentioned earlier, throughout the drug war years, the cartel has suffered significant disruptions. Such disturbances range from the demise of cells they have in Mexico and other countries, important seizures on shipment of drugs, weapons, ammunition and money, the destruction of clandestine labs to process drugs, and crops, among others. Yet, one of the biggest and most sounded setbacks the Sinaloa cartel has suffered is the capture of Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, in 2014 and more recently in early 2016. Then again, even under these harsh circumstances, been constantly attacked and without one of their most important leaders, the organization continued to operate. This section aims to examine the most significant organizational setbacks the cartel has encountered and its reaction towards them.

In October 2008, one of the "triumphs" of the administration of Felipe Calderon was the arrest of Jesus Reynaldo Zambada Garcia "El Rey." El Mayo Zambada's brother stood as a central piece on the structure of the cartel. He oversaw the criminal activities in the Mexican Valley, responsible for the production of massive quantities of methamphetamines in clandestine laboratories, and the import of cocaine precursors from South American countries through Mexico's City international airport (Fox, 2012).

According to Grayson (2014), another significant shock the cartel has suffered accounts for the capture, in 2009, of Vicente Zambada Niebla "El Vicentillo," son of El Mayo, by the Federal police in a suburb outside Mexico City. Five hours before his detention Zambada Niebla had met with DEA agents in a grand tourism hotel in that city.

El Vicentillo was in charge of coordinating the shipment of tons of cocaine into the U.S. He was extradited to the latter country in 2010.

An additional noteworthy disruption suffered by the Sinaloa cartel was the assassination of Ignacio Coronel "El Nacho" Villarreal, third in command of the cartel until his murder by the Mexican Army in June of 2010. He controlled a broad coastal strip that includes the states of Jalisco, Colima, Nayarit and a part of Michoacán. He had direct access to cocaine suppliers in Colombia, and had established a chain of supply of chemicals needed to produce methamphetamines from Asia.

Two years later in 2012, Manuel Torres Felix "El Ondeado" or "M-1" was killed during a violent clash with the Mexican army. He was a high-ranking leader who oversaw drug trafficking shipments from South America into Mexico. He was the right hand of El Mayo and a major administrative figure in the organization. There is some controversy about the death of this important member since some conspiracy theories state that El Mayo supposedly set him up with the Mexican government (Ramsey, 2012).

The next two years would be harsh for the organization losing three more important members. In 2013, Gabino Salas Valenciano "El Ingeniero" in charge of the Juarez *plaza*, one of the most important territories for drug trafficking, was assassinated. This same year, Jose Rodrigo Arechiga "El Chino Antrax" was captured in the airport in Brussels, in an operation lead by the Interpol and the Dutch police (Excelsior, 2014). El Chino Antrax, started in the organization as a professional hitman. He later formed and managed the armed wing "Los Antrax" in charge of the security of El Mayo. The organization invested significantly in this group to get highly trained and later served as an important part of the organization (Milenio, 2014).

The last shock considered here and the most vital until today, is the arrest of El Chapo Guzman in 2014. As it is known, he escaped on July 2015 and got recaptured about six months later in early 2016. It is believed that in June 2014, one of the four main leaders of the cartel "El Azul" died from a heart attack. This would be another setback of great magnitude for the cartel. Nevertheless, the drug lord could be faking his death once again. Many experts consider he is still alive and is managing the cartel along with El Mayo. Since his death is not official, it is not considered in this study.

Figure 3.1 illustrates a time line when these mayor setbacks took place and how the cartel responded based on their criminal activities.

Figure 3.1.
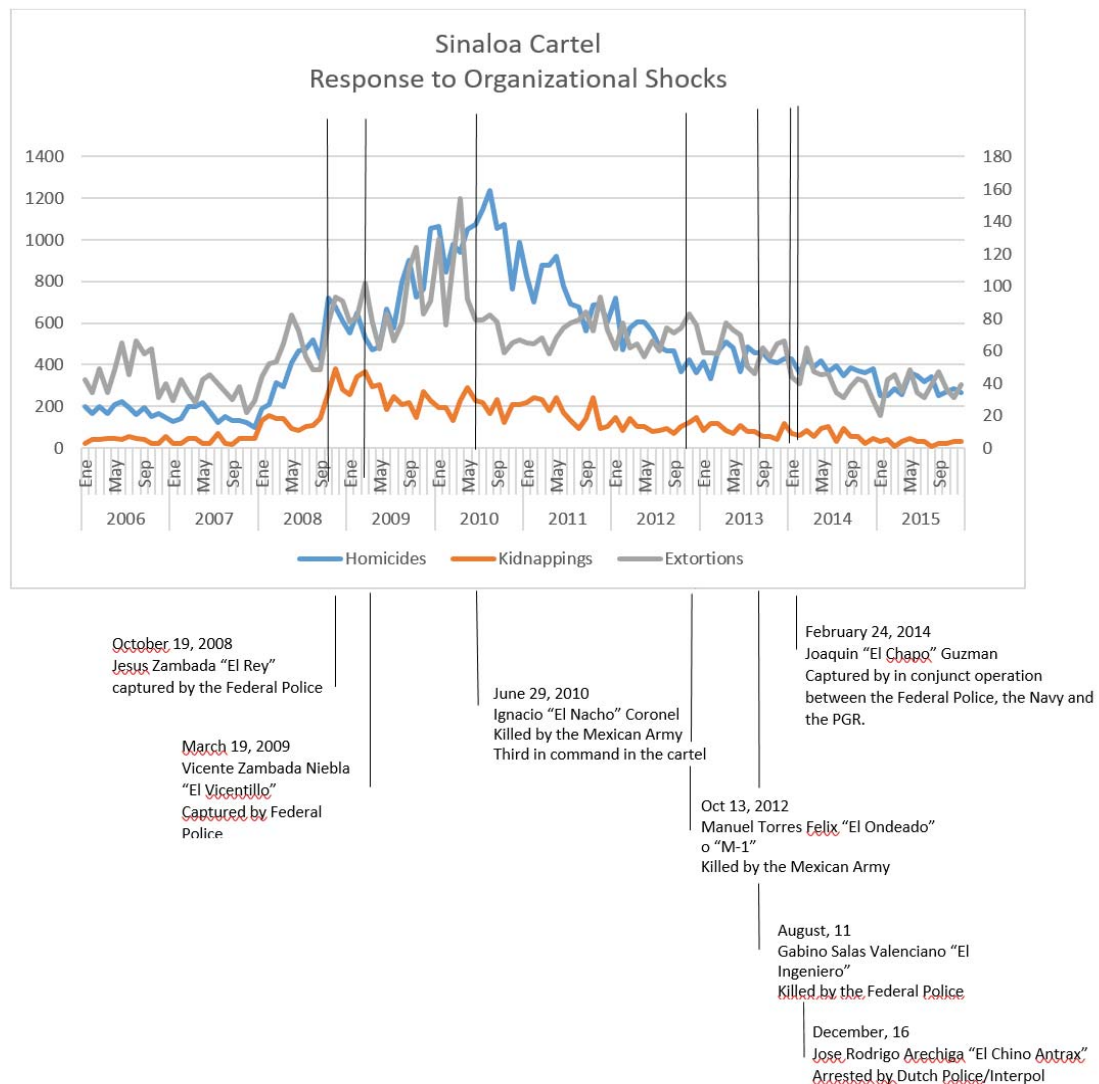
The model shows that the Sinaloa's cartel criminal activities have fluctuated throughout the years and that they have reacted differently towards organizational shocks. Theory suggests that after a top leader of a criminal organization is taken down, violence will erupt indicating a time of re-accommodation and restructuration within a criminal group. We can see this trend happening with the Sinaloa cartel, increments in violence after

every seizure can be observed, but such response is more prominent in some cases more than others.

After the capture of "El Rey" in 2008, and "El Vicentillo" the following year, an increment of criminal activities and violence can be perceived. But later in 2010, the indicators reach a peak soon after the assassination of Nacho Coronel. The DEA called the Coronel's death "a crippling blow" to the organization (Ellingwood, 2010). The absence of this leader really influenced the Sinaloa's cartel. His death sparked major wars for turf in Guadalajara involving major cartels and allied gangs (Grayson, 2014). The escalation of violence may be an indicator of intra cartel conflicts or confrontations with rival groups. In this case, it was the Juarez cartel the one that attempted to take over the Coronel's domains increasing battles between these two criminal organizations.

This analysis suggests that after these three significant losses in the organization, but more precisely after the death of El Nacho Coronel, the cartel faced a turbulent period during which they were forced to conduct mayor structural changes. The latter is reflected in the way the organization reacts upon the disruptions that follow. After the restructuration process the cartel seems to be more solid showing more congruence when facing new disruptions. After the reconfiguration, indicators of violence and criminal activities stay relatively steady even after a mayor shock.

During the following years, violence on their areas of influence slowly started to go down. The organizational shocks suffered in 2012 and two in 2013 (El M-1, El Ingeniero, and El Chino Antrax respectively), does not show significant impact on their criminal activities. Later in February 24th, 2014, the most powerful capo in the world Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman was captured in a conjunct operation between the Federal

Police, the Navy and the PGR. Being the main known leader of the organization there was a lot of speculation on how the organization was going to react and an increase of violence was of course expected. Strangely, El Chapo's capture does not show much impact on the cartel's criminal activities. There are two possible explanations for this: the first is that during the restructuration period the organization became more solid, organized, and stronger. The second, is that by that time El Chapo did not have as much leverage in the organization as before, and his influence in the decision-making process of the cartel had diminished. As odd at this sounds, in the next section this possibility is further explored.

The Sinaloa Cartel on Social Media

Social media has changed the way we communicate. One of its key features is that anyone with internet access can connect with others without intermediaries and it offers a degree of anonymity. Web platforms such as Twitter has made possible one-on-one interactions, now it is plausible to directly Tweet or send a message to a favorite artist, state leaders like President Obama, or Trump, or even to the most well-known drug lord since Pablo Escobar, El Chapo Guzman.

Members of the Sinaloa cartel have extensively use social media and their presence on these platforms is significant. As mentioned in chapter 1, the use of social media by criminal and terrorist organizations has given them worldwide exposure. Although members of these groups are present in several social media platforms such as Vine, Instagram, or Snapchat, this study focuses on the cartel's use of Twitter and YouTube. [26] What follows is a detailed analysis of the cartel on these communication channels.

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[26] Members of the Sinaloa cartel have also presence on Facebook. For example, the Sinaloa cartel has a Facebook group dedicated to "El Chino Antrax" with more than 20 thousand members Thus, a larger fan based was found on Twitter. Also, while doing the content analysis, many tweets and Facebook posts were very similar and for instance repetitive pictures were upload. For his reason, in this case study Twitter was

Online Presence

The Sinaloa cartel holds a wide-ranging fan base on social media. Just on Twitter alone, the universe of their network is about 140 million people. They have followers from all over the world including the U.S., Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay, Peru, Argentina, Turkey and of course Mexico.

To locate the most important nodes, actors, or accounts in their vast network, a social network analysis (SNA) of the Sinaloa's cartel Twitter network was conducted. It also aided on constructing a visual picture on how their network is configured.

The social network of the cartel presented here is a simplification since it only considers the most relevant nodes. In other words, it is based on the nodes with more interaction and linkages among them. This simplified version of the network comprises a total of 353 main nodes with 5,066 edges or links. The analysis started with El Chapo's official Twitter account and then other accounts were gradually added to have a more comprehensive scheme. The modularity function was used in order to find commonalities or groups within the network. Two main measures of centrality were considered to determine the most important nodes: in-degree and betweenness.[27] These metrics are helpful to determine the importance and quality of a node in a network in terms of connecting individuals or groups. A node with high a degree of betweenness functions as an intermediary. Their role is important because without them, communication between

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the social media platform used for the social network analysis and to monitor their social media usage. The content analysis was conducted in both Twitter and YouTube. In addition, something interesting about their Facebook pages is that during my preliminary research, most of the accounts I studied were open to the public. Going back at them a few months later, I found that most of these accounts turned private. This limited my research on Facebook since some of the friend requests sent were never accepted.

[27] In-degree centrality refers to the number of links or ties directed a node. Betweenness centrality quantifies the number of times a node acts as a bridge between two or more other nodes (Freeman, 1997).

actors, modules, or groups can be broken or inexistent. Other factors considered to choose

the accounts analyzed for this case study where the number of followers and specific

content. Graph 3.2 is an approximate visualization of the Sinaloa cartel on Twitter.

Graph 3.2.

Created with NodeXL Pro (http://nodexl.codeplex.com) from the Social Media Research Foundation (http://www.smrfoundation.org)
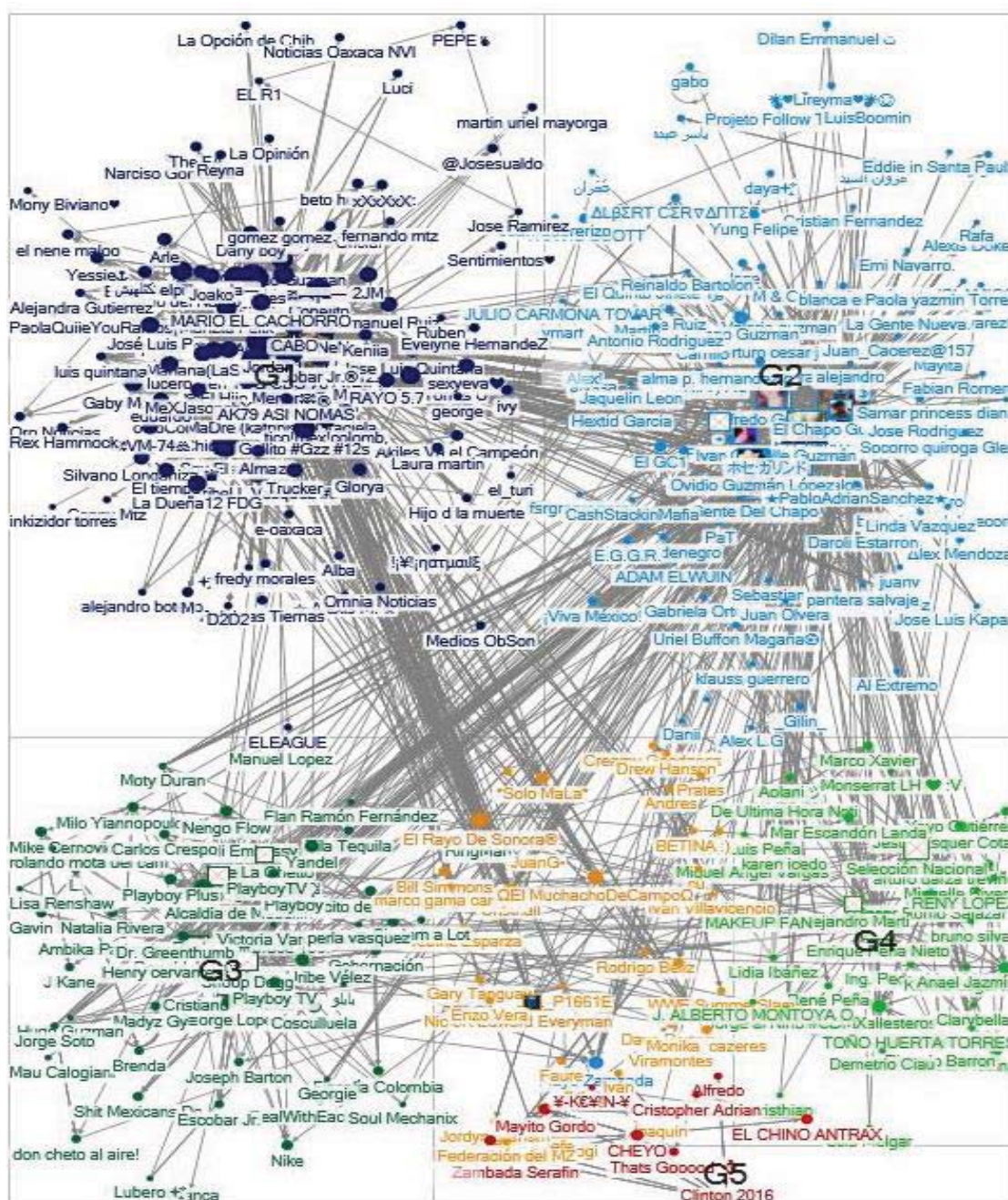
There is a great amount of information that can be construed from the SNA. In the figure above, it can be observed that the Twitter network structure of the Sinaloa cartel bears a resemblance to their "physical" configuration. In other words, it is similar to a hub-and-spokes structure. The network is divided into five main groups. Groups G3 and G4, do not tell much about their structure, but they give information about the cartel members' personal interests. For instance, we can see that they are interested in following Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, they like to be updated since they present reciprocal connections with numerous news outlets. It also shows that they have interests in international politics following the accounts of former U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and now President Donald Trump, and some governmental institutions from Colombia. They are soccer aficionados, they like Pitbull's music and they are fans of Playboy.

Group 2 (G2) is directly related to El Chapo Guzman, being his "official" account the most central node of this group and of the entire network. After him, his sons Alfredo, Ivan, and Ovidio Guzman accounts follow on importance and centrality, and then accounts of members with lower positions on the organizational ladder. Group 1 (G1) represents a group conformed by various armed wings of the cartel: *la Gente Nueva, los Antrax, los Damaso, los* 701, and a group led by *El Gallito* called *los* 12. Group 3 (G3) is formed by El Mayo Zambada and his closest constituents, though this is a much smaller cluster. The groups are connected only through a few nodes that link the network together.

There are behavioral patterns that these accounts follow, depending on their centrality. Highly central nodes such as El Chapo, his sons, and El Mayo Zambada use an open-close system to communicate through the network, serving mainly as sources of

information. In other words, they post messages, receive likes and comments but they rarely answer such comments or engage in conversations. These nodes have a particular characteristic which is that they are followed by thousands of people but they only follow and interact with a small set of nodes. For example, El Chapo's twitter account has 610, 376 followers whereas he only follows 17 people, mostly family members. His son Ivan Archivaldo, follows only 35 accounts, and he is followed by 323, 387 twitter users. His brother Alfredo follows only 5 persons, but he is followed by 310, 700. Nodes with less centrality throughout the network are followed and follow more accounts and they promote interaction with their followers. In G1, this type of behavior can be observed the most.

On a similar fashion, there is also a resemblance on the manner El Chapo and El Mayo and the groups under their leadership behave on and offline. For example, El Chapo and the groups under his command, especially the *narcojuniors,* like to be public, popular and controversial on social media as they are loud, extravagant, and irreverent in the real world. El Mayo Zambada instead, maintains a low profile also on social media, using the platforms just "to inform the truth" about the cartel. He follows only 1 account and writes posts that are discrete about his life and whereabouts, but at the same time these messages contained encrypted and detailed information about the organization status. As in the virtual plane, in real life, El Mayo Zambada has always maintained a low profile which has helped him avoid detection by the authorities during his 40 years or more in the business. Even though these accounts contain highly graphic violent content, just a few of them have been shut down. There were barely three cases of accounts that where taken down and they were reopened under a different user name. The content of the accounts of ISIS and the Mexican cartel presents on their social media pages are not that different. Nevertheless,

ISIS's accounts are constantly attacked and taken down (Johnson et al, 2016), but it is not the case of the accounts managed by members of the Sinaloa cartel.

Twitter and YouTube's Content Analysis

The amount of information members of the cartel provide on social media is vast, impressively detailed, sweet, humane, violent and horrific. Going through the content on their web pages is a roller-coaster of emotions. The visuals on these webpages range from love letters to decapitated bodies. The nature of the content on their posts have given them international attention making the Sinaloa cartel members popular personalities, almost celebrity-like status. It has also made them accessible to the public, and more relatable.

Through their accounts they let us contemplate the stories from their own point of view, giving us direct access to their life in the underworld. They present a different metanarrative on the cartel. By the end of this section your perception of the criminal organization might shift completely. Below the analysis on the content of their Twitter accounts and YouTube videos is presented.

Twitter

Most journalistic articles and research done on the content narcos' social media accounts have mainly focus on the ostentatious lifestyle members of cartels show off on their pages. Yet, there is so much more information worth exploring. In this study, 12 different categories were found based on the content of their posts. These categories include: description about their operations and missions, pictures/ videos depicting their luxurious lifestyle, threatening messages, altruism and recruitment. They also update their followers about the status of the organization, and communicate among each other through posting coded messages on their walls. Graph 3.3 illustrates the breakdown on their usage.

Graph 3.3.
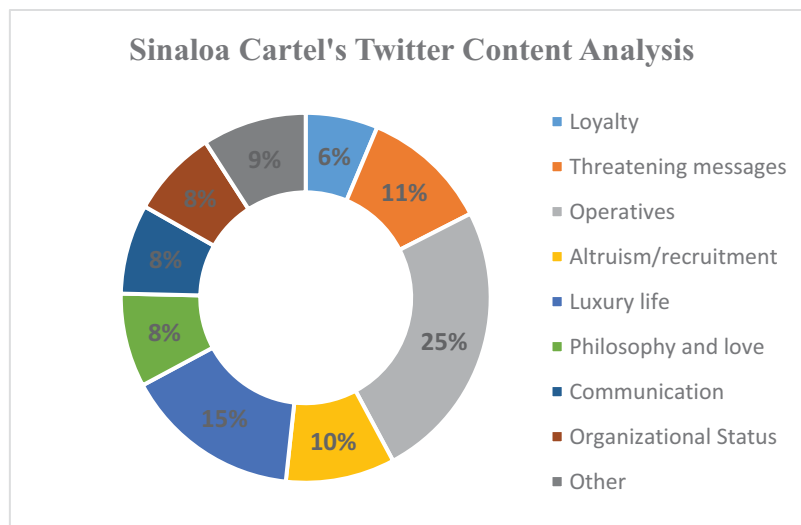
Narcotweets about their missions and operatives account for 25 percent of the content of the accounts. On these posts, phrases like "mission accomplished" or "following orders" are common along with photos or videos of them before, during or after the job was completed. On these images, they show the entire convoy of trucks in action, the members on military-like uniforms proudly holding AK-15s, ready to complete their task. Another portion of these posts contain videos of them in training sessions, they upload recordings of actual confrontations, and they also publish footage showing the corpses of enemies that died during a battle to intimidate their foes. In some of the videos, they can be seen working at Mexican Airforce military bases. This suggests that the cartel holds close relationship with some of the Mexican security forces. They also upload pictures on business trips. A good amount of these posts are from cities in the U.S. like Los Angeles, and Chicago. They do state that they upload the pictures days or weeks after their visits to prevent being tracked. They also say that they armed groups are trained in the Middle East, in partnership with Al Qaeda and ISIS.

Probably the most common and studied posts of the cartel in social media are the ones related to their luxurious life. Although this study shows that it is not the main purpose of use, as other reports claim, this category takes the second place with 15 percent. Here, members of the cartel and especially the narcojuniors, such as Alfredo and Ivan Archivaldo Guzman, El Chayo, and El Mini Lic post pictures with bales of money, drugs, gold-plated weapons, trips, planes, boats, Bentleys, Lamborghinis, Ferraris, ostentatious parties, fine jewelry, brand clothing, beautiful women, and exotic pets. In other words, they present a dream life which attracts especially young impressionable people to pursue the lifestyle.

The cartels also use these communication platforms to send threatening messages to other rival organizations and to the government. This type of messages account for 11 percent of the content. The menacing messages for other cartels are mainly claiming territories, bragging about a victorious battle, and pictures of rival cartel members massacred. They send messages to the government declaring that the marines are being abusive to civilians, killings innocent civilians including children, directly tagging government agencies such as SEMAR (the Marines Secretariat) on their posts. After El Chapo was captured for the third time, his son Alfredo posted threatening messages to the government implying that the person responsible for the arrest would face horrid consequences: "the government will pay for this betrayal, one should never bite the hand that feeds you" he wrote. They have as well posted threatening messages directly tagging President Pena Nieto, the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA), and members of rival cartels. El Chapo even sent a message to Donald Trump's account *@realDonaldTrump,* to threaten him after his invidious speeches about Mexicans.

