Framing of Social Protest: A Comparative Study on Mainstream Media Outlets and Online-Native News Sites’ Coverage of the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional

by

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ABSTRACT

FRAMING OF SOCIAL PROTEST: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON MAINSTREAM MEDIA OUTLETS AND ONLINE-NATIVE NEWS SITES’ COVERAGE OF THE MARCHA POR LA DIGNIDAD NACIONAL

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Mainstream news outlets often frame protests adversely, discrediting demonstrators or minimising their demands. However, we lack knowledge on how social protests are framed by online-native news sites. The Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional (MDN) is a social protest launched by relatives of disappeared persons in Mexico, with the purpose of demanding from the federal government concrete actions and policies to address the crisis of disappearances of persons. Through a textual analysis of news stories about the MDN, produced by a sample of three Mexican mainstream news outlets’ digital editions and three online-native news sites, this research analyzes whether and how framing of the MDN differ between the two types of news organizations. The results indicate that two mainstream news outlets tend to use episodic framing more frequently, while two online-native news sites tend to use thematic framing more frequently. No evidence of description bias or the use of disqualifying labels to refer to demonstrators of the MDN was found in any of the six news organizations analyzed.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present a brief outline of the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional, the research question guiding the study, as well as the news organizations selected for the comparison of news coverage. The disappearance of persons became a huge problem in Mexico during the period of then President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) as a result of the “war on drugs” that he launched. During Enrique Peña Nieto’s presidency (2012-2018) this issue became even bigger (Villarreal, 2014; Martínez, 2018). Since authorities fail to take action in locating