Other purposes of use as mentioned already account for altruist propaganda and also for recruitment purposes with 10 percent of the content. "We protect and support the cartel [Sinaloa], we are at the service of the community and with the people," reads the opening line of the Twitter account of *Gente del Chapo* (Chapo's people), one cell of El Chapo's faction. Such propaganda might help the cartel to legitimize their business and gain society's acceptance. What is more, these accounts get job petitions from followers posting their requests on their public walls. These include profiles of citizens working in the formal sector and some with university degrees such as lawyers and accountants. Work seekers usually post comments complaining about their low income and distrust in the government. Cartel members usually respond by asking them to send their CVs through inbox. Another recruitment strategy of cartel members is to create groups through the WhatsApp application and ask their followers to post their cellphone numbers in order to be added to a group. These types of messages seem to be effective since they commonly get between 300 and 400 responses from followers.

The cartel also uses social media to talk about the status of the organization when changes are taking place (8 percent). For example, when El Chapo was taken by the authorities in 2014, they announced through their Twitter accounts who was replacing him. This message was posted two weeks after the capo's capture:

Cartel De Sinaloa @CartelDSinaloa · Mar 8
Nuevos jefes en el cartel de Sinaloa: El joven @IvanArchivaldo con su hermano @_AlfredoGuzman_ tendrán el control del cartel de Sinaloa.

151   558

The announcement reads as follows: "The new leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel: @IvanArchivaldo with his brother @_AlfredoGuzman_ will have the control of the cartel," (posted on the official page of the cartel @CartelDSinaloa on March 8, 2016).

They also use social media platforms to communicate among each other during missions in areas where they do not have cellular reception but Wi-Fi is available. They do this through just posting codes on their walls and tagging each other. These types of posts account for 8 percent of their content. And finally, 6 percent of their posts show a more human side of the drug traffickers. They write love letters, they write about their philosophy on life, and also, they profess an enormous amount of respect, pride and loyalty to the Sinaloa cartel and its leaders.

YouTube

When one types "cartel de Sinaloa" on the YouTube search bar tool, 99, 100 videos are found. For the purpose of this research, I used the "most relevant" filter option and got 578 videos ranging from 800 to more than 1.5 million views. Graph 3.4 presents a classification on the content of the videos.

Graph 3.4.

Sinaloa Cartel's YouTube Content Analysis

- Lived mutilations, tortures, executions — 11%
- Narcocorridos — 19%
- Live clashes/shootings — 6%
- Narconews — 28%
- Communiques/ interviews — 4%
- Threats and narcomantas — 8%

(additional segments: 20%)
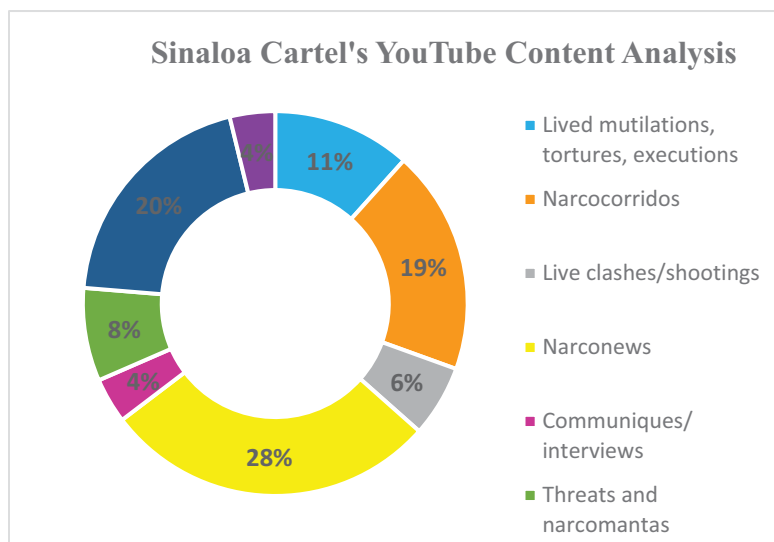
The presence of the Sinaloa cartel in YouTube differs a bit from Twitter. Most of the videos in this portal are related to *narconews* which account for 28 percent of the content. Some of these news clips come from national or regional televised newscasts, but on its majority, they come from videos posted in *Blog del Narco*. The videos that come from the latter webpage, present detailed information about the cartels, hardly found on any journal, newscasts, books, articles or other social media platform. Such information includes messages warning the population about possible violent events, interviews with cartel members talking about the general situation of the Sinaloa cartel, their alliances, main rivalries at a point in time, and future endeavors. Similarly, there are messages detailing the involvement of government officials on cartel's activities.

The following category, with 20 percent, are videos in where members of the cartel state details on how the organization functions. In these messages, they explain that important decisions are taken by a Council Board. These types of resolutions include for example, whether they will take El Chapo once again out of jail or they will decide on his extradition. Also, they describe in detail how the leaders of the main cartels in Mexico have organized conclaves to establish the new rules of the game in order to cease the chaos and extreme violence, since it was starting to affect the business. According to an audio in one of the videos, the first meeting happened in June 2007, in a ranch owned by Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano near Valle Hermoso, in the state of Tamaulipas. The main leaders of the drug cartels at the time, El Chapo, Vicente Carrillo Fuentes, Juan Jose Esparragoza Moreno, Ismael Zambada, Ignacio Coronel, Arturo and Hector Beltran Leyva, and Heriberto Lazcano, got together to discuss issues including the repartition of territories, the accommodation of new cartels, and the cease of violence. According to these recordings,

resolutions were meet just for a short period of time since "El Lazca" (leader of the Zetas at the time) did not agree to some of the rules established neither he trusted his enemies.[28] More meetings took place later in Cuernavaca, Morelos and Polanco in Mexico City.

As in Twitter, the Sinaloa cartel uses YouTube to inform the public about their missions or operations, accounting for 20 percent of the shares. Following with 19 percent of the content, are *narcocorridos.* The narcocorridos have played a key role on the diffusion of a narcoculture in Mexico. These are songs in where narcos are depicted as heroes and some of them have become anthems in some regions of the country. This music genre idolizes drug lords and their lifestyle. During the drug war years, the narcorridos have become more popular, having a strong influence especially in young people. Once again, the songs can work as a tool to incite social acceptance.

Some of the content of the videos related to the Sinaloa cartel in YouTube is graphic. Their cruelty sometimes surpassed fiction in movies, 11 percent of the content is footage of lived tortures, and execution style killings. The purpose of these horrid videos is to intimidate rival cartels and to extract information from them. The remaining of the content are threats towards the government and other cartels with 8 percent, following by videos of live battles and shootings with 6 percent. The last 4 percent correspond to communiques about the cartel's endeavors and interviews.

What Social Media Told Me: The Untold Story of the Sinaloa Cartel

Twitter accounts and YouTube videos of the Sinaloa cartel underline a story much different from the one commonly known about the criminal organization on mainstream media. The content on social media almost takes the reader into a parallel world of the

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[28] Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eoKUtko4X6k.

cartel, that if examined meticulously a different perspective than the one put forward to the public light can be perceived.

One of the more interesting accounts studied here is allegedly managed by El Mayo Zambada (@mzoficial).[29] According to him, he passed down his account to the new leaders taking his place from the now called "the MZ Federation," since he "retired" in 2013. Supposedly, he now works just as the advisor to the organization. But in this Twitter account, another version on the way the cartel operates is uncovered. Here, it is stated that contrary to common wisdom, El Chapo was not the most powerful member or the head of the Sinaloa cartel since years ago, but he was chosen to be the public figure of the organization. In other words, El Chapo served as a façade to deviate the attention from the real CEO of the cartel, El Mayo Zambada. In these accounts, it is also stated that Rafael Caro Quintero or "Mr. from the 80s" came back as a leader of the cartel once he was released from prison at the beginnings of Pena Nieto's administration in 2012, serving mostly as an advisor.[30]

In El Mayo's account, it is implied as well that the cartel's power goes beyond the Mexican government. He claims they are the ones that have chosen the presidents for years not only for Mexico, but for other countries in South America. Through his account, El Mayo communicates that, in conjunction with higher officials, they already chose the Mexican president for 2018 ("one more radical"). They have also stated that high ranking military officials are planning and have asked for the cartel's support to make a *coup d'etat*, since 2013.

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[29] Available at: https://twitter.com/search?q=%40mzoficial&src=typd
[30] Tweet available at: https://twitter.com/search?q=%40mzoficial&src=typd (Jul 12, 2015).

Finally, more recent posts are related to conflicts and treason within the organization. They state that the General Council of the organization decided to turn El Chapo to the authorities in 2014. The reasons, indiscipline and excesses from him, and the groups he was leading,[31] including their overexposure on social media. El Chapo continued with this behavior even after his second scape in 2015, hence the Sean Pean and Kate del Castillo scandal. According to El Mayo's account, such behavior represents a danger to the cartel and does not comply with the rules of the organization, motive for his return to prison.

Social Media Use and Organizational Shocks

On the previous section, a model was presented to assess the survival capacity of the cartel, here the model is used to observe the cartel's behavior on social media after each organizational shock.[32] Figure 3.2, shows that two years after the media censorship in the country took place, the presence of the Sinaloa cartel on Twitter displays a momentous increase. Hereinafter, organizational disruptions notoriously are reflected on their social media use, since its use peaks on most of these events.

More notoriously, their Twitter usage exploited during the capture of El M1 and of course El Chapo in 2014. On the following year, the activity presents an increase during happenings related to El Chapo. The model shows that the cartel member's usage of social media increases when the organization experiences organizational shocks. The messages uploaded during these events correspond to posts mostly with the purpose to inform about

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[31] Available at: https://twitter.com/search?q=%40mzoficial&src=typd (Feb 22, 2014).
[32] In this model Media Censorship is consider and organizational shock since it was after the signing of this accord their mayor platform of exposure, mainstream media, became unavailable for them. They later turned to social media.

the state of the organization during and after a disruption, and also to launch threats to the
ones responsible.

Figure 3.2.

Sinaloa Cartel Twitter Usage and Organizational Shocks 2006-2015

October 19, 2008
Jesus Zambada "El Rey"
Captured by the Federal Police

March 19, 2009
Vicente Zambada Niebla
"El Vicentillo"
Captured by Federal
Police

Media
Censorship

June 29, 2010
Ignacio "El Nacho" Coronel
Killed by the Mexican Army
Third in command in the
cartel

Oct 13, 2012
Manuel Torres Felix "El Ondeado"
o "M-1"
Killed by the Mexican Army

February 24,
2014
Joaquin "El
Chapo" Guzman
Captured by in
conjunct
operation
between the
Federal Police,
the Navy and
the PGR.

El Chapo escapes
from prison

El Chapo escapes from the
Mexican Army in an
operative for recapture

August, 11, 2013
Gabino Salas Valenciano "El
Ingeniero"
Killed by the Federal Police

December, 16, 2013
Jose Rodrigo Arechiga "El Chino Antrax"
Arrested by Dutch Police/Interpol

The Analysis

The purpose of this project is to study if the implementation of social media to their strategies has helped strengthen drug trafficking's organizations in Mexico. The data presented in this chapter suggests that the Sinaloa cartel's survival capacity has remained strong, responding differently to organizational shocks throughout the years. But, going back to my hypotheses the question remains: does the use of social media by the cartels beneficial for their survival capacity? Or for the contrary, makes them more expose or vulnerable?

To address the questions, social media usage or activity and the reported clashes are analyzed. Graph 3.5 illustrates the relationship between the two variables.

Graph 3.5.
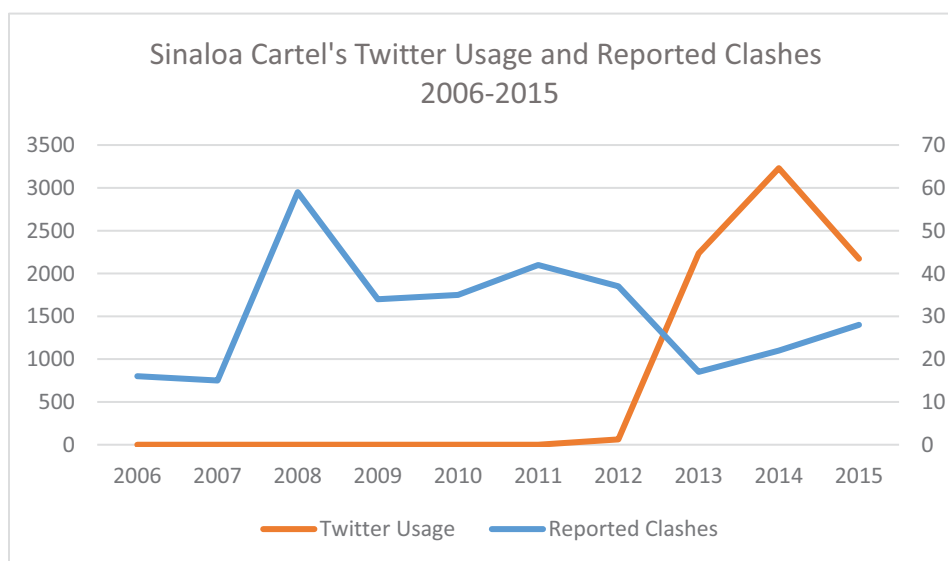
One of my hypothesis states that an increase on the usage of social media will lead to more attacks towards an organization since exposure on these communication outlets can increase their detectability making them more vulnerable. A statistical correlation

between the two variables (Twitter usage and reported clashes) shows a negative relationship between the variables. This means that as one of the variables goes up the other one goes down. However, the Pearson's correlation coefficient does not show any statistical significance. In sum, the relationship between these two variables is really weak.

Conclusions

There is a theory that argues that the Sinaloa cartel has a high capacity of survival and maintains its power due to the fact that the government favors the organization over the others. Meaning that the military or other judicial bodies do not target the cartel as much protected by the deep corrupted system the organization has created. The data in this analysis shows that the argument that the cartel's resistance is due to a favoritism is not quite accurate. The reported clashes gathered in this study shows that from 2006 to 2015, the organization was constantly targeted by Mexican security forces and other actors. In fact, according to a recount published by *El Universal,* between 2013 and 2015, the Sinaloa cartel was the criminal organization that suffered the most arrests in comparison with the other Mexican criminal organizations.[33]

The cartel's use of social media is extensive and their posts offer more information about their criminal organization that might be generally believed. In this chapter a social network analysis was performed in order to discover the more relevant accounts in their Twitter network and to visualize its configuration. When exploring the Sinaloa cartel's Twitter network, it is noticeable that the nodes with the highest degree of centrality serve

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[33] According to the article, between 2013 and 2015, the Sinaloa cartel suffered 214 arrests, compared to 159 of Gulf cartel members, 138 from CJNG, 136 Zetas, 130 from the Beltran Leyva, 126 from La Familia Michoacana, 67 Caballeros Templarios, 48 from the Cartel Independiente de Acapulco, 13 from Juarez cartel, and 5 from Tijuana cartel. Report available at:
http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/nacion/seguridad/2016/01/31/fuerzas-federales-pegan-la-estructura-del-cartel-de-sinaloa.

as informants, the nodes with the higher degree of betweenness function as disseminators of information and they are the nodes that links the network together.

The analysis of this chapter suggests that although important members of the cartel, especially the *narcojunios,* are highly exposed in these outlets, and although some of them have been captured, there is no evidence that the cartel has weakened because of this. Indeed, it is observed that important members and leaders of this organization are cynically too exposed in these platforms such as the sons of El Chapo, Alfredo and Ivan Archivaldo Guzman, and they are still free and holding leadership position in the organization.

In a counterfactual scenario, would the Sinaloa cartel remain strong without social media? Probably yes, but on what degree is hard to assess. There are factors that social media has help strengthen and facilitated for the organization. The degree of narcoculture penetration during the last years in the country might have not be possible without these communication outlets. Social media has aided the cartel to be closer, more reachable and relatable to the citizenry, this closeness might help on building social acceptance and support. As the literature suggests, social and cultural acceptability is key for the successful functionality of criminal organizations. Another important factor that social media has facilitated is recruitment. These platforms have ease the way to find new people interested in working for the cartel, and in fact as it was found in the content analysis, people usually reach to them looking for employment. The rapid replacement of killed or arrested members is important to maintain a stable system.

Finally, the SNA demonstrated that the cartel's virtual constitution is reminiscent to their physical one, reflecting a hubs-and-spokes structure. This will be helpful in identifying central nodes or some structural hole in the virtual arena that can be helpful at

identifying weaknesses on their physical structure. Alternative strategies, besides the kingpin, can be developed to disrupt the organization. For instance, a *fragmentation from within* strategy instead a top-down approach to dismantle the organization might prove more successful.

Chapter 4

THE ZETAS CARTEL

The Zetas is a criminal organization that has transformed the drug trafficking business in Mexico. Not only they pioneered on the diversification of criminal activities, but also, they introduced a new level of operational violence never seen before in any other Mexican drug cartel. The Zetas have systematically violated many rules traditional cartels[35] such as Sinaloa, Tijuana, and the Beltran Leyva followed for decades. The White House has labeled the Zetas a "global menace" comparing them to criminal organizations of the caliber of the Camorra in Italy, and the Yakuza in Japan (Grayson, 2014). The cartel has developed a reputation derived from sadistic and savage acts, they rapidly became associated with beheadings and public hyper-violence. Since their split from the Gulf cartel

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[34] Ariel Avila Perez is a member of the Zetas. His Facebook account resulted to be the most central on the Zetas' Facebook network. He started working in a cell of the organization in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. He held a high position and was the main leader of the Zetas group in the said country. Years later, the Zetas promoted him within the organization and moved him to Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, and became one of the main leaders in the region.

[35] As stated on a previous chapter, the term "traditional cartels" in this study, refers to the *modus operandi* of the criminal organizations. Traditional cartels still followed the tacit agreements, for example, keeping violence away from innocent people. Non-traditional cartels like the Zetas do not follow such agreements and follow a more diverse illicit business portfolio.

in 2010, the Zetas achieved the status of the second most powerful criminal group in Mexico, and the main challenger to the Sinaloa cartel's hegemony. By this time, the Zetas expanded significantly operating in 405 Mexican municipalities out of a total of 2,440 (161 more than the Gulf cartel) and was 2.3 times larger than the cartel of Sinaloa (Coscia and Rios, 2012: p. 9). The areas in where the Zetas operate have seen the highest numbers of drug related homicides. According to Dudley and Rios (2013), in 2010, the municipalities in where the Zetas operate presented 10,169 drug related homicides, compared to 6, 388 in the areas the Gulf cartel operates and 4, 772 in Tijuana's cartel domains (p. 1). The Zetas as well expanded their operations to Central America, collaborating with other gangs like the *Mara Salvatrucha* in El Salvador and *los Kaibiles* in Guatemala, in an effort to control the shipments of cocaine between the Guatemalan-Mexican corridors.

This chapter investigates the Zetas cartel, starting with a brief account of their origins and present status in the first section. The second part of the chapter, explores the cartel's survival capacity, revisiting their battles and the organization's response to mayor organizational shocks. The third section studies the Zetas in social media. A social network analysis on their Facebook accounts is presented as well as an analysis on their Facebook content and YouTube videos. The fourth part analyses the relationship between social media usage and major organizational shocks. The last section covers the conclusive remarks.

The Origins and Evolution: From Military Elites to *Sicarios*

The Zetas were created between 1996 and 1997 by Osiel Cardenas Guillen, the main leader of the Gulf cartel at the time. By these years, Cardenas Guillen was among the most wanted drug traffickers in the world, and was seeking for protection (Ravelo, 2013).

He was looking for a strong and highly trained group, who could operate sophisticated weaponry but most importantly, had good insight and information about their main rivals, the PGR and the Mexican army. Cardenas Guillen delegated a military defector, Arturo Guzman Decena also known as "El Z-1," the responsibility to create such group. For this purpose, Guzman Decena recruited 30 lieutenants who deserted from the Mexican army's Airborne Special Group Forces (Grupos Aeromoviles de Fuerzas Especiales, GAFES),[36] a highly trained faction of the Mexican security forces. The group became the armed wing of the Gulf cartel and was named "the Zetas." The new recruits were highly trained in various capacities: they could manage high-power weaponry, they had expertise on communication surveillance, and counterintelligence tactics (Ravelo, 2013: p. 36).

Between 1997 and 2003, the Zetas were considered a paramilitary group working as the security body for drug traffickers, giving certain competitive advantage to the Gulf cartel over other criminal organizations.

Osiel Cardenas Guillen was arrested on March 17th 2003, in Matamoros, Tamaulipas by the Mexican army. After his capture, the Zetas were left in a drift without a fixed leadership or direction. Cardenas Guillen's arrest left a vacuum that contending leaders from both, the Gulf and the Zetas, were trying to fill, fighting over the control of important drug corridors in cities like Matamoros, Reynosa, Tampico, Nuevo Laredo, Monterrey, Veracruz, and San Luis Potosi. By then, the Zeta's co-founder Arturo Decena Guzman had died (2002), and the second in line to lead, Rogelio Gonzalez Piñaza was

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[36] The GAFES were created during the administration of Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon (1994-2000), when the national security policy was focused towards reinforcing the security forces with elements of the Mexican military (Ravelo, 2013: p. 36).

arrested in 2004. This marked the opportunity for Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano "El Lazca" or "El Z-3" to take the lead over the organizations.

Under the leadership of Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano the Gulf cartel went through a restructuration process giving the Zetas more leverage within the cartel's operations. They were in charge of other lucrative criminal activities like kidnappings, extortions, and piracy. Soon after, the Zetas started to gain more power and influence.

In 2007, Osiel Cardenas Guillen was extradited to the U.S. He was charged with the involvement of conspiracies to traffic large amounts of illegal substances such as marijuana and cocaine, violating the "drug kingpin statute,"[37] and also for threatening two DEA agents and one FBI officer in Tamaulipas in 1999 (FBI, 2010). As common practice when top drug leaders are extradited, the American authorities offered him a reduced sentence of 25 years in exchange of information. The shared information had important repercussion to the organizations. Tensions built between the Zetas and the Gulf started to manifest and the cartel went through a stage of internal conflict and fractioning, culminating on their split in 2010 (Ravelo, 2013: p.49; Beittel, 2012). Once the Zetas started working as a cartel themselves under the leadership of El Lazca, their expansion and power grew exponentially.

After the death of Lazcano in October 7th 2012, Miguel Angel Treviño "El Z-40," responsible for the *plaza* in the state of Nuevo Leon*,* headed the organization. Under his leadership, the Zetas continued successfully operating, nevertheless, hints of internal fractioning started to appear. El Z-40 was arrested during the summer of 2013. His younger

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[37] Also known as the Continuing Criminal Enterprise or CCE Statute, refers to a U.S. federal law that targets large-scale drug traffickers responsible for long-term and elaborated drug conspiracies. The sentence for a CCE conviction ranges from a minimum of 20 years in prison, to a maximum of a life sentence. More legal details available at: https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/21/848.

brother Omar Treviño "El Z-42" inherited the leadership of the Zetas. Omar Treviño's mandate was short, he was captured by the Federal Police on March 4th, 2015 (Castillo, 2015).

Structure and Modus Operandi

The capture and later extradition of Osiel Cardenas Guillen in 2007, marks an important critical juncture in the evolution of the Zetas. Once, Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano took control, he started a restructuration process within the organization. The Zetas started operating under a *military- hierarchical* structure, and later El Lazca restructured the organization into a less centralized *franchise* configuration.[38] He created cells, appointing several lieutenants to control specific territories. For example, Miguel Treviño, before becoming the main leader, was selected to control the state of Nuevo Leon, Jorge Eduardo Costilla Sanchez "El Coss" managed the *plaza* in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. Others were responsible for the crossing points in border cities such as Nuevo Laredo, and Reynosa. El Lazca also established cells in the southern states of Quintana Roo, Guerrero and Tabasco. The Zetas, compared to other drug trafficking organizations in Mexico, are believed to have achieved the most diversification on their criminal activities (Beittel, 2012). They have expanded their felonious undertakings to extortion, murder-for-hire, kidnappings, human trafficking, contraband, petroleum theft, money laundering, prostitution, organ trafficking, just to mention some out of their 24 criminal modalities. They established a broad financial umbrella and created an intrinsic network of bribes, coercion, and co-optation.

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[38] These structural terms *military hierarchical* and *franchise* are taken from a conversation with Dr. Bruce Bagley on March 17, 2017.

Their brutal and extremely violent business model has differentiated them from more traditional cartels. One of their characteristics is the use of torture and beheadings, and the exposure of their victims' mutilated bodies on public spaces. This group was also the first to challenged traditional powers to take over their set territories. Under their expansionist strategy, they seek for domination and the control of territory in which a particular criminal activity takes place (Coscia and Rios, 2013). Their tactics include market positioning and subletting. In other words, they extract rent from already stablished criminal webs without the need to build their own infrastructure (Rios, 2012).

The Zetas Today

According to Grayson and Logan (2012), since the death of Lazcano Lazcano in 2012, the cartel has steadily declined since their peak from 2010 to 2012. As mentioned earlier, after the capture of Miguel Angel Treviño, his brother Omar Treviño took over the organization. Although he maintained the violent and sadistic ways of his brother, Omar Treviño had serious problems holding the organization together. When he was captured in 2015, a new faction of the cartel arose: the *Cartel del Noreste*. The group worked as a cell under the Zeta's mandate, but they have become independent and central enemies of the now called the *Zetas Vieja Escuela* (Zetas Old School), which ironically condemns them for the level of operational cruelty. It seems like the Zetas Old School is moving towards adopting a more traditional strategy and refocus on the drug trafficking part of the business. Needless to say, the Zetas have lost influence and power and have retracted from some territories. Yet, the organization is still relevant in the drug trafficking arena in Mexico.

Survival Capacity: The Zetas Vice

This chapter so far has established that the Zetas is no ordinary cartel. The vicious ways they go about their business has gained them the hatred of many different fronts. For example, the Zetas are constantly targeted by the Mexican, the U.S., and the Guatemalan governments. Between 2010 and 2012 three major drug cartels, Sinaloa, Beltran-Leyva, the Gulf, and other groups allied to form the *Carteles Unidos* (United Cartels), to combat and eradicate the Zetas. The *cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion,* created a group called *los Matazetas* (the Zeta's killers), established mainly on the state of Veracruz. As their name implies, their sole mission was to banish this group and "clean Mexico from these dregs of society," as they state in their introductory video on YouTube.[39]

The rise of neo or non-traditional criminal organizations have restructured the dynamics of drug trafficking in Mexico. It is not uncommon for governments, other rival groups, and even intra-cartel clashes to be the major disruptive forces for these type of organizations, yet another layer of actors can be added to the list of challengers of the Zetas: civilians. There are two main ways in which this has been possible during Mexico's war on drugs. The first has been through the formation of self-defense groups, especially in rural areas, usually forgotten by the government, which have made the regions nests for cartels. These groups have emerged in states like Michoacán and Guerrero in where Zetas-inspired cartels such as the Caballeros Templarios terrorize communities,[40] and also in Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, states directly affected by the hyper violent Zetas. Although the government denies their existence, in Tamaulipas two self-defense groups or

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[39] Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uz6ko0R_yqU.
[40] The self-defense groups in Michoacan and their role in the drug war are further analyzed on the next chapter.

community police were established. One originated in San Fernando, municipality that have witnessed the massacre of thousands of migrants mostly from Central America. The other, called "Columna Pedro Mendez," was formed in the communities of Hidalgo, Mainero and Villagran (La Jornada, 2016). The second way through which the civilians have actively joined the war on drugs fight is through the utilization of social media, which is further elaborated in the next section.

Expectedly, the Zetas have suffered major disruptions to their organization. Nonetheless, this criminal group presents a particularity amongst the other organizations since, as explained earlier, their *modus vivendi* has gained them more enemies than supporters. How the cartel was able to emerge and achieved so much growth facing probably the attacks of more enemies than any other Mexican drug cartel? What explains the Zetas' survival capacity? Several hypotheses have been put forward by experts. One argument attributes the Zetas' expansion to their military formation. They were trained with cutting-edge warfare techniques, military strategy, and professionally versed in the use of weapons. This, according to experts, gave them competitive advantage over the other cartels. However, this argument has lost credibility since members with this training are long gone from the organization. All fourteen original founders are dead or in prison (Beittel, 2012). Other explanations for their success refer to their ability to incite terror, their novel *modus operandi* and their later adopted decentralized structure. Yet, other new criminal organizations have tried to imitate the Zetas' strategies like *la Familia Michoacana,* without enjoying the same results.

Despite all the enemies they face, the Zetas managed to survive and to expand more than any other group in a relatively short period of time. Following the same process as the

previous case study, the strength of the Zetas will be analyzed through reviewing the constitution of their battles, and their response to major organizational disruptions.

The Battles

Graph 4.1 presents the reported clashes the Zetas cartel faced from 2006 to 2015. Considering that from 2006 to 2010 the Zetas worked for the Gulf cartel, the battles chosen to include in the data are attributed specifically to the group of hired assassins. El Universal's archives included 7, 180 notes related to the Zetas during the period of time this study includes. The analysis presented here is based on 721 of these notes that met the criteria.

Graph 4.1.

The Zetas Reported Clashes 2006-2015
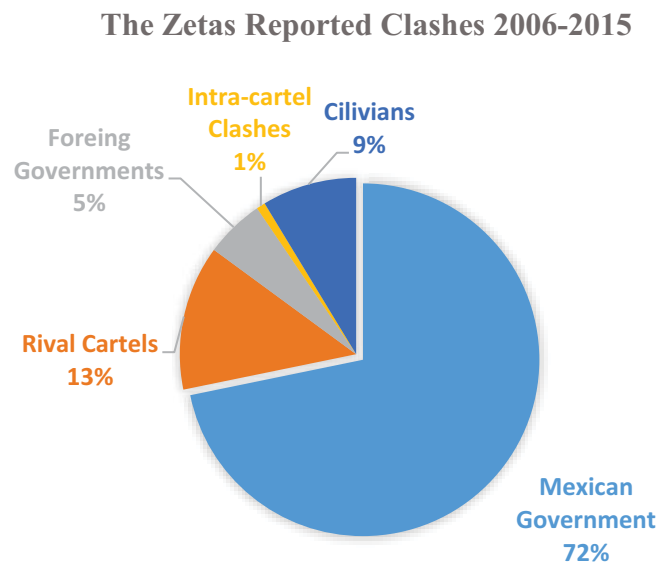
The data shows that most of the battles involved the Zetas versus the Mexican government, accounting for 72 percent of the reported clashes. During the war years, different governmental security forces have been responsible for these battles. For example, since 2007, when the Zetas started carrying bigger responsibilities in the Gulf cartel's operations, their main enemy was the Mexican army. The following year, the

governmental security body they fought the most was the Federal Police. From 2010 to 2012 the cartel was mostly targeted by the army once again. By 2014, their worst enemy became the *Grupo de Armas y Tácticas Especiales* (GATES).

Confrontations with rival cartels account for 13 percent, which seems a low share considering that they face more enemies than other drug cartels in Mexico. It is important to remember that in states such as Tamaulipas and Veracruz, in which this criminal group widely operates, clashes involving the cartels are never reported. There is a possibility that this figure is tentatively higher. The cartel has also faced prosecution from foreign governments liable for 5 percent of their battles. The foreign governments that target this organization are mainly the U.S. and Guatemala. Thus, three governments in Central America, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, founded the *Fuerzas Combinadas Especiales* (Combined Special Forces), to battle the Zetas, not mainly because of the drug dealing problem, but because they have been accounted responsible for the vanishing of thousands of migrants from those countries that travel through Mexico to get to the U.S. Just in a period of 6 months during 2009, 9,758 migrants where kidnapped presumably by the Zetas. There are estimates of 70 thousand migrants misplaced as of today (Guzman, 2016). Nonetheless, compared to the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas deal with the attacks of foreign governments at a much less extend.

What is especially interesting about the data gathered here, is that 9 percent of clashes reported have been with civilians, introducing a new actor on the list of enemies or victims of the cartel. The Zetas have been responsible for attacks in public areas in where dozens of innocent people have died. A resound case is the bombing in 2011 of the Casino Royal in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, which resulted in the death of 52 civilians. Another

occurrence is the bombing in 2008 in Morelia's historical center during a commemoration of the Mexican Independence Day, with 4 casualties and a dozen injured. As mentioned before, they have orchestrated the kidnapping and murder of thousands of migrants as the monstrous incidents of San Fernando demonstrate. Certainly, in Mexico, drug trafficking related violence is not uncommon, but the Zetas brought it to another level. Traditionally, drug cartels did not interfere with the lives of the average civilian, but the Zetas changed this dynamic, so much that it shows to be a noteworthy share of their reported battles. The interaction between these two actors takes an interesting turn once social media is added to the equation.

As shown in this section, the Zetas have a broader list of enemies to fight against compared to other criminal groups such as the Sinaloa cartel, but then again, they have managed to survive. The next section examines the way the Zetas have responded to mayor organizational setbacks.

Major Organizational Disruptions and the Zetas Response

Some of the major disruptions that the Zetas have experienced happened when they were still part of the Gul cartel, nevertheless such disturbances also affected the Zetas directly since the group worked with a degree of autonomy. This list of major organizational shocks encloses probably some of the most vicious and violent individuals that have ever run a drug trafficking organization in Mexico, capable of crimes that takes us back to the inquisition era, from torturing, dismembering and making puree out of their victims, to eating them.

Several of the major leaders of the Zetas did not witnessed the split from the Gulf cartel. This is the case of Jaime Gonzalez "El Hummer." He is one of the original founders

of the armed group that deserted from the Mexican military in 1999 to join the Zetas. He has been catalogued a bloodthirsty leader (Hernandez Herrera, 2014). El Hummer served as a sicario during nine years under the mandate of Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano. Their closeness opened the path for El Hummer to become head of the *plaza* in Reynosa, Tamaulipas. His domains included five key municipalities, among them his natal San Luis Potosi. He was captured by the Federal Police in November 7, 2008 and later admitted to the maximum-security penitentiary of *El Altiplano* in Almoloya de Juarez in the state of Mexico, sentenced to 35 years (Ibid).

According to Grayson (2014), the Zetas suffered another significant blow with the capture of Raul Lucio Hernandez Lechuga "El Lucky." Founder and leader of the cartel, he made the list of the 37 most wanted criminals in Mexico and was of high interest to the DEA (Semar, 2011). He was responsible for the cartel's criminal activities in ten states across the country including: Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Puebla, Veracruz, Tabasco, Campeche, Queretaro, San Luis Potosi, Quintana Roo, and Mexico. El Lucky was captured on December 12, 2011, by the marines in a ranch in Veracruz during a birthday celebration in his honor.

The organization as well experienced an important setback with the arrest of Flavio Mendez Santiago "El Amarillo" another original founder of the Zetas on mid-January 2011, in the state of Oaxaca. He was too on the list of the 37 most wanted criminals in the country. Mendez was recruited in 1993 and later became the leader of the cartel's *halcones*[41] (hawks), in the northern states on Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Later, he oversaw the operations in southern Mexico. He became in charge of one of the most

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[41] *Halcones* or hawks, are people working for the organization that serve as an informant or vigilant on the streets.

lucrative illicit activities of the cartel, controlling the flow of illegal immigrants coming from Central and South America (Insight Crime, 2011).

Later in 2012, the organization suffered two key shocks. In September, Ivan "El Taliban" was captured by the Mexican marines. This important figure on the organization was the appointed regional leader of the cartel in one of the most important ports, Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. In 2007, he was relocated to the state of Zacatecas. From there, he then ascended to the top echelons of the Zetas becoming a major financial operator and money launderer for the cartel. By 2012, he was serving as a top commander in several states across the Mexican territory. The arrest of El Taliban has been thought to be a set up (Pachico, 2012). According to some reports, before his capture, El Taliban was planning on turning against other top leaders of the organization (La Jornada, 2012). He was becoming a dangerous individual for the drug cartel.

Just a few days later, in October 7th, the marines confronted the Zetas in a rural road in upstate Coahuila. Later to know that one of the narcos killed during the shooting was the one and only Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano, the maximum leader of the organization at the time. Lazcano was also known as the "Z-3," or "the executioner," nickname earned due to his aggressive and ruthless way of conducting the business. He is considered one of the most merciless leaders of the Zetas. According to Dudley and Rios (2013), El Lazca became like a spiritual leader for the organization, recruits really respected him and felt pride on working for him. He created a sense of fraternity among the Zetas. Under his guidance, the cartel seemed the strongest, demonstrating a great degree of unity and stability.

After Lazcano Lazcano, Miguel Angel Treviño Morales alias "Z-40," rose to power. Although his mandate did not last long (less than a year), he left his mark. He was for a long time responsible for the plaza in Nuevo Laredo. Later, in 2007, he was sent to Veracruz to replace a high-ranking leader after his death. There, he controlled the drug trafficking in that corridor. Treviño also took over the pirated DVDs and CDs' business, and human trafficking. The capture of this capo has been one of the most important victories of Peña Nieto's administration. The U.S. has asked for his extradition but negotiations have been unsuccessful (Insight Crime, 2016).

The natural successor of Miguel Angel was his brother, Omar Treviño Morales the "Z-42." Omar Treviño had a long history, as his brother, working for the Zetas. Under his mandate, he continued the tradition of brutal violence. He has been catalogued as the responsible for the brutal happenings in San Fernando. His participation in criminal activities include extortions, kidnappings and drug trafficking. The DEA offered $5 million reward in exchange for information leading to his capture (Insight Crime, 2016; Perez Salazar, 2013). He has been considered a strong leader, however, by the time he took charge, the organization was having internal issues, and the split was foreseeable.

After reviewing the most significant organization setbacks the Zetas undergone until 2015, figure 4.1 reflects how the organization has reacted towards them, observing alterations or readjustment on their criminal activities before and after these shocks.

Figure 4.1.
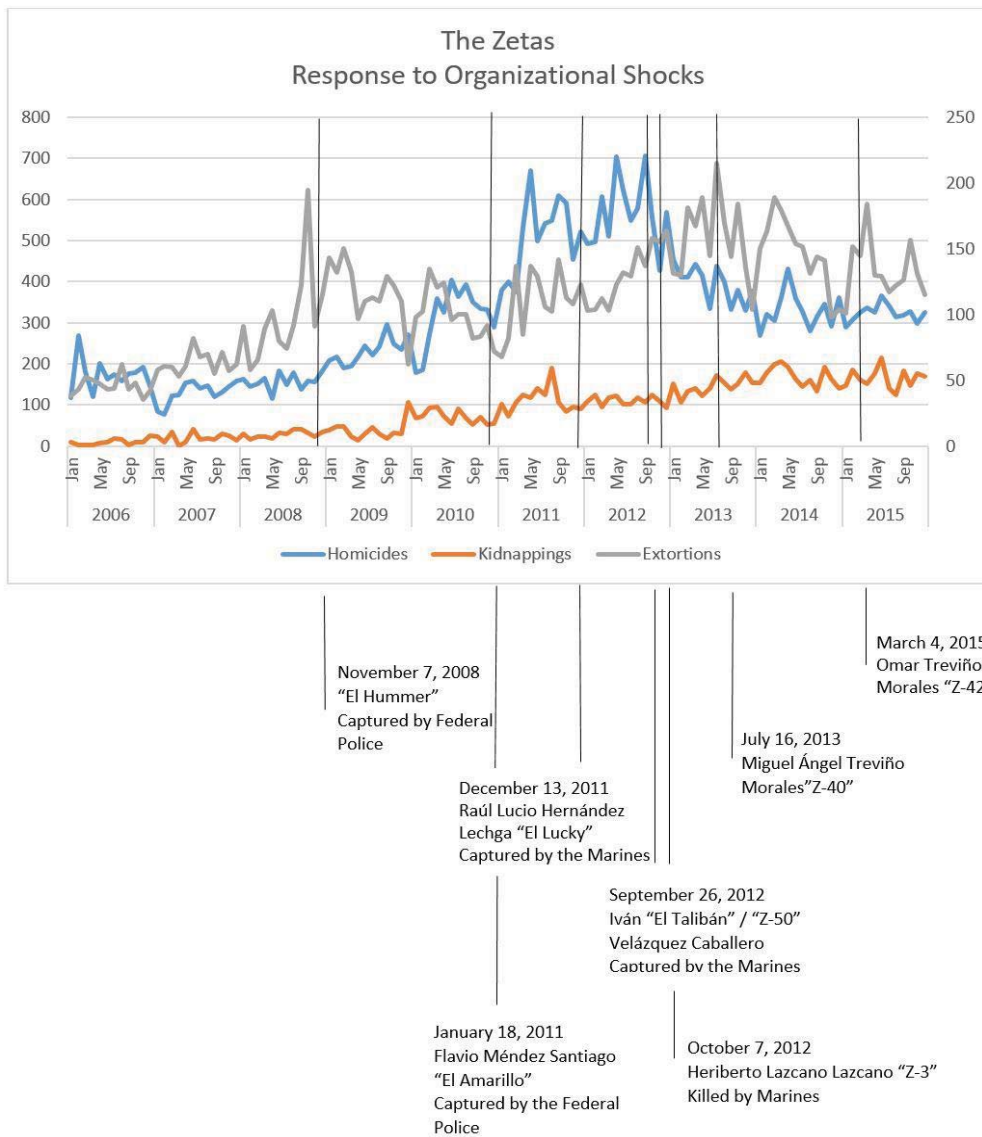
In the model, it can be observed that the indicators of violence and criminal activities start rising months after the extradition of Osiel Cardenas Guillen in 2007. Before this time, in 2006 and part of 2007, the figures remain relatively lower compared to the following years. As mentioned earlier, after the extradition of the leader to the U.S. in 2007 the Gulf cartel went through a restructuration process in which the Zetas were given more power and tensions started building internally. The increase of violence and criminal

activities during this time is reflected in the model. In the upcoming years, the Zeta's criminal activities reflect some spikes, especially in the number of homicides between 2011 and 2012, and after the loss of two important leaders "El Amarillo" and later "El Lucky." To put it in context, during those years the organization had not for long completely split from the Gulf Cartel. Also, it was during this time that the Zetas reached their highest level of growth and expansion throughout the Mexican territory. This is a period of intra-cartel disturbances and well as intense confrontations with other organizations, now also including the Gulf cartel, due to their eagerness of taking over enemy's turf. The rate of homicides reached its highest point between El Lucky's captured and the arrest of El Taliban on September of 2012. After this, the rate of violence decreased almost by half and stayed like that even after the death of Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano.

According to an analysis presented by Logan (2012), the death of El Lazca was not expected to have the same kind of operational impact that it would have had several years prior. This is also reflected in the model presented here. After his capture, probably one of the most vital setbacks for the Zetas, the indicators of presence do not seem to change much except for extortions which reach the highest level after his death. Dudley (2014), states that after the death of the bloody leader, the cartel faced division and disorganization. Although indicators of violence appear to be lower, indicators of criminal activities, especially extortions spiked during the power transition between El Lazca and Miguel Treviño and remain high for the rest of this study's timeframe.

It might be due to the transition between military-hierarchical to a more decentralized one that made the organization more resistant to mayor organizational shocks, and for this reason, the organization does not appear to destabilize meaningfully at

least until 2015. According to experts, a decentralized structural composition makes an organization more resilient to major organization setbacks. Also, theory states that when top leaders of criminal organizations are taken down, as discussed earlier, violence tends to spike. In the case of the Zetas, the trend does not appear to apply, since leaders became simply agents that can be quickly substituted or supplanted. This can be a variable that might help to explain why the indicators of violence and criminal activities through the war years have remain relatively steady. Finally, the cartel appears to be in constant turmoil, having transitory or short-term leaderships, this might be due to the highly decentralized nature they eventually adopted. This structural composition resulted in higher elasticity when major setbacks befall, solidifying their survival capacity. However, the internal constant turmoil can, in the long run, fraction the organization as is has happened to the Zetas at the present. This is not reminiscent in the model above since the split of the Zetas and the *Cartel del Noreste* happened in 2016 (Proceso, 2016), a year beyond the scope of this study.

The Zetas on Social Media

Like the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas have also taken advantage of technology and social media platforms. The Zetas got the international spotlight when major international journals such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, and academic outlets such as Yale Journal of International Affairs, followed up an unprecedented incident that has been called the "cyber war of Anonymous vs. the Zetas." The conflict consisted in an interchange of threats mainly via social media platforms between the two groups. A series of YouTube videos were uploaded by the hacktivists, in where they threatened the cartel to disseminate critical information about their physical operational network if they did not

comply with the liberation of three members of the hacktivists group, kidnapped during a demonstration in the state capital of Veracruz. The first of several videos was posted on October 6, 2011, it lasts two and a half minutes and has 645,106 views. In this video, a representative of Anonymous, in their characteristic attire (Guy Fawkes or Vendetta mask and a black suit), also externalize to the marines and the Mexican army they discomfort and enragement with the crimes committed by the Zetas, especially towards innocent people, and the impunity towards them.[42] What makes this case unique, is that never before a group of civilians so openly and successfully threatened a powerful drug cartel in Mexico. This case comes back later in this chapter.

The context under which social media usage functions within the Zetas' domains has unfolded differently from the setting under which the Sinaloa cartel operates. In these areas, especially in Tamaulipas and Veracruz, traditional media has been highly censured and social media platforms took over as an alternative outlet of information. The underlings of the virtual interactions between the Zetas, the authorities, and the citizenry, have created an unprecedented situation, altering in a way the dynamics of the drug war.

This section follows the path from the preceding chapter. A social network analysis was performed to illustrate the cartel's online presence. In this case, the analysis was conducted on Facebook. Contrary to the Sinaloa cartel members, it appears that Facebook is the social platform of the Zetas members' preference. After investigating their Twitter accounts, I found that their use of this outlet is limited and mostly systematic. Many of alleged Zetas members' Twitter accounts are short-lived, in other words, the accounts they

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[42] Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knkjQpe9SVA.

open last just a few weeks and serve a specific purpose. For instance, many of the posts are menacing messages tagging a specific person. Below is an example of these posts:

Los Zetas @loszetasoficial · 24 Oct 2015
@MVeronicaMartin Eres LA siguente a morir
View translation

Source: https://twitter.com/loszetasoficial

The post reads: "@MVeronica you are the next one to die." This particular account contains only three messages all of them in reference to killing Veronica.[43] It was active just for a few days. Again, these type of publications and life span of their accounts are apparently a common practice of the Zetas in Twitter. For this reason, it was not possible to build a reliable representation of their network on this platform, or conduct a proper analysis on its usage and content. Thus, it was feasible through their Facebook accounts. Graph 4.2 is a depiction of the Zetas cartel's Facebook network.

Directing a social network analysis on this platform was more challenging than doing it for Twitter since NodeXL (the software used to perform the analysis in this study), does not have the legal rights or authorization to download information from Facebook accounts. To construct the database for the analysis, personal accounts were examined one by one. Linking each individual node and edges manually through their friends in common until a network was unveiled. To proceed with the analysis a similar process from the previous case was tailed. Various centrality measures were run to find the most important

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[43] Veronica Martin is a Colombian girl who posted a series of offensive Tweets to the Mexican people during the passing of hurricane "Patricia." Her posts were retweeted by one of El Chapo's accounts in October 2015, and members of the Zetas sent their menacing messages as well.
Chapo's tweet available at: https://twitter.com/elchap0guzman_/status/657784180328132609?lang=en.

nodes in the network. This simplified version of the cartel's Facebook network, presents a

total of 142 nodes with a fan base of approximately 40 thousand friends and followers.

Graph 4.2.
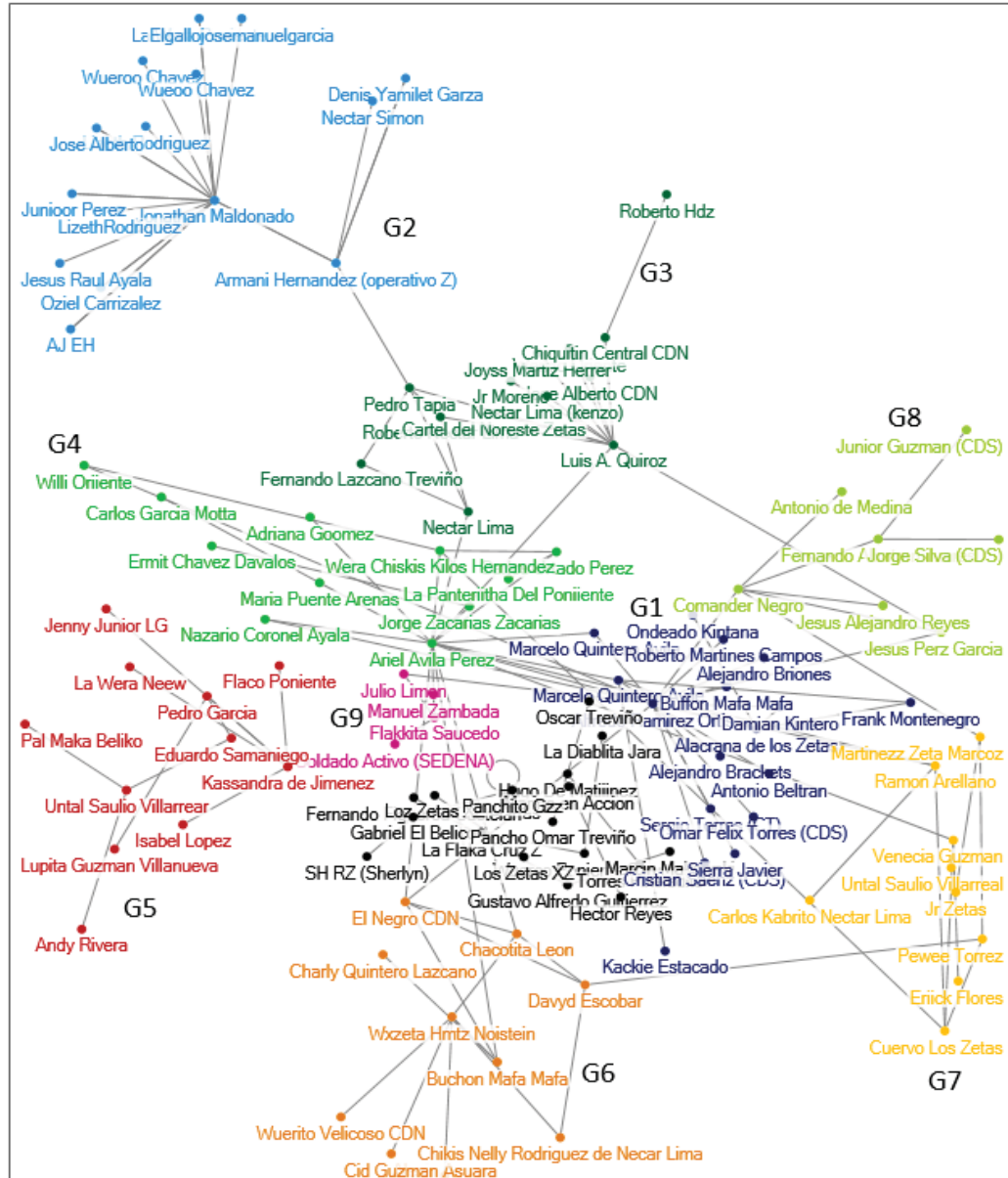
The Zeta's Facebook network exhibits a complex decentralized network. The illustration shows that their level of decentralization gives roots for additional subnetworks to emerge, mimicking their composition at the physical level. This network divides in various clusters forming nine main groups, each one offers different pieces of information about the cartel. For instance, G9 and G8 tells us that members of rival cartels and affiliates of Mexican security forces closely monitor their enemies through their social media profiles. In this case, Junior Guzman, a leader of the Sinaloa cartel and a central node in their network, Manuel Zambada, and Jorge Silva from the same illicit group, have befriended a couple of constituents of the Zetas, such as Jesus Alejandro Reyes and Antonio de Medina. Alike, a member of SEDENA (Secretary of National Defense) under the name of *Soldado Activo* (Active Soldier) is Facebook friends with Julio Limon and Flakkita Saucedo, persons with significant degree of centrality in the Zetas' Facebook network. Facebook is different from Twitter in the sense that on the first, an approved request in necessary to be registered as friends and have reciprocal access their information, also it depends on the privacy settings on each individual account. In other words, all parties here are totally aware of the access of rival groups to their information and the fact that they are interested in monitoring them through their accounts. The purpose of this could be strategical, to publicly maintain intelligence on each other.

Groups 7 and 6 (G7, G6) represent the newest faction of the organization and presently one of their worst enemies the *Cartel del Noreste* (CDN), many of these profiles were created in 2015, they are relatively new. In these accounts, it can be seen how some Zetas changed their Facebook status from "working for the Zetas" or "the Company" to "working for CDN." Through their posts the imminent rupture of the cartel can be

perceived. This will be further analyzed as this section unfolds. In G5 and G3 there a juxtaposition of their cells is reflected, formed by members of the Zetas Old School, Nectar Lima, and CDN. The next group, G4, corresponds mainly to accounts from a first generation of Zetas. Also in these groups, the organization's factions from other countries are detectable, there are Zetas from Bolivia, Peru, and the U.S. especially with geolocation in the state of Texas. In this group, the node with the highest degree of betweenness is located, Ariel Avila Perez, leader of the Zetas in Bolivia, who was later transferred to Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. G2 represents the Nectar Lima division of the cartel and G1 is a hub for rival cartel members' accounts. These profiles are linked to *Alacrana de los Zetas* and to Marcelo Quintero Avila, whose accounts have an important degree of centrality. Several members of the Sinaloa cartel, the Caballeros Templarios, and the Gulf Cartel are part of this fragment of the network.

The network does not present strong central figures, but there are a couple of nodes with high centrality. Notably, and inversely from the previous case study, the main capos of the Zetas, such as El Lazca, Miguel Angel Treviño, "El Hummer," or Omar Treviño, do not have Facebook or Twitter accounts. Some accounts under their names were found but some of them specify they are parodies. The rest of them do not have reliable content. If they do have social media accounts, they probably created them under another name or pseudonym, remaining far less obvious and exposed compare to El Chapo and top leaders of the Sinaloa cartel.

The social media presence of the Zetas is not as prominent as the Sinaloa cartel. Different from Twitter, Facebook just allow a limit of 5000 friends per account. Also, it is possible, as in Twitter, to "follow" accounts, nonetheless the number of followers on the

accounts studied here does not nearly compare to the Twitter followers base of the Sinaloa cartel. Still, the Zetas have thousands of followers. In the network presented previously, the entire universe is form by more than 47 thousand nodes. They do have strong presence on YouTube with about 196 thousand videos related to the cartel. The subject-matter of the Zetas' accounts is evaluated in the next section.

Facebook and YouTube Content Analysis

In the former chapter, terms such as *gruesome* and *vile* were used to describe the content on the accounts of the Sinaloa cartel members. Clearly, I was clueless and unprepared for the current case study. The Zetas have made decapitations their trademark to get horrid crimes attributed to them to spread terror. At one point in this study decapitation seemed a mild practice compared to what I found as the investigation progressed.

Some similarities between the Sinaloa and the Zetas' social media content where encountered; however, some significant differences stand out. This section reflects on the content and purpose of Facebook and YouTube usage.

Facebook

The Zeta's Facebook accounts content, among other things, reveals details about demographic characteristics of the members of the organization. Especially, the Zetas is a cartel that includes more women in their workforce than the Sinaloa cartel. Also, they recruit teenagers as young as 13 years old, both boys and girls, who are trained as soldiers, sicarios, or hawks. It seems like a military background is no longer required for the new recruits. This gives an idea on how low the barriers of entry for the organization have become.

The Zetas economic position and level of education are evident. In most of the accounts studied, it is apparent that compared to the members of the Sinaloa cartel, their narco-life is less glamorous. They do proudly show their new trucks or cars, but they are way less luxurious or extravagant as ones from their mayor rivals. Their writing skills and spelling on their posts show a low level of education in most of them. What is more, it is noticeable that a good part of their members are English speakers. Some of their accounts have posts written in Spanglish,[44] which is a widespread practice for the inhabitants on the U.S.-Mexican border area in where this cartel has important headquarters. This sheds light on the fact that a lot of the recruits of the Zetas come from the U.S. side of the border. Having English speaking collaborators eases the process of conducting business in the northern country. The results of the content analysis on Facebook are summarized in the graph below (graph 4.3).

Graph 4.3.

The Zetas Facebook Content Analysis

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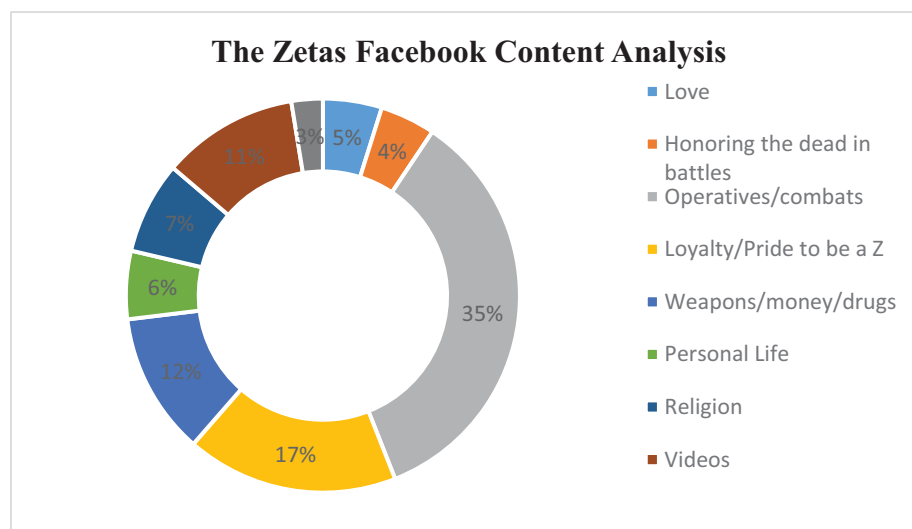
[44] *Spanglish* refers to a hybrid language combining words and idioms from both Spanish and English (Oxford, 2016a).

Similar to the Sinaloa cartel, a great percent of their content on Facebook is related to posting pictures and descriptions about their operatives and combats. 35 percent of their publications contain images of them ready to accomplish a mission, videos of live shootings and images of the aftermath of the battles. The visuals entail bodies massacred by bullets, and the interior of their vehicles stained with blood and burned out from the flames of grenades used during a confrontation.

The second major purpose of using Facebook (17 percent), is to praise their organization and its leaders. The Zetas show a lot of pride on been part of the cartel. They often post pictures of them in their uniforms and caps with the logo of the "company" as they call it. The following two major purposes are pictures of the weaponry they use, which are not as sophisticated as the ones the member of the cartel of Sinaloa show, they do not show gold plated or diamond inserted pistols or rifles. They post imagines of piles of money and bulks of drugs they traffic which account for 12 percent of the content. Next of the list, with 11 percent, are uploaded videos. Some of these videos are to honor cartel members lost in battles, but most of them are *narco*raps. Narcoraps are like narcorridos. In these songs they describe epic adventures, send messages to rivals, talk about what makes their cartel great and strong and honor their leaders almost as legendary heroes. It is possible that since the Zetas recruit people from Texans border cities, mainly from Laredo to Brownsville, they have more exposure and influence to rap and hip hop music.

Another category found in the content is religion (7 percent). The Zeta's main catholic saint in San Judas Tadeo. Yet, here we can be witnessing a case of syncretism[45] since they also pray to the Holly Death. They post composed pictures portraying San Judas

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[45] Syncretism refers to the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought (Oxford, 2016b).

Tadeo holding an AR-15 rifle with the Holly Death in the background. The narcoculture that has become embedded in Mexico during the last decade started popularizing the composite religion, mixing hints of *Santeria* and catholic practices. The purpose of posting these images is to pray for their lives and for protection during battles and missions.

One more sort of posts of members of this group are about their personal life. This is a type of content that was not found as much in the previous case study. These types of publications have pictures of friends, family, and their ordinary life. On these posts Zeta's members seem like regular people. It is hard to believe sometimes that the sicarios and sicarias are moms and dads, daughters and sons, brothers and sisters. Distinctly, there are mostly women in the organization the ones that expose their work and normal lives at par the most. Four of the accounts followed in this study were from women. Two of them were denounced killed on their own accounts by a family member or friend who wrote posts honoring their lives. The remaining categories in the content analysis are posts about love (5 percent), honoring Zetas that have been killed during battles (4 percent), and lastly other type of content (3 percent).

YouTube

Overall, the content on the videos the Zetas upload to YouTube and the details former members described on video interviews on how the cartel works are hard to conceive, digest, believe, reason, sources of true nightmares. The content on their videos truly demonstrates their monopoly of terror.

Graph 4.4 shows the shares of content the Zetas broadcast in YouTube. Most of the videos found (23 percent), are clips from different state or national news outlets related to the cartel of the "last letter," reporting the capture or death of a top leader, a cell dismantled,

confiscated weapons and drugs, and notes about their gruesome crimes. Next in quantity are threatening messages totaling 18 percent of the content. The Zetas are very successful at getting their menacing messages across this platform. The footage displayed here is hard to watch. The videos show for example, one or several captured members of rival cartels on their knees with Zetas behind them holding long-barreled weapons pointing at them in the meantime someone is shouting questions and been filmed. This is a strategy Zetas use to make members of opponent organization confess or give out information about their location, plans, missions, leaders, etc. The point of these type of videos is to make clear the consequences anyone would suffer if interfering with the Zetas. The sigh of terror in the eyes of the prisoners confessing knowing they will die at any second it truly chilling. Some of the videos are censured, complete versions can be found in web pages such as *Blog del Narco*, but some videos play the complete footage with someone getting tortured, shot or slowly beheaded.

Graph 4.4.
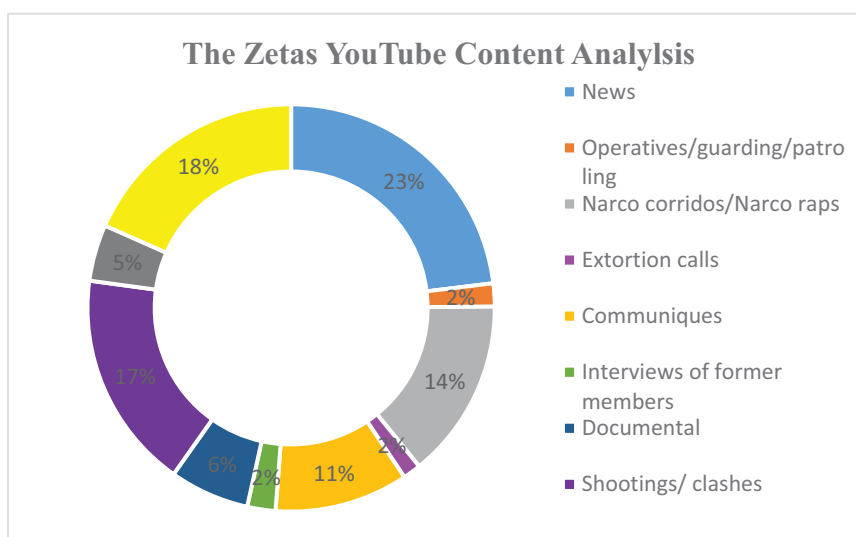
The next category are videos about shootings and clashes with 17 percent of the content. Here, live battles and their aftermath are publicized. Following are *Narcoraps* clips with 14 percent, next are communiques with 11 percent of the content. These reports contain information about the status of the cartel or future plans, for instance, they announce in which cities they will be fighting for turf, warning the citizens about not leaving their homes late at night during those days. 6 percent of the content are documentaries about the cartel most of them are in English. In some of them they present interviews with former or current cartel members in where they reveal in great detail how it is to be a Zeta. They tell stories about their recruitment process and the way they keep them disciplined. The interviewed describe the punishments they face, the same to men and women. A recurring technique is one call "*tablazos.*" The reprimand consists on being hit by a piece of good, specially tailored with very specific characteristics. The stick of wood, as they described, has specific measures with three holes in the middle in order to brake the air as they are hit with it leaving deep scars on their bodies. They apply this method to all members that made some type of mistake while working, such as missing to report a police car. The stories get darker when they talk about how they take care of the bodies of all the people they killed, from dissolving them on barrels full of acid, to making stew out of them. The rest of the videos are civilians reporting of the cartel operations or whereabouts with 5 percent, followed by isolated interviews with former members and extortion calls recorded by the victims each with 2 percent.

The Changing Dynamics of the Drug War: A War of All Against All

A drug war is usually fought between the government or state security forces and drug cartels, so threats flowing among these agents is expected. Yet, based on the data

gathered from the content analysis in YouTube, an undercurrent changing aspect of the war can be perceived. In the "threats" category analyzed in the previous section, the exchange of messages does not only happen between the usual actors (the government or rival drug cartels), the hostile interactions include civilians as well. In this subsection, the menacing interchanges are further explored.

The shares of these threats are displayed on Graph 4.5. The data shows that just 5 percent of the hostile messages occur between the Zetas and the government. A major part, 78 percent, of the threats presented in the YouTube content are among the Zetas and other rival cartels. The Zetas have received 48 percent of the menacing messages from rival groups and the Zetas are responsible for 30 percent of the generated messages. But then, civilians come into the picture. 17 percent of the threats that are posted on YouTube videos are targeted from Zetas to citizens (10 percent), and 7 percent are threats from civilians against the cartel.

Graph 4.5.

The Zetas Share of Threats
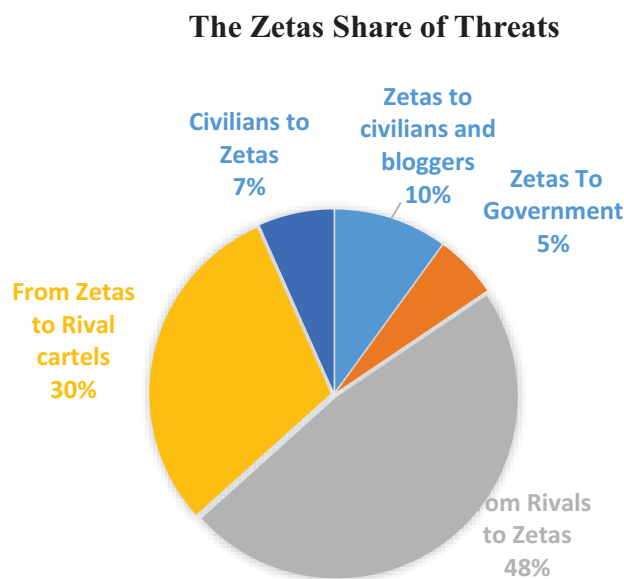
Civilians became active participants in the drug war, adding yet another enemy fighting against the Zetas. Briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, citizens in states such as Tamaulipas and Veracruz, in where traditional media has been harshly censored, and impunity is high, social media became a source of information. And with anonymity playing a vital role, civilians use social media also as an instrument and platform to report on the cartels and the injustices they are suffering. Yet, this not only provoked retaliation from the Zetas towards civilians reporting on them, but also prosecution from the government.

With the upraising on the use of web-based social platforms, the control of information got difficult for the government and the cartels to regulate. They took some measures. On the one hand, in addition to the violations of human rights from the military civilians have witness since the war started (Human Rights Watch, 2016), later, they also face retribution from the authorities for reporting drug war related issues on social media. Some state governments have made the reporting by civilians of drug related issues on these platforms a crime. In the state of Veracruz, for example, reporting on a shooting or a blockade on social media that are not proven accurate is now considered a misdemeanor under the charges of "terrorism and sabotage," which under the Mexican law can result in a 30-year sentence (CNN Mexico, 2011).

On the other hand, the cartels are also trying to dissuade civilians for reporting through extreme violent approaches. Not only Mexico became one of the most dangerous countries for journalists killed by cartels (Garza Ramos, 2015), but also the Zetas started killing cyber activists and bloggers that were trying to fill out the informational vacuum traditional media left when it comes to reporting on the drug war. There are some renowned

occurrences in where these dynamics of the war are notorious. For example, the case of the murder by the Zetas of Maria Elizabeth Macias who reported under the pseudonym "NenaDLaredo," on the page of *Nuevo Laredo en Vivo*. In this portal, heated interchanges about the drug war took place, also real-time information about cartel clashes in the city were constantly reported. The page urged people to report on cartels and the military whereabouts for the sake of their own survival (Illif and Luhnow, 2011). Two weeks later in the same city, the bodies of two young men were found hanging out of a bridge with another note,[46] again signed by the Zetas, mentioning and menacing the authors and participants of three web sites and blogs, including the most popular *Blog del Narco,* to stop with the reporting (La Nacion, 2011). Later, in Reynosa, Tamaulipas, on October 17, 2014, Twitter exploded with the feeds of the assassination of Doctor Maria del Rosario Fuentes Rubio, collaborator of the page *Valor por Tamaulipas* that served as another platform of civil journalism. The doctor was reported missing for a few days until a series of messages were posted on her Twitter page. The messages are presented below:

Source: https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elmundo/4-257754-2014-10-18.html

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[46] Sensitive image available at: http://www.lanacion.com.ar/1406114-mexico-asesinados-y-colgados-por-denunciar-en-twitter-asuntos-narcos.

In the first post, she states: "Friends and family, my real name is Maria del Rosario Fuentes Rubio, I am a doctor and today my life has come to an end." In the second she warns Twitter users not to make the same mistake as she did (reporting on cartels), "nothing is gained from it, on the contrary, today I realize that I found death with nothing in return," she continued, "they are closer than you think." On her last post, she advices Twitter users that report on *Valor por Tamaulipas* pages to close their accounts, "do not put your families at risk, like I did, I plead for their forgiveness."[47] Finally the last post includes a picture of her lifeless body. The authors of the homicide where never prosecuted, found or convicted, which adds to the frustration and indignation of the citizenry. Despite of the cartel horrid attempt to stop the flow of information via social media, people continue to report on them until this day. Some others have faced the same faith as the cases just mentioned.

Another less tragic example in which a group of civilians threatened the Zetas, was the previously mentioned episode, the so called "cyber war" between the Zetas and the hacktivist group Anonymous. In brief, members of Anonymous publicly demanded the Zetas, through social media, the liberation of three of their members kidnapped during a demonstration on the capital of Veracruz, the incidence took place back in October 2011. The hashtag *#OpCartel* (created particularly to get mass exposure on the issue) and the particularly of this asymmetrical interaction got the attention of people all over the world, since the story, as the expression goes, seems to be taken out of a Hollywood movie, literally. There is a forthcoming film about the case with the tentative title "Anonymous vs. Zetas: We don't Forget" starring Daniel Radcliffe (Harry Potter).[48]

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[47] The tweets were translated by the author.

[48] Some experts are more skeptic about these social media portals and their interactions. For example, Correa-Cabrera and Nava (2012) theorize that pages like *Valor por Tamaulipas* have been strategically created and manipulated by government officials to create psychological fear on society, with the sole purpose of

One last example to illustrate how complex the interaction between actors in the drug war has become, is the time when the citizens, the cartels, and the government united forces to fight a common front, the Zetas, in the middle of chaos. Three main drug cartels in Mexico, *Carteles Unidos* under the lead of the Sinaloa cartel, got together to get rid of the Zetas (Vega, 2011). This estrange occurrence took place sometime around autumn 2011. Although there are not official records from the government, during my investigation on the content of the social media of the Sinaloa cartel, on the Twitter account presumably owned by El Mayo, it is stated that the government had asked the cartel to aid them on their fight against the Zetas. During this time, through narco mantas and social media, the Sinaloa cartel urged the citizenship in Tamaulipas, Veracruz, Zacatecas, and Nuevo Leon to report on the Zetas for them to find them. Citizens responded to the request. They posted on Facebook and Twitter pages tagging members of the Sinaloa cartel informing them of houses used by the Zetas to keep kidnapped people, drugs, or weaponry. They informed about small stores and places they operated, and even reported on places members of the Zetas gathered or lived.

Social Media and Organizational Shocks

The main puzzle of this dissertation revolves around the question of whether or not the use of social media by the drug cartels has any influence on their survival capacity. Figure 3 shows the interaction between the Zetas' Facebook usage and mayor

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legitimizing the war on drugs. The expert even suggests that there are doubts about the legitimacy of the episode between the Zetas vs the hacktivists Anonymous, with the same underlying purpose of cultivating distress. The expert proposes that the incident might have been an experiment ran by the Mexican government or even external entities to gather intelligence through social media.

Article available at: https://patnet2012.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/guadalupe-correa-cabrera-jose-nava-losing-the-monopoly-of-violence.pdf.

organizational setbacks. As in the Sinaloa cartel case study, in this model the media censorship in Mexico in 2011 is included. Here, it is considered as a mayor organizational shock since exposure on mainstream media became unavailable for the Zetas to spread messages. Figure 4.2 shows the online behavior (on Facebook) before and after each mayor organizational setback.

It is expected to see that there is no social media (Facebook) activity from 2006 to mid-2011, since the usage of social media in Mexico was taking over in 2010, with the adoption process taking some time. Then, between 2012 and 2013 the use of Facebook from members of the Zetas ascends significantly. The data suggests that by 2013, the Zetas greatly adopted social media for their communications' strategies. But it is until 2015 that their Facebook activity reaches its highest point, particularly at the time during the arrest of Omar Treviño. As the SNA performed on their Facebook network indicated, hints of the new faction and now *Cartel del Noreste,* were showing, and during the leadership of Omar Treviño there was already some internal fractioning of the cartel. This turbulent period is reflected in the activity of the Zetas and transitioning Norestes' Facebook pages. It is important to consider that the thriving Facebook presence can be due to the recruitment of young soldiers, some of them still teens, which is a generation that tends to social media significantly.

Figure 4.2.

The Zetas' Facebook Usage and Organizational Shocks 2006-2015

November 7, 2008
"El Hummer"
Captured by Federal
Police

November 5, 2010
Ezequiel Cardenas Guillen
"Tony Tormenta"
Killed by the Marines

January 18, 2011
Flavio Méndez Santiago
"El Amarillo"
Captured by the Federal
Police

Media Censorship

September 26, 2012
Iván "El Talibán" / "Z-50"
Velázquez Caballero
Captured by the Marines

October 7, 2012
Heriberto Lazcano Lazcano "Z-3"
Killed by Marines

July 16, 2013
Miguel Ángel Treviño
Morales"Z-40"
Arrested by Marines

March 4, 2015
Omar Treviño
Morales "Z-42."
Federal Police

The Analysis

The Zetas adopted social media to their communication strategies running a successful psychological warfare. But, following the hypotheses presented on this dissertation here I ask: has the Zetas' exposure on social media increased their vulnerability

to get more targeted by rival groups? To assess this question, the relationship between social media presence and reported clashes is evaluated. Graph 4.6 shows the association of the two variables.

Graph 4.6.

The Zetas Facebook Usage and Reported Clashes 2006-2015
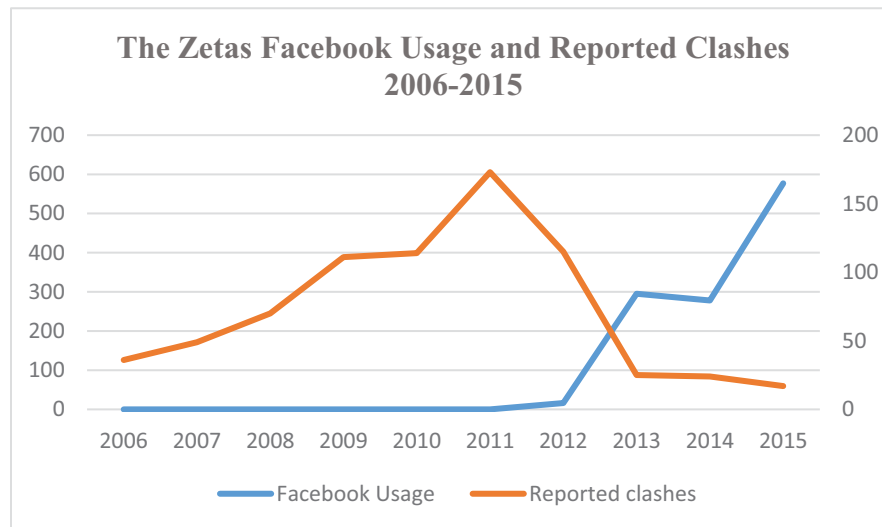
Overall in the graph, the data does not exhibit a positive relationship between the use of social media and the behavioral pattern of the cartel's clashes. Table 4.1 displays the statistical correlation between the two variables.

Table 4.1.

Correlations

		Facebook Use	Clashes
Facebook Use	Pearson Correlation	1	-.386**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
Clashes	Pearson Correlation	-.386**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The relationship between two variables demonstrate a significant (at the 0.01 level) but negative correlation. A negative correlation tells us that as one variable goes up, the other one tends to go down or vice versa. In other words, as the use of social media increases, reported clashes in where the Zetas where involved diminished. However, since Pearson correlation co-efficient values range from +1 to -1, a -.386 is considered a week correlation.

Conclusions

So far, two different cases have been presented. The first case study explored the traditionalist Sinaloa cartel, and the presents a non-traditional, the Zetas. The Zetas broke with the traditional *modus operandi* of the Mexican cartels, diversifying their activities, and adopting a more aggressive expansionist strategy, but they also have faced major internal problems, and probably more enemies than any other criminal group in Mexico. At its beginning, the former armed wing of the Gulf cartel, functioned under a military-hierarchical structure, and later restructured into a franchise model. The new structural prototype was more decentralized and facilitated the creation of a more cellular composition.

Particularly, during the mandate of Felipe Calderon (2006-2012), the Zetas presented an extraordinary thus unusual rate of growth. Interestedly, during Calderon's administrations, the Zetas experienced more attacks by the government security forces in comparison to other cartels. Paradoxically, it was the organization that grew the most within Mexico and expanded to other countries between 2010 and 2012 (Ravelo, 2013; p. 54). But also, the cartel's violent ways gained them many other enemies to fight, including civilians. After the dead of Heriberto Lazcano, the cartel has weakened but it still one of

the most influential in the country, with a strong and deep intrinsic network under which they work that has not been corrupted.

Like the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas have also implemented the use of social media to their strategies. Dissimilar has been the way the drug war and its dynamics have morphed throughout the war years in the areas in where the Zetas operate. It is suggested here, that social media became an instrument through which civilians became active participants of the drug war directly attacking the Zetas by reporting on them in social media. This situation gradually progressed into a war of all against all: the Zetas killing civilians for reporting on Twitter or blogs, government incarcerating civilians for reporting, not to forget the violations of human rights by the military, civilians organizing demonstrations claiming justice and security from the government, and civilians allying with Zetas' rivals to get rid of them.

The Zetas' usage and platform of choice is somewhat different from the Sinaloa cartel. This cartel has made more use of Facebook. Analogous to the Sinaloa cartel's Twitter network, the Zetas' Facebook network corresponds to their later adopted physical configuration, presenting a highly decentralized structure. In addition, the data suggest that both cartels have used social media for public relations purposes. In the Sinaloa cartel, their social media environment and public response exhibited major support from the citizenship, they are really admired and loved. People seek for their protection, even people living in other states like Tamaulipas have asked for their help, as was earlier exposed in this chapter. The Zetas have made use of this strategy as well, but they have used it with the opposite purpose. One of the specificities on the way the cartel operates and what has differentiated them from others, is the fact that they function by fomenting terror. The Zetas

love to be feared. Social media has been another outlet for them to spread their horror. Through the content on these platforms it is also visible that they are successful at attracting young people to enlist on their workforce. They do this by demonstrating that by being part of the organization you will have a good paid job and give you some type of power "status." The *narcoraps* can work also as a tool of attraction, especially young adults or teenagers which is their biggest niche for recruitment from both sides of the border.

The results on the analysis of this chapter suggest that there is no convincing evidence that the use of social media has made the Zetas cartel more exposed and an easier target for attacks. On the contrary, social media has successfully worked for the organization establishing a powerful psychological warfare instigating fear in society so they can conduct their business without intrusions. However, this case study shows that the Zetas present an important vulnerability, which was made obvious when the group Anonymous threatened them to expose their physical operative network through social media. The cartel quickly responded and succumbed to the activist's request, indicating that if used effectively, social media can also work as their Achilles heel.

Chapter 5

THE CABALLEROS TEMPLARIOS CARTEL

"No pido clemencia ni benevolencia para mi persona. Soy un delincuente, reconozco que me equivoqué. Tendré que pagar en su momento [...]. Cometí muchos crímenes. Arrepentido estoy. A mi Dios padre todopoderoso es al que le voy a pagar." [49]

Servando Gomez "La Tuta"

The Caballeros Templarios were born on March 8th, 2011, after splitting from La Familia Michoacana cartel. Their arrival was announced on banners distributed throughout Michoacán, the Mexican state in which the criminal organization is mainly based, announcing the Templarios were going to take over the altruist activities previously performed by La Familia, asserting that their mission was to protect the sacred, free, and sovereign state of Michoacán (Insight Crime, 2017).

La Familia Michoacana cartel started as a communitarian police, it also had a strong religious foundation. By 2010, they had established themselves as one of the most powerful and bloodiest criminal organizations in Mexico. They infamously announced their arrival by throwing five human heads in the dance floor of a night club in Uruapan, Michoacán, on September 7, 2006 (Marquez, 2006). The cartel grew strong building a wide network of

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[49] "I do not ask for mercy or benevolence for myself. I'm a delinquent, I recognize that I was wrong. I will pay when it is due time [...]. I committed many crimes. I am truly sorry. To my God, the Father Almighty, is to whom I will repay." This is the last audio statement La Tuta uploads on YouTube on November 18th, 2014. The video has 301,985 views. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTfjUkyj4nc.

distribution of methamphetamines and conducted business in the Netherlands, India, China and Bulgaria, and various cities in the U.S. La Familia experienced a massive internal rupture after the supposed death of Nazario Moreno, their main leader and founder, and its power and influence decreased significantly. After this, the Caballeros Templarios emerged.

The Caballeros Templarios cartel took their name from the medieval Knight Templars that fought during the crusades defending the Catholic faith during the XII and XIV centuries. This cartel has differentiated itself from the others in Mexico for their semi-religious ideology and rhetoric. There is some mysticism that surrounds the cartel and their discourse is one of defendants and protectors of their land and people. They kill in the "name of God."

Circa 2013, the Caballeros Templarios were considered the third most powerful drug trafficking group in Mexico, just after the Sinaloa and the Zetas cartels. Besides their dominance on the state of Michoacán, they have also presence in Edomex, Jalisco, and Morelia, states highly disputed by other criminal organizations. The Templarios' growth was exceptionally accelerated, in just two years the organization won significant territory in the Michoacanian communities. The cartel got to be considered one of the most violent organization in the country having inherited the *modus operandi* from La Familia (Najar, 2014). After the capture of their last influential leader, Servando Gomez "La Tuta," in February 2015, the organization debilitated considerably.

The Templarios also adopted social media to their communication strategies. Indeed, the most famous Mexican *cybersicario* "El Broly Banderas," is a member of this cartel (Cox, 2013). El Broly was a pioneer of sicarios' practice of making their criminal

lives public and attractive. Journals from all over the world have published entire articles devoted to the sicario. However, the usage of social media by the Templarios differentiates them from other criminal groups.

This chapter centers on the Caballeros Templarios cartel. The first section presents the cartel's background, structure, and their present status. The second evaluates the cartel's survival capacity by observing the way the Templarios respond to main organizational setbacks. The third section evaluates the presence and use of social media by the organization. This part as well offers an examination on the effect social media usage has on the cartel's confrontations. In the last section concluding remarks are presented.

The Caballeros Templarios: A Narco-Sect

The state of Michoacán, home of the Templarios, is a territory that has been and still is, disputed by other strong drug trafficking organizations. Its location and geographical conditions makes it attractive for cartels (Solera, 2013; Macias, 2014). In the south, the state borders the Pacific Ocean, holding one of the most important commercial ports in the Americas, the Lazaro Cardenas port, which has served as a point of entry for cocaine from South America and chemical precursors from Asia to produce methamphetamines, cocaine, and heroin (Noel, 2015). The port is a hub for commercial shipments that are distributed to the U.S. and Canada. Michoacán also enjoys different climates and miles of mountainous territories ideal for the growing of limes, avocados, mango and banana. Yet, the climatic conditions are also ideal for the plantation of marijuana and poppy crops. In addition, the vast forests make detection by the authorities challenging facilitating the establishment of clandestine laboratories to produce synthetic drugs, and serving also as a refuge for criminals. The region that is especially battled over

by various groups is called *Tierra Caliente* (Hot Land), in reference to the highly violent environment the area is constantly under. The region is conformed by the municipalities of: Tepaltepec, Buenavista, Apatzingan, Paraculo, Francisco Mugica, Gabriel Zamora, Huacana and Churumuco. Nevertheless, the location of Michoacán also works as a disadvantage for drug trafficking organizations. The state is a little more than six hundred miles south the Mexican-American border. This means that they must negotiate and pay fees to other cartels to allow them to transport drugs up north.

The state of Michoacán is known as well for political alternation, having different parties governing its 113 municipalities (Astorga and Shirk, 2010). This has made the political-narco relationships complicated, and violent. Michoacán is considered a week state, or even a failed state, regarding its institutional dysfunctionality and deep-rooted corruption (Castellanos, 2013), adding one more condition to the idyllic environment for organized crime to flourish and operate.

Before La Familia Michoacana, the group that used to control the drug business in the area was a group known as *El Milenio* (The Millennium) that worked along the Tijuana cartel (Insight Crime, 2017). This relationship started to crumble when members of *El Milenio* felt abused by the outsider cartel exploiting their resources. Members of this group contacted the Gulf cartel to establish an alliance to take the Tijuana cartel out of Michoacán. The Gulf cartel sent their then armed wing the Zetas. By 2003, the Zetas stood as the main cartel in the region. Members of *El Milenio* were trained by them, but the locals did not support the vicious ways under which the Zetas conducted their business. During the following years, the Zetas put the Michoacanian communities under a lot of distress; resentment started building up once they expanded their methamphetamines production in

the state. This is when La Familia appeared, founded by Nazario Moreno Gonzalez alias "El Chayo," in 2006.

There are various versions of what happened to this cartel. After the first alleged death of their messianic leader Nazario Moreno on December 9th, 2010, the organization lost significant power. Some experts consider that La Familia mutated into the Templarios just "changing their name" (Castillo, 2011; Otero, 2011). There is another version which states that La Familia continued operating under the leadership of Jose de Jesus Mendez "El Chango," one of its co-founders, but then disbanded completely after his capture on June 2011 (CNN Mexico, 2011).

Early mentioned, after the "death" of Nazario Moreno, La Familia experienced an internal rupture. On March 2011, co-founders Enrique Plancarte Solis "El Kike," Servando Gomez "La Tuta," and Diosinio Loya Plancarte "El Tio," formed a new group, the Caballeros Templarios. A great part of the members of La Familia left with them (Insight Crime, 2017).

In their beginnings, following La Familia's religious path, the cartel was founded as a kind of a cartel-sect. Their recruitment tactics were strict. To get accepted as part of the Templarios, an application with a picture had to be reviewed by the Council, formed by the founders. If accepted, the members had to pledge to the organization for life. The new recruits were initiated in rituals held in the mountains in where they used Roman knights-like attires and helmets. They also held public ceremonies in where they unveiled altars in honor of the Templarios cartel throughout several communities in *Tierra Caliente*. The altars had as their main figure the now "canonized" Nazario Moreno "El Chayo" the messiah of the Templarios.

The Caballeros Templarios cartel, aimed to construct an image of honor and altruism around their organization. They follow an ethical code "The Code of the Caballeros Templarios of Michoacán." When entering the organization, the new recruits were given a 22-page booklet in where all rules, ideology and procedures are written and had to be strictly followed. In their inauguration ceremonies, the new members pledged to help the poor, fight against materialism, respect women and children, not to kill for money, not use drugs. They went as far as conducting random drug testing. It was prohibited for cartel members to do drugs, drink and drive, to steal, kidnapping, and assault women (Te Interesa, 2012). If rules were broken, they will pay with their own lives. The Templarios also opened clinics to treat addictions. Centers that later served as a mayor source for recruits. The organization granted loans to farmers, they also built schools and churches throughout the region to gain the support of the community.

Structure and Modus Operandi

The Templarios inherited a pyramidal semi-religious structure from La Familia. Every leader had a specific rank in the organization. At the top, they had four leaders[50] (Nazario Moreno, Enrique Plancarte Solis, Servando Gomez and Diosinio Loya Plancarte); next on the ladder where 100 *plaza* leaders, and at the base about 500 sicarios (Reyez, 2014).

Their modus operandi shifted with time. Illegal activities that were previously prohibited under their code of ethics, such as extortion and kidnappings, became a major source of income for the cartel. Another big part of their profits came from coercion like

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[50] Some authors have pointed out that the organization had seven main leaders, adding Ignacio Renteria Andrade "El Nacho," o "El Cenizo," Samer Jose Servin Juarez and Pablo Magana "La Morsa" to the list (Reyez, 2014; Vela, 2014). Thus, they have not been as influential as the other four leaders.

cobro de piso or *cobro por protección*.[51] Eighty-five percent of formal business in Michoacán were obliged to pay for this "service" (Insight Crime, 2017). The Templarios got to dominate the economy and production on their principal areas if influence. This practice caused the closing of many local business and the fled of hundreds of Michoacanians to other states. Alternative profits came from paid executions including political assassinations (Perez Salazar, 2014).

The cartel uses propaganda techniques to generate a climate of social intimidation to amplify the impunity margin under which they operated justifying their criminal conduct, at the same time, they somehow try to maintain their image of benefactors and vigilantes. To achieve their objectives, they resort to highly violent tactics that have victimized entire communities. Violence towards authorities and citizens is a fundamental part of their operative logic (Otero, 2011).

The Cartel Today

After the capture of the last standing leader Servando Lopez "La Tuta," it is not clear if the Caballeros Templarios are completely extinct. There are two groups that were created by deserters of La Familia, the Templarios, and self-defense groups, these groups are the *Viagras* and the H3 also known as "the third brotherhood." These groups have established strong alliances with Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion. It has been contemplated that Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes "El Mencho," leader of the latter cartel is likely to assume the control of Michoacán's *plaza* (Especiales LSR, 2015).

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[51] "Cobro the piso" or "cobro for proteccion" refers to a tax or fee cartels charge to business or street vendors to grant them permission to work and given them "protection." This is a similar tactic that the Zetas and La Familia implemented.

However, some reports have implied that a reactivation of the Templarios cartel is taking place as allegedly they are reoccupying territory on the *Sierra Madre's* mountainous region in Michoacán (Liemann, 2016).

Survival Capacity: The Different Fronts

Michoacán, native state of former President Felipe Calderon, was the state to where the first wave of troops was deployed, a total of 6, 500 elements, soon after he announced the militarization of the war on drugs in 2006. Also known as *Operación Michoacán*, this action marked the starting point of the conflict (Grillo, 2011).

Three years later, on July 2009, the Secretary of National Defense (Sedena) sent an additional 2,500 military elements to reinforce the security forces in *Tierra Caliente*. More recently, in October 2015, under Peña Nieto's administration, 5,000 more elements from the military, marines, and the Gendarmerie, where deployed to the state, to reinforce once again the fight against the drug cartels.

In this context, Michoacán is one of the states that throughout the drug war years has presented a higher degree of militarization and violence. Not only has the state faced strong military presence, and violent drug cartels fighting for turf, but also the creation of paramilitary self-defense groups supported by the government. These groups arose from the most affected communities to fight against the violation of human rights from the military and federal police, and the abuse and terror of the Templarios. Jaded for the abuse and intimidation, farmers and businessmen took the security of their communities on their own hands under the leadership of medical doctor Jose Manuel Mireles Valverde. On February 24, 2013, they established the first self-defense groups in the municipalities of Tepalcatepec and Buenavista Tomatlan, in *Tierra Caliente*. During some time, the

government supported these groups as they grew stronger. In some areas, the groups accomplished what the government could not, they managed to expel the Caballeros Templarios from their communities regaining their control and peace, at least for a brief period of time.

Nonetheless, despite the high concentration of security forces, the state has been the cradle of two of the organization that got to be amongst the most powerful in the country such as La Familia and the Caballeros Templarios. Hence, these two criminal groups did not enjoy the same faith as their rivals, Sinaloa and the Zetas cartels, since they have debilitated considerably. How did the Caballeros Templarios managed to get to the top in a short period of time under the high concentration of security forces, the pressure of enemy cartels, and the constant attacks of self-defense militia groups in Michoacán? What led to their accelerated debilitation?

On this section, the survival capacity of the Caballeros Templarios is studied. Assessing which actors target them the most and the regularity of their attacks gives a good indication on the landscape under which the cartel operated and the symmetry or asymmetry of their enemies in terms of capabilities. Also, an analysis of the Templarios' response to major organizational setbacks is presented.
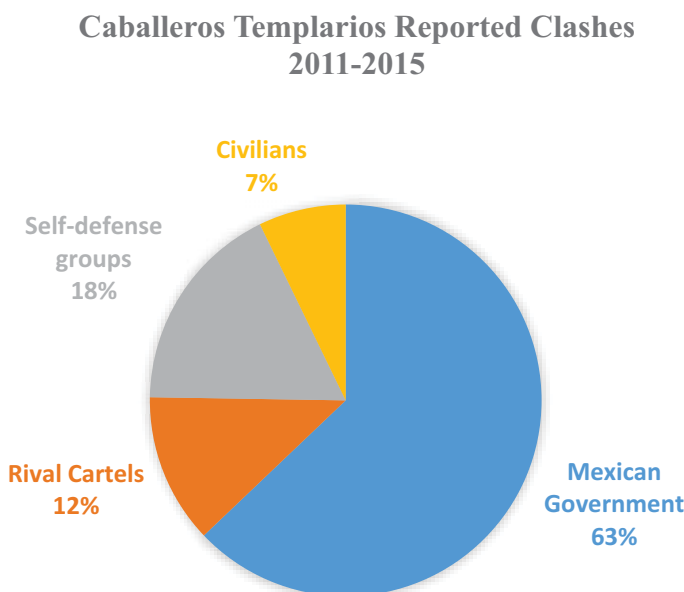
Confrontations

Early stated, the progression of the war on drugs in the state of Michoacán developed into an extremely violent conflict. There is a high concentration of military forces fighting the violent drug cartels, and cartels battling each other. In addition, the expansion of self-defense militia groups and their growing influence throughout the state

during 2013 and 2015, added another level of violence to the conflict since all of these actors were highly armed.

The confrontations the cartel faced from its beginning in 2011 to 2015 are presented below. The data was gathered from El Universal's archives. This study is based on 96 reports in which the Templarios were specifically involved. Graph 5.1 illustrates the different actors fighting the Templarios and their share of confrontations.

Graph 5.1.

Caballeros Templarios Reported Clashes
2011-2015

Civilians
7%

Self-defense
groups
18%

Rival Cartels
12%

Mexican
Government
63%

The data shows that government security forces have been responsible for 63 percent of the clashes the Caballeros Templarios have entailed since the organization began to operate. The Federal Police is the security body that mostly targeted the organization, followed by the military.

The actor that follows on their list of enemies are the self-defense groups. On the cases of the Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas, rival cartels where usually the second biggest adversaries for the criminal organization. Nevertheless, in the case of the Templarios, the

self-defense groups became their second biggest enemy. But, these once united forces fighting for a common interest started suffering inter fragmentation antagonizing each other. Some groups joined other cartels or started cooperating with outsider criminal organizations such as Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion. On March 2014, the government captured self-defense leader of La Ruana, Hipólito Mora accused of participating on the homicides of two members of other self-defense groups (Crespo, 2014). Later, on June 27th, 2014, Mireles Valverde founder of the militia groups, was arrested by the Mexican authorities. With this, the self-defense groups disintegrated. Former members went back to their normal lives just to find themselves and their families under the menace and retaliation of the Caballeros Templarios. Entire families were slaughter or hung up from bridges in the entrance of the communities from where the self-defense groups had once expelled the criminal organization. During the investigation of the reported clashes, it was interesting to find that many of the links to news reporting on the successes of the self-defense groups in battling the Caballeros Templarios were broken or deleted.

The third actor the Templarios confronted the most were rival cartels with 12 percent of the share. The Zetas and the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion stand as the criminal organizations the Templarios had major tensions with. Lastly, 7 percent comprises clashes with civilians. In the previous chapter, the Zeta's case presented a similar trend of civilians emerging as an active player and target in the drug war. This tendency shows again in this case, but not in the Sinaloa cartel. It is important to highlight that younger criminal organizations tend to follow non-traditional *modus operandi*. Meaning, that in conducting their business they no longer follow the golden rule of not interfering with innocent civilians. However, the case of the Caballeros Templarios is multifaceted. The

organization, on its beginnings, established a strict code of ethics that as previously mentioned, violation of them was penalized with death. The Templarios pledge to protect civilians and not to kill innocent people, nevertheless, the data shows that this principle started to be broken by the members of the organization just a year after their start-up. This implies a change on the cartel's *modus operandi* from a traditional-semi-religious to a non-traditional like the Zetas.

Caballeros Templarios Response to Organizational Shocks

After La Familia lost its power and the Caballeros Templarios started rising, the cartel became the priority target of federal and state security forces (Otero, 2011). Then the group became also the main target of the self-defense groups around 2013 and 2014. Contrary from the cases presented before in this dissertation, the Templarios where not as effective in coping with the constant attacks. This subsection studies the main organizational setbacks the organization has suffered. Their criminal activities where monitored thoroughly the attacks to observe their behavioral response to their major organizational shocks.

The Caballeros Templarios emerged in 2011, but it was until 2014 that the cartel started receiving their most important setbacks. The first important disruption for the Templarios was the capture of Dionisio Loya Plancarte "El Tio." He was arrested by elements of the Mexican army and the PGR in the state of Michoacán on January 27th, 2014. El Tio played a key role in La Familia, and then in the Templarios. Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán (2012), conducted a social network analysis to recreate the physical network of La Familia cartel. El Tio registered as the most central node concentrating the largest quantity of direct social relationships. He served as the public relations person in

La Familia, and later in the Templarios. He was in charge or articulating and establishing agreements with public servants in the different branches of public administration. El Tio was considered the third in command in the structure of the Templarios (Insight Crime, 2017).

Two months later, the organization received its mayor setback yet. Nazario Moreno also known as "El Chayo," or "El Mas Loco" (the Craziest One), the top messianic leader of the organization lost his life (for the second time) during a confrontation with the Mexican marines and army elements in Tumbiscatio, Michoacán, on March 9, 2014. Nazario Moreno started in the drug trafficking business working for the Milenio cartel and he operated in the Mexican- American border of Tamaulipas and Texas. After being arrested by the U.S. authorities in Mc Allen Texas a couple of times, he moved to the state of Michoacán and established La Familia with co-founder Jose de Jesus Mendez Vargas "El Chango." Nazario Moreno, is considered a pseudo-religious leader who presumably indoctrinated members of his criminal organization through gospels. By 2009, the federal government, then under Calderon's mandate, offered a $2.4 million reward in exchange for information that lead to his capture. The following year, in 2010, the government announced Moreno's alleged death during a shootout with the federal security forces, but his body was not recovered. It was 4 years later that his passing was officially confirmed. This time, the authorities were in position of his lifeless body and matching DNA. He died a day after his 44th birthday (Excelsior, 2014).
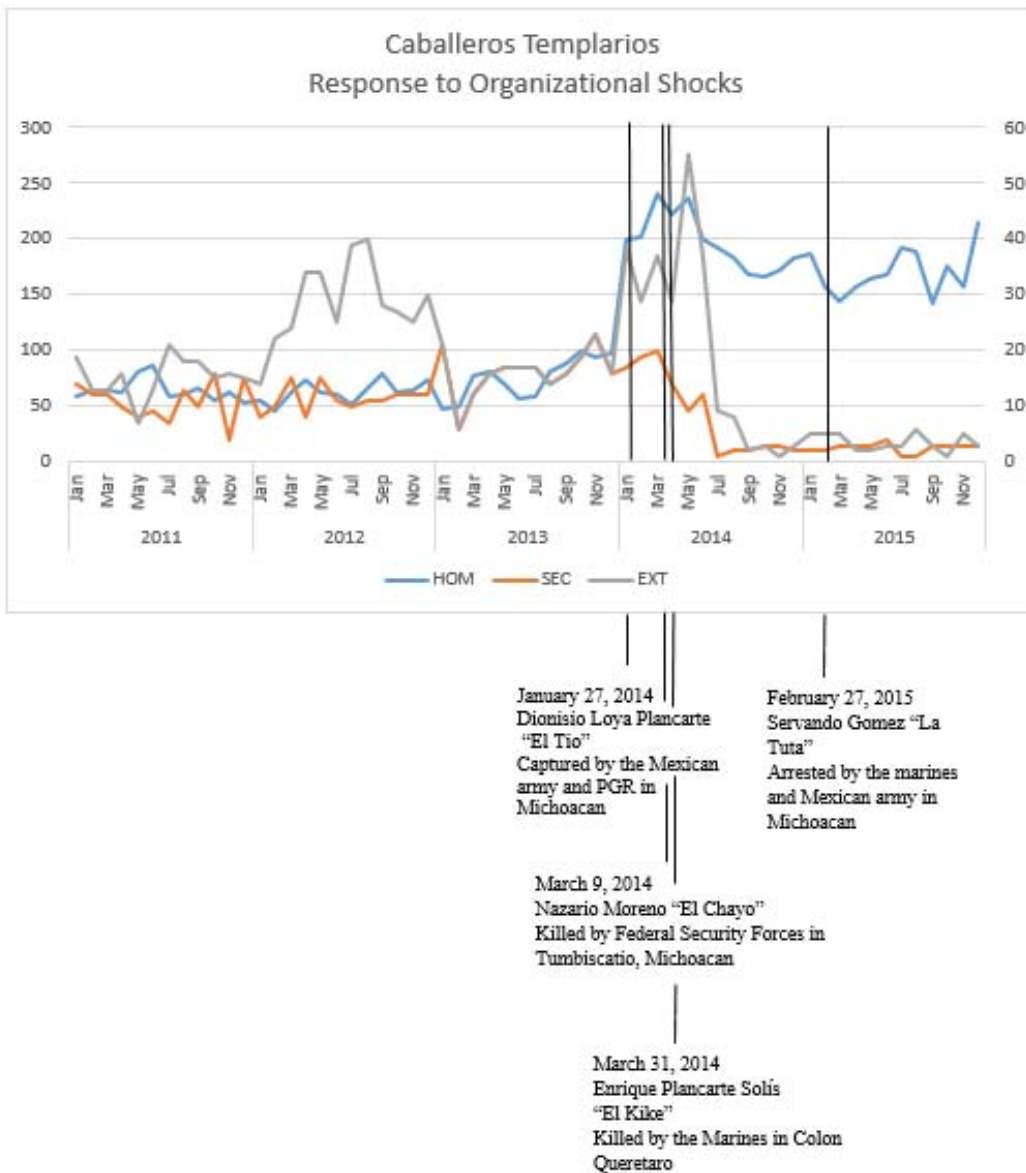
A third significant organizational setback came with the assassination of Enrique Plancarte Solis also known as "El Kike." He was killed in a conjunct operation by the marines and the Mexican army on March 31st, 2014, in the municipality of Colon in the

state of Queretaro. El Kike was also one of the founders of La Familia who then held a higher rank within the Templarios. He was the financial leader in charge of coordinating the production of methamphetamines for the organization (Nájar, 2014). Numerous homicides have been attributed to this leader some of them victims of the religious rituals which are a usual practice of the organization.

After the later three main organizational disruptions, just one original leader remained, Servando Gomez "La Tuta." A manhunt for the last standing capo by the Mexican authorities lasted a couple of years. Finally, he was captured by an elite police force in February 27th, 2015. La Tuta was originally a school teacher in the community of Arteaga, Michoacán, before he decided to join the drug trafficking world. As the public image of the organization, he fervently promoted the organization's ideology of vigilantes of their communities. He often claimed that the Caballeros Templarios' ultimate mission was to protect Michoacán from groups like the Zetas and had grievances with the Federal Police for their countless violation of human rights. La Tuta or "El Profe" (the Professor) was also in charge of coordinating drug shipments through Baja California (Nájar, 2014). His arrest was considered one of the biggest victories of the government against this organization, bringing with it the end of the Caballeros Templarios as a powerful cartel. Figure 5.1, illustrates the mayor organizational setbacks discussed above, and the organization response towards them.

Figure 5.1.

Caballeros Templarios
Response to Organizational Shocks

January 27, 2014
Dionisio Loya Plancarte
"El Tio"
Captured by the Mexican
army and PGR in
Michoacan

February 27, 2015
Servando Gomez "La
Tuta"
Arrested by the marines
and Mexican army in
Michoacan

March 9, 2014
Nazario Moreno "El Chayo"
Killed by Federal Security Forces in
Tumbiscatio, Michoacan

March 31, 2014
Enrique Plancarte Solís
"El Kike"
Killed by the Marines in Colon
Queretaro

Theory and historical indicators suggests that hierarchical or pyramidal structured criminal organizations are more susceptible to strategies like the kingpin. Once the cupola of the cartel is taken down, violence erupts, the organization loses direction, experience fragmentation, internal fracturing, and lastly, it dissolves into less powerful criminal cells. Based on the model presented above, the Caballeros Templarios experienced such faith.

From 2011 to mid-2014, figures show that the Caballeros Templarios were functioning smoothly, indicators of violence and criminal activities remained steady, and extortions particularly high. But then, 2014 appears to be a challenging year. During this time, the Templarios suffered three out of the four most critical setbacks, and that same year, the self-defense groups got stronger, really impacting the Templarios strength. This can explain the rise of violence and criminal activities shown in the model above during this time of turmoil.

Despite these key setbacks, the organization continued functioning under the leadership of the last standing leader, La Tuta. However, after his capture in February 2015, the Templarios presents signs of weakening. Their indicators of criminal activities, extortions and kidnappings, dropped significantly while violence erupted. A high rate on violence can be an indicator of intra cartel confrontations and of rival groups taking advantage of the vulnerability of the cartel to take over turf. There are no signs of a restructuration within the organization, neither had another strong leader taking over the cartel's mandate. Their criminal activities remained low after the last shock, suggesting the organization could not regain the strength they once hold. The next section covers the presence and usage of social media by the Templarios assessing the influence this variable has on the cartel's survival capacity.

Caballeros Templarios on Social Media

As mentioned previously, the Caballeros Templarios got a lot of attention on social media during the cartel's early years thanks to Antonio Olalde better known as "El Broly Banderas" considered "the most famous sicario on social media" (Cox, 2013). El Broly served as a personal guard to Servando Gomez "La Tuta." He started this practice of going

public on Facebook since he was working as a sicario for La Familia cartel. Later, he followed his leaders and became a member of the Templarios. He was one of the pioneers of the Mexican *cybersicarios'* practice of uploading selfies, flaunting a lifestyle of extravagances, excesses and violence (Cox, 2013). El Broly posted selfies with kidnapped victims in the background, burned bodies, and pictures of piles of death bodies left at the aftermath of a confrontation.[52] He was considered the bloodiest sicario. The case of El Broly has been reported in journals from all over the world. There are about 25 profiles on Facebook under his name and identity. But, while examining all the open profiles, none of them seem like a real one. There is a possibility that his "official" account has been closed. Suddenly, El Broly dropped from the social media radar, and nor authorities or self-defense groups really know what happened to him. Authorities believe he died during a shooting against the self-defense groups in 2015, thus his death has not been made official (Lucio, 2015; Valencia, 2015).

As members of the Templarios attracted the public attention through Facebook, one of its main leaders, La Tuta, started using YouTube extensively as the outlet to spread his messages. This practice distinguishes the Templarios from the social media strategies adopted by other cartel leaders. This section explores the Caballeros Templarios on Facebook and YouTube.[53] An examination on their social media presence, usage, content, and purpose is presented. Finally, the relationship between the usage of social media on Facebook and YouTube and the organization's clashes is assessed.
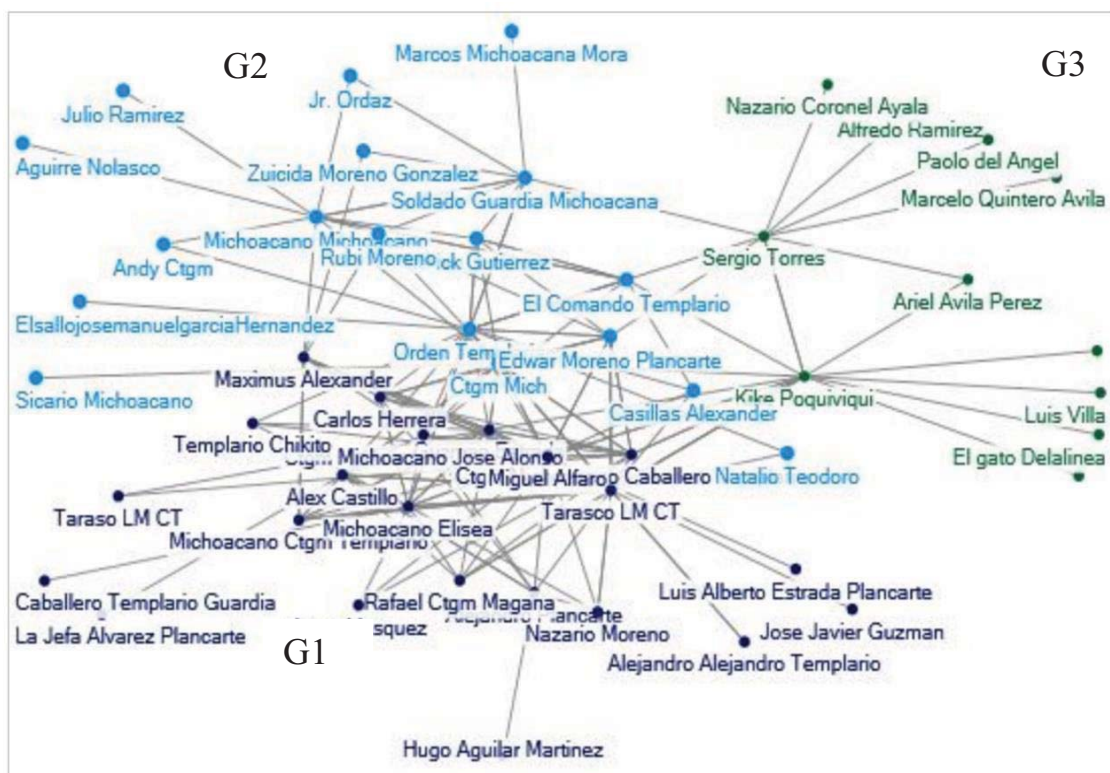
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[52] Images available at: https://worldwideweber2014.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/fbcartel-8-web.jpg and http://static.tvazteca.com/imagenes/2013/49/Presunto-sicario-presume-cuenta-Facebook-1874850.jpg
[53] While conducting research, Twitter was not a feasible outlet in this case to develop a comprehensive analysis.

Social Media Usage and Presence on Facebook

The Caballeros Templarios have a robust presence on Facebook at least until 2015, the last year this study covers. A social network analysis was conducted to visualize the cartel's online constitution, reach, and central nodes. Graph 5.2, is a simplified representation of the Templarios Facebook network.

Graph 5.2.

Created with NodeXL Pro (http://nodexl.codeplex.com) from the Social Media Research Foundation (http://www.smrfoundation.org)

This network is composed of 188 edges and 57 vertices, totaling 24,990 friends and followers and it is divided in three main clusters or groups. When analyzing these groups, the composition and origins of the cartel can be traced, from their relation to the Zetas to the transition from La Familia to the Templarios. Group 3 (G3) is composed by members

of rival cartels, however, most of the profiles are from the Zetas members, responsible of training La Familia Michoacana. In this case the Facebook networks of the Zetas and the Templarios intertwined. For example, Ariel Avila, the most central node on the Zeta's Facebook network, studied in the previous chapter, is connected to this cluster. Group 2 (G2) highlights on the transition process of members from La Familia to the Templarios. The profiles of this group show some type of affiliation to the strange cartel either by a photo or directly stating they worked for La Familia before but are currently working for the Caballeros Templarios. Group 1 (G1) is formed by just members of the Caballeros Templarios, indicating a full transition from one group to another. The node with the highest centrality in this network is Miguel Alfaro CT, followed by Tarasco LM CT, and Orden Templaria. These accounts are located in G1. The vertex with the higher degree of betweenness is Kike Poquiviqui. This node serves as a structural bridge holding the three clusters together and it seems that has been one of the members that experienced the complete journey from training with the Zetas to becoming part of the Caballeros Templarios.

This network, does not mirror the pyramidal structure the cartel holds in the physical terrain. A possible explanation for this is that the leaders at the top are not participants in this network. It does reflect the brotherhood constitutions and ideology the cartel presumes to work under. Cluster G1 is where the members of the Caballeros Templarios are concentrated the most, is a close group, though is not as wide, the relationship and communication among the members of this group shows they have a close relationship. As on other cases, the members of cartels do communicate with each other over these platforms. In some of their posts they tag each other in a mission related

messages, other times they talk in key or coded messages. The Caballeros Templarios's messages towards each other are focused on their bond as Templarios, they treat each other like family, as brothers.

Content Analysis: Facebook

The content on the Facebook accounts of the Caballeros Templarios is similar from the content of profiles of rival cartels. The profiles chosen for the analysis were based on their degree of centrality in the network and vertexes with the highest betweenness. The most central nodes are the profiles that have the major concentration of edges, in other words, are the accounts of the Caballeros Templarios with a higher concentration of friends and followers. The nodes with high degree of betweenness are vital nodes on a network because they are ones that link the network together. The data gathered from these accounts is presented on graph 5.3.

Graph 5.3.

Caballeros Templarios Facebook Content Analysis
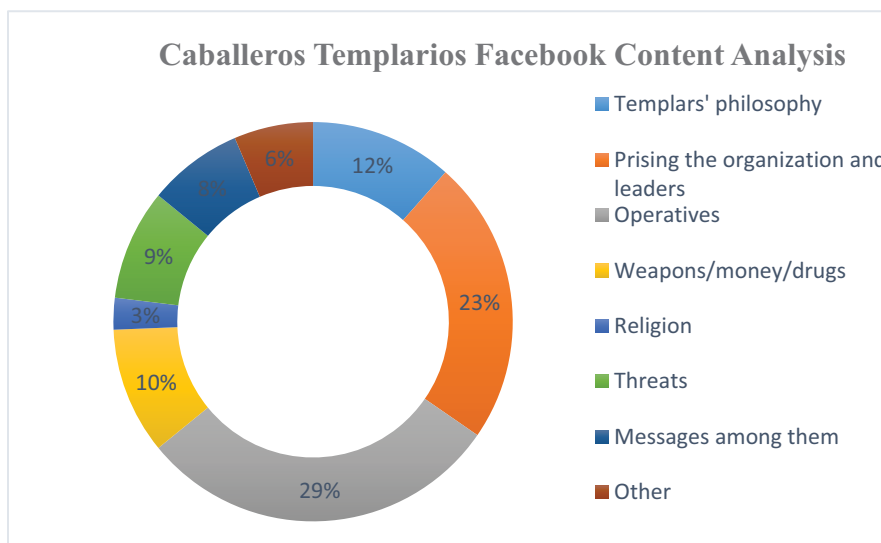
The content on the Facebook accounts of members of the Caballeros Templarios is divided into seven main categories. The main purpose of use for this group is posting about

operatives with 29 percent of the content. Similarly, to the other cases, these types of posts show pictures of members of the Templarios ready to complete a mission. Other posts, are just written statements, commenting something about their assignment, a target or a particular place.

The next category, with 23 percent, are posts related to praising the organization and their leaders. It does not come as a surprise that this category is a core part of their content due to the indoctrination imposed to their recruits. They perceive the organization they work for as a brotherhood. Praising the organization and honoring their leaders specially, Nazario Moreno and La Tuta, is a big part of their ritual traditions. The next type of posts takes from the previous category, 12 percent of the content in the Templarios accounts are posts about the philosophies of the cartel. Here, they quote biblical references, and motivational sayings taken from the booklet they are given when they become an active member of the organization. Moreover, on these posts the Templarios talk about glory, honor, and humility, which is a great part of their ideological orientation and discourse. Although their practices and actions contradicts their rhetoric.

Next with 10 percent, are posts and pictures of weapons, piles of money and drugs. These type of posts the organization shows their capabilities, and their success on the drug trafficking industry, demonstrating strength and power to their rivals. 9 percent of the content are threats among the Caballeros Templarios, the Zetas, the Cartel Jalisco New Generation and the self-defense groups. The following category are posts about religion with 8 percent. As noticed, religion is a big part of the core and identity of this cartel. Most of the images here are pictures of altars dedicated to Nazario Moreno "El Chayo" which was canonized by the group and serves as the main saint they pray to, asking for protection.
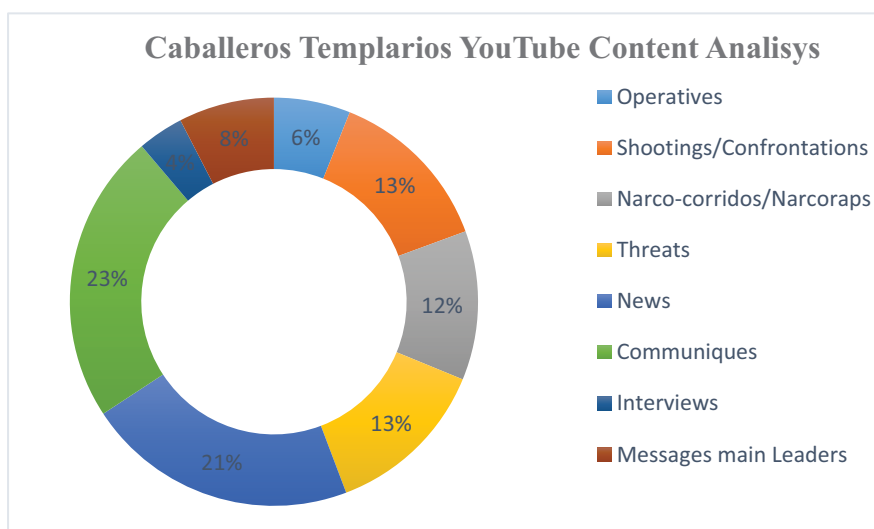
Other categories such as parties, pictures of death bodies, and posts honoring Templarios that lost their lives during battles, account for 6 percent of the content. Lastly 3 percent of the content are messages that they sent to each other. As it was seen in the social network analysis network, members of this cartel do see to develop deep ties and a brotherhood and this is reflected on these types of posts.

Content Analysis: YouTube

The usage of the YouTube platform of the Templarios set them aside from the other case studies presented in this dissertation. The criminal organization have significant presence on YouTube considering that the organization is several years younger than the Sinaloa cartel or the Zetas. 51, 400 videos related to the Caballeros Templarios are available, thus some of the videos are documentaries related to the original medieval Knight Templars. This is the platform through which their main leader at the time, La Tuta, chose to send his messages.

The videos considered for the content analysis of this case total 531. Graph 5.4 shows the shares of content for this cartel on YouTube.

Graph 5.4.

Caballeros Templarios YouTube Content Analisys

- Operatives — 6%
- Shootings/Confrontations — 13%
- Narco-corridos/Narcoraps — 12%
- Threats — 13%
- News — 21%
- Communiques — 23%
- Interviews — 4%
- Messages main Leaders — 8%

Most of the content of the Caballeros Templarios' videos are communiques with 23 percent. As in the other cases these messages share fair amount of information about the cartel. For instance, structural changes of the organization are revealed. Associations between politicians and the Templars are exposed. The cartel reports on future operatives warning civilians of the upcoming violence, and also on other rival groups. These videos maintain a degree of anonymity since the communiques are generated through robotic voices. Most of these videos are provided by channels or blogs that have closely follow the war on drugs such as *Grillonautas* and *Blog del Narco*.

The second type of content is narconews with 21 percent. The news come from traditional media stations. Excelsior TV is the source with most of these reports. International news cast such as Univision has also clips reporting on the cartel. The notes they present are news about organizational setbacks like the capture or killings of leaders, La Tuta's videos, battles or violent acts, or arrested cells.

The next two categories with 13 percent each are videos of live battles and shootings, the other one is threats. The images from the battles and their aftermath are brutal. Some are from confrontations with rival cartels, with the self-defense groups, and others against government security forces. There is footage of a battle in which the Templarios managed to shoot down a Black Hawk used by the Mexican military to search and target criminal groups settled in the middle of the mountains. The share of threatening messages follows a similar pattern from the previous case studies in which the platforms are used to send threatening messages to rival cartels or the government. In the case of the Caballeros Templarios the interchanges take place mainly among the Cartel Jalisco New Generation, the authorities, and self-defense groups. This time, the nature of the threats is

for the most part in a form of discourse. The groups involved in this exchange of threats, deliver long planned speeches in where they explain their activities in an attempt to justify their actions. Demonstrations of tortures, beheadings, or executions are not a tactic that the Templarios recur to too often on this platform, thus there is a couple of videos displaying Zetas-style interrogations. Narco-corridos and narcoraps hold 12 percent of the content on YouTube.

The next category corresponds to messages sent directly by the organization leaders with 8 percent of the content. These are mostly videos of La Tuta and there are two videos of El Tio, then the third in command of the cartel.[54] The footage of this videos follow a similar discourse and purpose. Exposing authorities and reiterating that their organization works for the protection of the state of Michoacán and its inhabitants. The content of these videos is discussed in the next section more in depth. There is also one video by El Broly, the only and very short video of the popular sicario sending greetings to his fans and followers.[55]

The last two types of content are operatives with 6 percent and interviews with the final 4 percent. The interviews presented here, are interviews of civilians either asking for help for the government or describing the conditions they have been forced to live under surrounded by cartels, military, and self-defense groups, all fighting for their own interests. Through the interviews it is perceived that the government has not been in anyway proactive on their protection or in fighting criminal groups, especially in the *Tierra Caliente* region. These videos present testimonies of civilians living in exploited communities in where once high driving businesses have closed. They have been victims

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[54] Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i26jg4HvJJ8
[55] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KdHgml4XiM

of commercial blockages. They state that there is a shortage of basic medicines, gasoline, and food. The Caballeros Templarios disallowed the flow of products into these communities. The consequences of such acts transcended to other countries as was the shortage of lemons and avocados in the U.S. and the rest of Mexico. Civilians state that the Templarios control the flow of trade in the area, charges fees or taxes to businesses, and have risen the price of basic products like tortillas to profit from them. This situation had a detrimental impact on the region's economy.

La Tuta on YouTube

It seems like La Tuta enjoyed the attention he received on his YouTube videos, reaching millions of views, continuing this practice throughout his leadership of the Templarios, with no intentions of maintaining any sort of anonymity. He has a total of 24 videos in a period of three years. His first appearance on YouTube was on August 24th, 2012.[56] In the footage, he is sitting at a desk with a saint-like statue of Nazario Moreno, a black cross like the ones used by the Knight Templars in the middle-ages, a Mexican flag, framed pictures of famous revolutionaries such as El Che Guevara and Pancho Villa, also at the desk there is a pile of "Code of the Caballeros Templarios" booklets. On this video, he explains when the cartel was created and its purposes. He declares that the Caballeros Templarios are neither a drug cartel nor criminals. He proclaims their mission is to protect people from the abuses of outer criminal groups, the military and the federal police, protect their land and regulate violence. The same logic and tone on his discourse are patent on his frequent appearances on YouTube.

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[56] Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgC0elu_UFU

On another video uploaded on January 2014, La Tuta is walking around a kiosk in the municipal *plaza* of Tumbiscatio, Michoacán, giving away money to the inhabitants of the community, inviting the population to join the Caballeros Templarios.[57] Portraying the organization as the Robin-Hood type, this is a strategy or *modus operandi* traditional drug cartels practice. The goal is to gain the support of the communities they operate in so they can conduct their business without resistance, which is an important asset for criminal organizations. For the Caballeros Templarios, the strategy might have worked at first. But with time, the cartel became exactly everything they say they were standing against. They forgot all about codes, values, honor, rules, and became violent and ruthless just like the Zetas, group they regularly condemned for their gruesome ways.

There is another popular video of La Tuta uploaded on August 10th, 2013, with 2,549, 339 views, where he is conceding an interview for an unidentified media outlet.[58] The interview takes place somewhere in the mountains in Michoacán, and the main purpose is for La Tuta to "clean" the bad image and reputation, that according to him, the media has created of his organization. During this interview, his discourse in relation to the doings of the Templarios started to shift. The former professor states that his organization is "a necessary evil." Here he began to publicly accept that his organization is criminal, thus still benevolent and "needed." He continues arguing that they protect Michoacán from other "more vicious" groups such as the Zetas and the Cartel Jalisco New Generacion. Also, they protect their families from the military, the federal police, and authorities which he considers criminals, "this is a war of criminal against criminals" he states. In the interview,

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[57] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ht1Y78sdsoQ
[58] Interview available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adz_lDG0fKw

La Tuta goes as far as saying that Mexico is under an imperialist attack from China. The following image presents an image of the video just described:

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adz_lDG0fKw

Some other videos serve different purposes. In one of them La Tuta is publicly distributing the inheritance of a local landowner, getting a donation of 400 thousand pesos (approximately $20 thousand dollars) for the Caballeros Templarios.[59] The content of this video gives us an idea of La Tuta's social and judicial roles he played on the communities under the Templario's influence, serving as the state de-facto. Other videos served to publicly expose politicians with ties with the drug cartel. These videos worked as evidence leading to the arrest and imprisonment of various political figures in Michoacán, such was Salma Karrum Cervantez former mayor of Patzcuaro, Michoacán, [60] and politician Vallejo Mora. [61]

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[59] Footage available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1C-L2FBf0A
[60] Footage available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7fLzgWvyYoQ
[61] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtWQPV2R4jU

Later, there was a shift on La Tuta's YouTube strategy. The last messages he sent through this platform, were just audios. He explained that he was trying to change his face just like *El Señor de los Cielos* to avoid detection.[62] February 1, 2015 marks the official farewell of La Tuta from YouTube.[63] On his last official message, the former leader makes accusations of authorities and rival cartels, confesses their illegal endeavors, asks for forgiveness for all the damage and suffering their organization caused to the state of Michoacán, and sends his blessings. This audio has been reproduced 375, 538 times. The fact that La Tuta started recording and uploading just audios instead of videos hints on the leader's state of mind and the pressure the organization was facing at the time, as if they felt trapped. He may felt his over-the-top exposure on social media might be having negative repercussions on their organization and his detectability. Nevertheless, the change in tactic came too late. He was captured three weeks after his last message.

La Tuta opted to use the platform in a way he was overly exposed. The technique might work in the sense that is a more direct way to get a message across, appear more relatable, closer to the people. Whether this was the goal of such tactic or not, was this approach successful in strengthening the organization or did it caused for the organization to be more visible and therefore more targeted? This question is evaluated next.

YouTube Usage and Mayor Organizational Shocks

Figure 5.2 illustrates the activity on YouTube mainly by La Tuta. Once again in this case, the use of social media increases significantly after the censorship of traditional media outlets. The use of social media by Servando Lopez seems to increase at specific instances, these being the capture or killing of three of the main leaders of the organization:

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[62] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KfE3pk2k-AI
[63] Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBDArEZwnK0

Dionisio Loya Plancarte, Nazario Moreno, and Enrique Plancarte Solis. These setbacks occurred in a period of 3 months in 2014. In the figure, it can be observed that after these major organizational setbacks and before his capture, La Tuta was highly active on the social media platform. His las activity is registered days before his capture.

Figure 5.2.
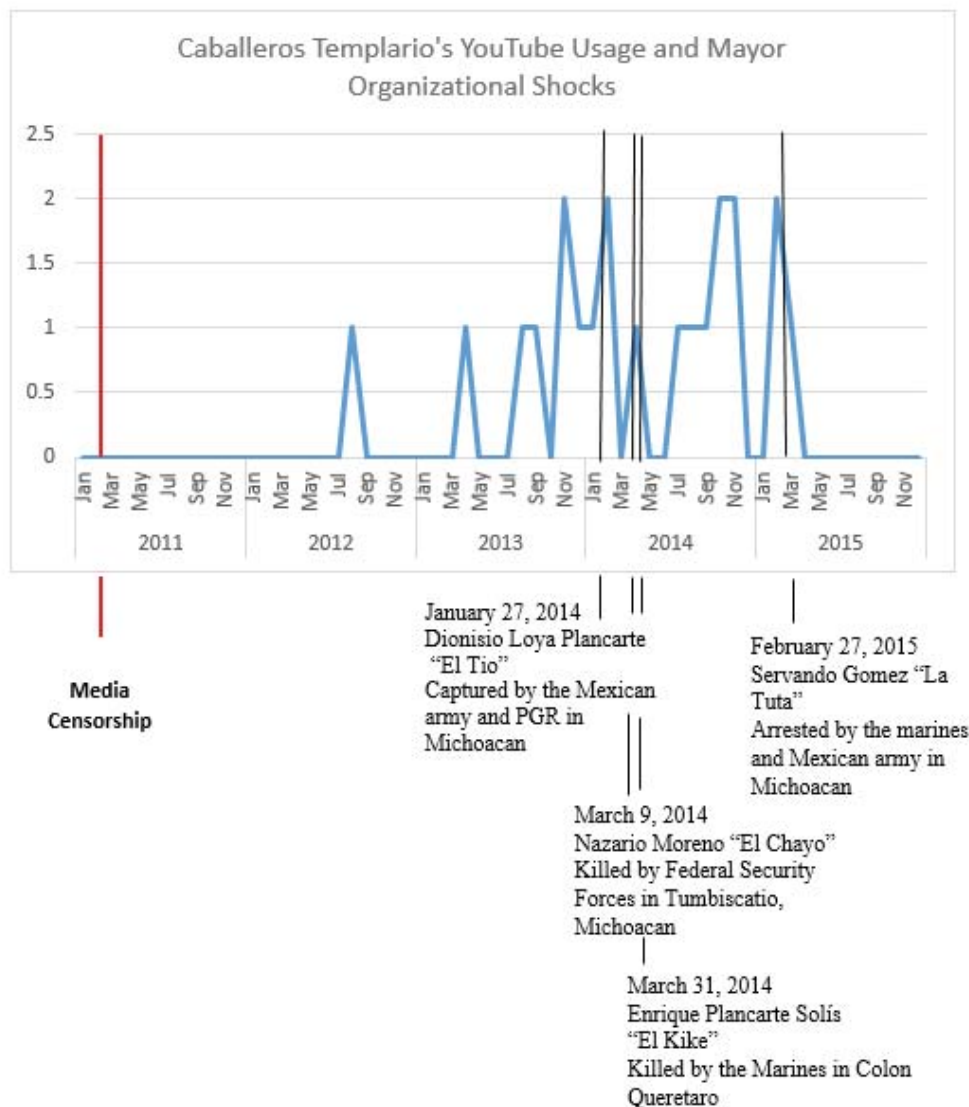
The Analysis

This section examines the relationship between the usages of social media and clashes the Templarios faced from 2011 to 2015. The study was conducted on two platforms: Facebook and YouTube. Correlation statistical analyses were run in order to assess the relationship between the two variables.

Clashes and Facebook Usage

Graph 5.5 shows the relationship between the Facebook usage of the Caballeros Templarios members and reported clashes.

**Graph 5.5.**
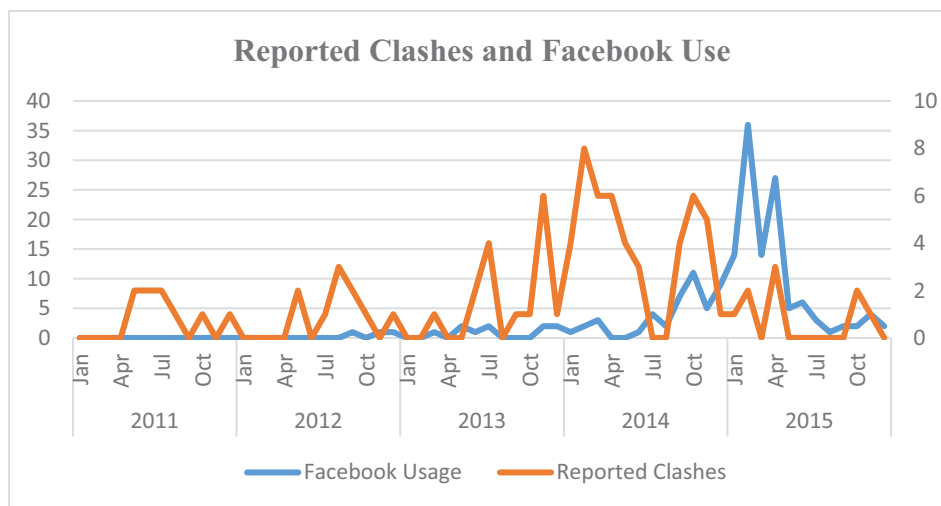
The correlation indicates that the two variables have a positive relationship but the association between them does not show any statistical significance and indicate a week relationship. In other words, the usage of Facebook by the Templarios has not made the cartel more vulnerable or more exposed since reported clashes do not seem to increase because of their social media activity.

As has been established throughout this chapter, the Templarios have also presence on YouTube, at a similar extend as the Sinaloa and the Zetas cartels. Yet, the way they implemented it to their strategies sets them apart from the other two criminal organizations. Next, a similar analysis done with Facebook was conducted to study the relationship between the usage of YouTube and reported clashes.

Clashes and YouTube Usage

The nature of the YouTube platform is different from Twitter or Facebook since the degree of anonymity can be more compromised. YouTube is based on videos, footage that sometimes gives away more clues about the surroundings in which the video is been filmed, such as interiors, exteriors, light or sounds. Nonetheless, it is completely possible to maintain secrecy if there is an intent to do so. Videos can be edited; a complete fake background can be created. For example, the group Anonymous International use masks, and voice regulators to maintain confidentiality while they spread their messages. But, this was not a strategy leaders of the Templarios practiced. La Tuta uploaded a series of videos with no intention of protecting his identity. Did La Tuta's usage of YouTube benefited the Templarios, or on the contrary worked against them?

To answer this question, the relationship between the cartel's exposure on YouTube and reported clashes is evaluated. In order to achieve this, the series of videos of La Tuta on YouTube were considered for the analysis. Graph 5.6 illustrates the relationship between the variables.

Graph 5.6.
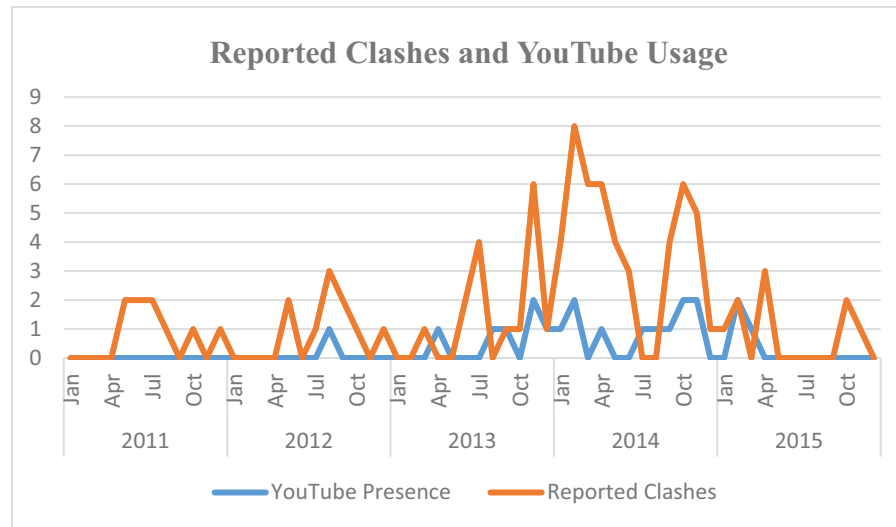
The graph reveals a positive relationship between social media use and clashes. Table 5.1 exhibits the correlation values. The Pearson correlation coefficient indicate a positive 53 percent relationship between the variables with a (2-tailed) 0.01 significance level, meaning that the correlation indicates moderate statistical significance. In other words, increases in YouTube presence is significantly related to upsurges in clashes.

Table 5.1.

Correlations

		YouTube	Clashes
YouTube	Pearson Correlation	1	.533[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	60	60
Clashes	Pearson Correlation	.533[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	60	60

[**]. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It is evident that in the case of the Templarios, the exposure of their main leader on YouTube had a negative impact in the survival capacity of the cartel. This finding supports Hypothesis 2 in this study, which again states that the utilization of social media by criminal organizations increases their exposure leading to greater targeting compromising their survival capacity.

Conclusions

The state of Michoacán reunites the geographical characteristics and climate conditions for the proliferation of the drug trafficking business and the emergence of strong drug cartel organizations. Michoacán is also considered a failed or week state. Whether this is an accurate statement or not, the phenomenon of the of the self-defense militia groups in the west part of the state is a clear sign of the lack of effective rule of law.

The Caballeros Templarios emerged from La Familia in 2011, and soon became a powerful cartel just as its antecessor. Their semi religious aspect and ideology was one of the factors for the cohesion of the group. The practice of these principles and the discipline the members followed, seem to have created a united force based on a brotherhood, and appeared to have legitimized their cause and earned the respect of their communities. All of which started to crumble when the cartel's *modus operandi* shifted into a double standard dogma. The group starts to experience indiscipline and became as violent as the group they resented, the Zetas, losing legitimation. The environment of violence and abuse the Caballeros Templarios created on their areas of influence incited a bottom-up participative action from the civil society in the conflict. In Michoacán, such participation took more force when the self-defense groups established themselves as major and

dangerous enemies for the Templarios, and one that had a lot of influence on the organization's weakening.

The cartel was composed under a pyramidal semi-religious structure. Highly centralized structures have proven to be more susceptible to strategies like the kingpin. Within the first three months of 2014, the Templarios lost three out its four main leaders. Although it was after the capture of La Tuta, their last influential leader, in 2015, when the organization weakened significantly. The Templarios were not capable of restoring the organization after their leaders at the top were gone. Their survival capacity proved not to be strong enough.

The Templarios presence and practice on Facebook presents similarities to the usage of the Sinaloa and the Zetas cartels. As on the other cases, its usage does not present statistical significance when it comes to attracting enemies and increasing targeting. But, their utilization of YouTube proved to have the opposite effect. The utilization of YouTube by the Templarios and more specifically by La Tuta, is what sets the cartel's social media strategy apart from the other two cases. The nature of YouTube is different from other social media platforms studied here. This platform is based mainly on broadcasting videos people upload from all around the world. Anonymity comes with the user's choice. La Tuta, opted to use this platform to upload his own videos that covered different purposes. One was to work of the PR side of the cartel trying to impose a benevolent and vigilantes image. It was also the communication outlet they chose to send threatening messages to rival organizations, self-defense groups, and to the Mexican security forces. It is a behavior that differentiates him from other cartel leaders. In the Sinaloa case, high ranking members and leaders of the organization such as El Chapo and his sons, or El Mayo are also present

of their social media platform, and as La Tuta, they were highly active. However, the platforms of choice and strategy differed. As argued in chapter 2, leaders of the Sinaloa cartel on Twitter, presented a close-open system. In other words, they maintain a wide base of fans and followers nevertheless their exposure and interaction with them was mainly one-way. They served as disseminators of information and rarely communicated directly with other followers. In their accounts, these leaders were followed by thousands, yet they only followed a close base of people. In addition, differently from La Tuta, the leaders of the Sinaloa carte were more careful about exposing their whereabouts and avoiding detection.

Finally, the Templarios Facebook's usage does not present indications of having a negative effect on attracting attacks towards the organization. For instance, cybersicarios celebrities such as El Broly attracted a lot of fans. However, even though La Tuta tried to switch his strategy into a more low-profile mechanism, changing videos for audios, his exposure on YouTube presents a positive statistical significance between an increase on his video appearances and the increment of the cartel's confrontations. In this case, social media worked as a double edge sword. One the one hand the platforms allowed them to get their benevolent message across with the purpose of gaining legitimacy, but on the other made La Tuta more exposed which might have increased the chances of his detectability.

CONCLUSION

There is a dialectical interplay between the positive and the negative perceptions regarding the rise in the usage of social media around the world and in Mexico (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001). The opportunities these new communication channels offer, such as serving as organizing mechanisms, a tool to move towards more transparent democracies and stronger civil societies, have stimulated the expectations of scholars and activists for greater civic participation, and governmental accountability.

A first wave of academic works studying the effects of social media developed principally after the rise of several powerful mass demonstrations around the world, such as the Arab Spring, and protests in Tunisia and Moldova (Morozov, 2009). The empirical evidence drawn from these works suggests that the so called "Twitter revolutions" proved to be successful organizing mechanisms, that contributed to the overturning of long standing authoritarian establishments such as the Mubarak regime in Egypt.

In Mexico, some social movements emerged as a response to the high rates of violence the drug war brought to the country. One of the movements is called *Movimiento por a Paz* led by poet Javier Sicilia, whose son was assassinated by members of organized crime in 2011. Another example are the protests for the disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapan, in the state of Guerrero in 2014. One of the petitions of this demonstration was for Enrique Peña Nieto to resign as President. The request gained popularity through the hashtag *#fuerapeña* that in google trends shows significant activity especially in 2016. Unfortunately, these social mobilizations did not transcend with much force as others around the world. However, in Mexico, the dual nature of social media platforms has been

more inclined towards a darker, more violent, and negative side that has been dominated mainly by its usage by criminal organizations (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001).

This dissertation focused on the dark side of social media and systematically analyzed its usage by major organized crime groups such as the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas, and the Caballeros Templarios. The amount of information members of the cartels provide on these communication outlets is vast, impressively detailed, at times sweet and humane, at other times violent and horrific. Reviewing the content of their profiles and YouTube videos spurs a rollercoaster of emotions. The visuals range from love letters to decapitated bodies. Their varied content even uncovers different narratives regarding the status of a criminal organization distinct from the one generally exposed by the media to the public, as it was the case of Sinaloa cartel.

This study found that the strategic adaptation of social media platforms has different effects on criminal organization's survivability. The empirical evidence suggests that if used efficiently, social media is a tool that provide benefits and strengthens drug cartels in Mexico, enhancing both their organizational and operational capabilities.

What follows is an overview of the findings of this research project, followed by the conceptual contributions. Finally, this dissertation closes by proposing some possible policy recommendations and prospects for a future research agenda.

Empirical Findings

The dependent variable assessed in this work is the cartel's survival capacity which was evaluated in two stages. The first chronicles the context under which these organizations combat and their capacity to respond to mayor organizational shocks. The second surveys the cartel's social media presence and usage.

In the first stage, the data gathered gives an indication of the operational environment of each drug cartel studied here including: the geographical importance of their territories, the extent of their domains, and the organization's frequency of attacks and main enemies. Three main findings are derived from the analysis: (i) drug cartel's levels of survival capacity; (ii) the symmetrical and asymmetrical relation between actors; and (iii) a fluctuation on the targeting of criminal organizations by the Mexican security forces.

By monitoring the cartels' rate of violence and criminal activities fluctuations before and after organizational setbacks, it was possible to establish various levels of survival capacity in the cases analyzed on this study. The Sinaloa cartel was the case that presented the highest level of survivability. In comparison with the Zetas and the Caballeros Templarios, after a restructuration process, the cartel's response to organizational setbacks, especially after El Chapo's capture, showed minor destabilization, displaying relative stability on their violence and the continuation of their criminal activities. The Zetas presented a medium level of survival capacity, their transition from a military-hierarchical towards a highly decentralized structure, allowed the organization to readapt better after mayor organizational disruptions. Although the cartel's internal fractioning has led to their debilitation, the Zetas are still operating and maintain a relatively important status in the drug trafficking scene in Mexico. The Caballeros Templarios presented a low level of survival capacity. This cartel, after the capture of its four main leaders, was not able to restructure as a cohesive group leaving just scattered cells operating and the organization weakened considerably.

The data gathered on the cartels' confrontations facilitated a comparison of each organization with their main rivals in terms of capabilities. For instance, the Sinaloa cartel is the organization that was the most targeted by the Mexican authorities between 2013 and 2015. In addition, it was the cartel targeted the most by foreign governments, including the U.S. and countries in Europe. The survival of the Sinaloa organization in the face of such intense national and international law enforcement pressure indicates a high degree of strength. The Zetas displayed greater vulnerability when they surrendered the threats of non-state actors. In the case of the Caballeros Templarios, the confrontations with self-defense militia groups, backed by the Peña Nieto's government, had an important impact on their debilitation. The Templarios were unable to adapt and survive their attacks. These examples shed light on the different capabilities each of these criminal organizations displayed.

Finally, the data demonstrated that the frequency and intensity of rate in which security forces targeted the cartels from 2006 to 2015, has fluctuated. Significant decreases in targeting from security forces towards a specific drug cartel, can be an indicator of collusion and corruption from the authorities.

The second part of this study explored the Mexican drug cartels' presence and usage of social media and the effects on their survival capacity. The findings suggest that the cartels' usage of these communication channels varied in the selection of platforms and strategies, which in turn led to different outcomes on their effectiveness of execution.

The implementation of social network analysis in this study proved to be a useful tool to better understand and study criminal organizations. Furthermore, the analysis provided important information about their structural characteristics. For instance, it was

possible to detect central figures, reach of their networks, interests, subnetworks, rivals, demographics, and a visual representation for each cartel's network on social media. The following cartels' characteristics were revealed: (i) the organizations'' "social capital," [64] (ii) their online organizational model characteristics; and (iii) behavioral patterns.

By conducting a social network analysis, it was possible to uncover the cartels' social capital on social media. Put differently, the interpersonal or relational properties between agents or nodes, the varied nature of relationships, and the way the information flows through the organizations' networks were brought into focus. For example, the graph of the Sinaloa cartel suggests that the most central agent in the network is El Chapo. El Chapo's Twitter account registered a high out-degree centrality, which means that he serves as a major disseminator of information, followed by the accounts of his sons Alfredo and Ivan Archivaldo Guzman. In the Zetas' network, centrality is not so much concentrated in one individual since several agents share high degrees of centrality, the main capos of this organization are not visible on their Facebook network. Their network also shows a node with a high degree of betweenness, meaning that this particular member of the Zetas serves as the structural bridge than holds the network together, by taking away this node their network would have major repercussions. In the Caballeros Templarios' network, information flows were more reciprocal since their nodes exchanged information among each other more than in the other two case studies.

Each cartel presented distinct types of online organizational models. In two cases (the Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas) their virtual structure was reminiscent of their physical

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[64] The term "social capital" was coined by Arquilla and Rondfelt (2001) to refer to properties of a network is terms of social ties (p. 318).

configuration. The Twitter social network graph of the Sinaloa cartel reflects a hubs-and-spokes structure, and it is divided into different clusters. For example, different groups that worked under El Chapo's faction such as *los Antrax, la Gente Nueva,* or *los Damaso* are visible on their network. The Zetas' Facebook network shows a decentralized structure and also the formation of new subnetworks or groups can be pinpointed such as *Nectar Lima*. In the case of the Caballeros Templarios, their Facebook network graph did not replicate their physical structure, but it did reflect the transition of some members from La Familia Michoacana to the Caballeros Templarios. It also hinted on their former connection with the Zetas.

Johnson et al. (2016) proposed that by examining the online behavior of criminal organizations, behavioral patterns can be identified and this makes possible the prediction of future conducts. In my study for example, through the Twitter and Facebook network graphs, especially of the Sinaloa and the Zetas cartels, the formation of subgroups was traced. Early detection of this cells present indications such as initial signals of fragmentation or the possible emergence of a new group. For example, during the timeframe of this study, the emergence of *Cartel del Noreste* from the Zetas' network was depicted. The once cell of the Zetas, became an independent criminal organization and it is now one of their major enemies.

Additionally, throughout the content analysis of the accounts of members of the Mexican drug cartels, I found that besides showing off their fancy cars and luxurious life, the cartels follow specific social media strategies some more benevolent that others. The Sinaloa cartel and the Caballeros Templarios followed a similar strategy, one focused on emphasizing social acceptance. The purpose of this approach is to gain legitimacy in the

communities the groups operate for them to conduct their business more effectively. The tactic also served as a force multiplier promoting a lifestyle that attracted new recruits. In both cases, leaders of the cartels were highly visible on social media. El Chapo for years had a active Twitter account followed by thousands of fans, including celebrities and politicians, and Servando Lopez "La Tuta" was for a couple of years uploading videos on YouTube. Although their tactics followed a similar path, there is a key difference between the two. On the one hand, El Chapo used Twitter as an open-closed system of communication, meaning that while he was followed by a couple of hundred thousand, he only exchanged messages and responded to just a few accounts. On the other hand, La Tuta, used YouTube to upload videos of him explaining the origins and vigilante mission of the Caballeros Templarios. Due to the double discourse his organization followed, he was not as successful as gaining legitimacy from the citizenry as El Chapo. The data presented on the Templarios' case suggests that the videos La Tuta uploaded to YouTube gave information about his surroundings making him an easier target for the authorities and self-defense militia groups. The Zetas approached a different strategy which consisted mostly on conducting a psychological warfare. They effectively utilized social media platforms as an extension for inciting terror in the municipalities where they work. Contrary to the Sinaloa cartel, the Zetas conducted their business not through social legitimacy but though coercion and intimidation.

Consequently, the use of social media by organized crime has worked as a medium that eases and enhances the functionality of decentralized structures. According to the analysis presented in this dissertation, the integration of social media into criminal organizations' strategies has produced important positive benefits in three main ways: (i)

social media have eased the flow of information allowing a decentralized structure to function. An example of this, is the real-time messaging that it is possible through these web-based outlets. As Arquilla and Ronfeldt (2001) put it, "new information technologies render the ability to connect and coordinate the actions of widely distributed nodes…whoever masters this form, will accrue advantages at a substantial nature: (p.5). (ii) A second favorable feature of social media usage is that it aids in the establishment of more direct channels of communication to promote social acceptability. Various studies suggest that the social and cultural embedding of a cartel in the areas they operate is indispensable for these group to successfully conduct their illicit businesses (Guevara, 2013; Grayson, 2010). Stern and Berger (2015) recognize that social media has opened the door to alternative types of interaction and have also reinforced their connectivity which has attributed to the strengthening or criminal organization. The Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas' social media strategy has emphasized on social mechanisms in which trust and legitimacy is built between their organization and the communities in which they operate, establishing a *clientelistic* relationship. As social acceptability of the cartel grows, so does their ability to recruit, and socialize the narco culture. Finally, (iii) the cartels, especially the Sinaloa cartel, have used these platforms as a force multiplier. Besides being protected by a social net, some cartels have been able to attract a greater workforce, which is imperative to their survival capacity since they find quickly replacements for soldiers captured or lost in battles.

As mentioned above, this study finds that the Zetas usage of social media differed in at least some aspects from the strategy employed by the Sinaloa's cartel. This criminal organization better known for their hyper-violent *modus operandi* found on social media a

medium through which they could extend their violent strategy. The content on the Zetas;
accounts presented the most vile and brutal pictures and footage. Their main online strategy
was to use these outlets as tool for psychological warfare. Their online presence is similar
to their physical presence in the sense that in both planes, their main operative strategy
under which they conduct their business is to intimidate their enemies and instigate fear in
the population. Scholars such as Farwell (2014) and Dale (2014), argue that this approach
can be effective for the organization to maintain control through fear on their domains, but
also can worked at a disadvantage since they can be instigating resentment of society. This
have been called the "social media paradox."

The Caballeros Templarios presented a clear example of the social media paradox.
This is the only case in my study that showed that the adoption of social media could have
negative repercussions on their survival capacity. The overexposure of their main leader,
La Tuta on YouTube, indicate that probably contributed to the discovery of his location by
the authorities. Although other members of this organization also had presence on
Facebook, their activity on this platform did not show any indication that it attracted more
targeting by rival groups and security forces. Their use of social media was contradictory.
On their social medial platforms one of their main purposes was to portray the organization
as one of benevolence serving as the protectors of their communities. They also displayed
a deep religious sub-culture under which they were supposed to operate. Nevertheless, in
the real world they behaved in the exact opposite fashion. As with the case of the Zetas,
the Caballeros Templarios also encountered the resentment of the society in the
communities they operated. The formation and rise of strong self-defense groups in western
Michoacán, opposed to the Templarios provides irrefutable proof of their rejection.

When assessing the relationship between the drug cartel's usage of social media and cartels' confrontations, the Sinaloa cartel's exposure on these platforms did not increase targeting from their rivals. Similarly, the Zetas presented a negative and statistical significant relationship between the two variables but the relationship is really weak. The same results applied to the Caballeros Templarios' and their Facebook usage. However, the data suggested that La Tutas' exposure on YouTube, did increase his visibility displaying a strong statistical correlation.

Comparing the three cases, seven mayor points are drawn from the analysis. Table 6.0 presents a summary of the empirical findings:

i. Criminal organizations operating under structures with some level of decentralization such as hubs-and-spokes coupled with a *modus operandi* on the more traditional side of the spectrum, presents a high level of resistance. This is the case of the Sinaloa cartel.

ii. Criminal organizations with a higher decentralized type of structures such as franchises and working under a non-traditional *modus operandi* presents a medium level of survival capacity like the Zetas.

iii. Criminal organizations with highly centralized or hierarchical structures, operating under a non-traditional *modus operandi* demonstrated a low level of survival capacity. This was the case of the Caballeros Templarios.

iv. The cases with greater decentralization and more flatter structures proved to be more resistant to organizational disruptions, since decentralization augments the flexibility within an organization making it harder for the authorities to get to capos if cells are relatively autonomous.

v.   The most successful social media strategy that cartels have followed is to use these communication platforms as a tool to construct relatability from the citizenship towards the drug cartel, emphasizing social acceptance and using it as a force multiplier coupled with an open-closed communications tactic can strengthen a criminal organization.

vi.   Following a psychological warfare strategy resulted somehow effective. The criminal organization can have control of their territories through coercion, but they might gain the resentment of society that at the end works against them.

vii.   Overexposure on social media especially on platforms with high visual information increases the possibilities of attacks from rivals.

Conceptual Contributions

Some scholars such as Arquilla and Rondfelt (2001), and Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán (2011), have suggested that there is a need to broaden the conceptualization of drug cartels or criminal organizations. The current definition is deficient or inadequate when it comes to describing the new generation of organized crime. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice defines drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) as "complex organizations with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs."[65] The conceptualization of drug cartels must take into account the diversification of criminal activities and the transformation of their structures into more complex configurations than command-and-control models. This dissertation joins a growing body of scholarship that argue that the new generation of criminal organizations should be denoted instead as
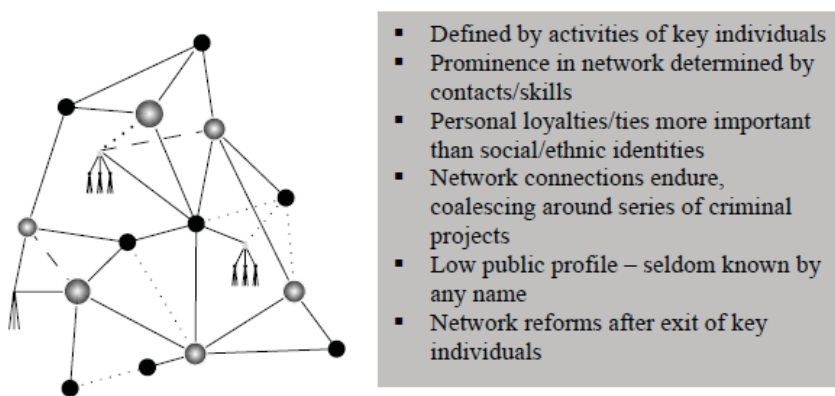
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[65] Available at: https://www.justice.gov/archive/ndic/pubs38/38661/dtos.htm

criminal networks (Garay Salamanca and Salcedo Albarán, 2011, Astorga, 2011; Arquilla and Rondfelt, 2001).

A network can be defined simply as "a series of nodes that are connected" (Williams, 2001; p. 66). The nodes can be individuals, firms, or (as the unit of analysis of this research project) criminal organizations. The United National Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) defines criminal networks as "[a] loose and fluid network of individuals, often drawing on individuals with particular skills, who constitute themselves around an ongoing series of criminal projects" (2002; p. 34). Figure 6.1 illustrates the typology of a criminal organization and more specific characteristics putted forward by the UNODC:

Figure 6.1. Typology "Criminal Network"

- Defined by activities of key individuals
- Prominence in network determined by contacts/skills
- Personal loyalties/ties more important than social/ethnic identities
- Network connections endure, coalescing around series of criminal projects
- Low public profile – seldom known by any name
- Network reforms after exit of key individuals

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Global Programme Against Transnational Organized Crime (2002).

Two of the drug cartels, the Sinaloa and the Zetas, analyzed in this work have moved towards more decentralized structures and they fit most of the characteristics that the UNODC's definition of criminal networks. Nevertheless, according to my findings, the "low public profile" characteristic was not necessarily found on the behavior of the criminal organizations surveyed in this research project.

In practice, organizational flatness intensifies the survival capacity of criminal organizations in several ways: (i) it increases response time, (ii) decentralizes decision-making allowing for faster restructuration and adaptability, and (iii) eases flexibility minimizing the impact as leadership is removed, since these central actors have been insulated. These behaviors can be found in two of the cases presented here: the Sinaloa cartel and the Zetas, which represent high and medium levels of survival capacity respectively. In the case of the Caballeros Templarios they maintained a hierarchical structure exhibiting a low level of survival capacity since the organization weakened significantly. These results show that the organizations that are apt to survive are the ones moving away from hierarchies and more into networked models reiterating the need to re-conceptualize the transforming structural trend of criminal organizations.

Policy Recommendations

Based on this study, four possible policy recommendations to deal with the social media dimension and its adoption by criminal organizations in Mexico are proposed. Some focus on short term opportunities that the monitoring of the cartels' activity online can provide in shaping the government's strategies and tactics to fight against these criminal organizations. Others are medium to long-term nature and consist of cooperative efforts among intelligence agencies and different security forces.

    i. Recognition of the organizational evolution of criminal groups towards decentralized nature and network models. This will serve to recognize the challenges of dealing with these types of new organizations and reformulate targeting strategies.

ii. Consolidation of information systems and collaboration among the different intelligence agencies in Mexico to allow the monitoring, and processing of real-time information that members of the cartels provide through social media.

iii. Implementation of social network analysis into the strategies to combat organized crime. Structural weakness and vulnerabilities can be detected and adequately targeted by law enforcement. Also, changes in the cartels' networks can be monitored, to identify and trace, for example, the emergence of subgroups that might later become independent and autonomous.

iv. Usage of social media platforms to analyze the conditions under which the cartels are operating couple with their emotional state can indicate if their strategies are more likely to succeed or fail.

Future Research Agenda

This study shed light on the usage of social media by criminal organizations in Mexico from 2006 to 2015. My research presents challenges since it is the first academic work that has attempted to systematically analyze the role of social media in criminal organizations functionality. The social network analyses presented here for each case can and should be studied further by amplifying the network representation included in this study. In addition, the focus on social media usage can and should be applied to newer and increasingly powerful criminal organizations such as Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel and Cartel del Noreste, extending the temporal bracket of this study.

The research design applied for this analysis can be extrapolated to the study of criminal organizations in other countries such as criminal bands in Brazil which seem to be following similar patterns with the adoption of social media to their operational tactics.

Criminal organizations such as Comando Vermelho (CV) and Terceiro Comando Puro (TPC) based in Rio de Janeiro, and some of their capos such as Nando Bacalhua (arrested in 2012) and Marcelo Santos das Dores have presence in social media outlets. Another example are powerful Salvadorian gangs such as Barrio 18 and the Maras Salvatruchas, that are not only using social media for propaganda purposes, but are taking advantage of the information people post of their accounts to monitor possible victims for kidnapping and extortion (Byrne, 2015).

Finally, the information revolution might be altering the nature of conflict. In this study, the latter is somewhat evident. The self-censorship of traditional media outlets coupled with the adoption of social media as a main source of information about the drug war transformed its dynamics transitioning into a multilayered conflict. This can be taken into a broader study of conflicts in the International relations field.

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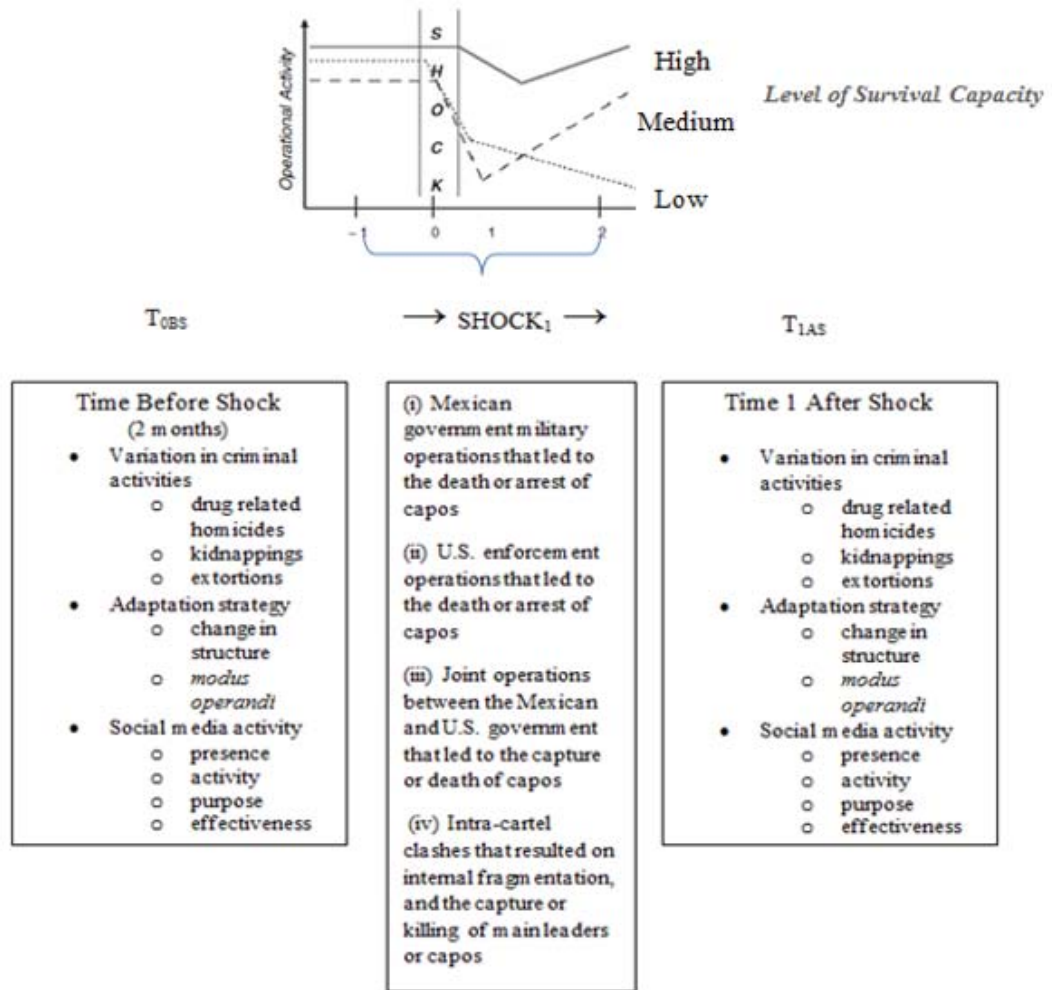
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APPENDIX A.

Survival Capacity of Criminal Organizations and Social Media Usage Model[66]

Time Before Shock (2 months)	(i) Mexican government military operations that led to the death or arrest of capos	Time 1 After Shock
• Variation in criminal activities o drug related homicides o kidnappings o extortions • Adaptation strategy o change in structure o modus operandi • Social media activity o presence o activity o purpose o effectiveness	(ii) U.S. enforcement operations that led to the death or arrest of capos (iii) Joint operations between the Mexican and U.S. government that led to the capture or death of capos (iv) Intra-cartel clashes that resulted on internal fragmentation, and the capture or killing of main leaders or capos	• Variation in criminal activities o drug related homicides o kidnappings o extortions • Adaptation strategy o change in structure o modus operandi • Social media activity o presence o activity o purpose o effectiveness

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[66] This model is based on the study on dark networks resilience by Bakker et al. 2014. It has been modified for the purpose of this project.

APPENDIX B.

Social Media Utilization Indicators

Facebook	• Yes/no • Number of Accounts • Numbers of friends	• Year of opening/closing the account • Frequency of posts • Date of last post • Active/not active • Private/public	• Recruiting • PR • Psychological warfare • Recruitment	• Positive/negative comments from friends
Twitter	• Yes/No • Reach (numbers of followers)		• Propaganda • PR • Psychological warfare • Recruitment	• Positive/negative comments from followers
YouTube	• Yes/No • Number of videos		• Propaganda • PR • Psychological warfare • Recruitment	• Positive/negative comments from viewers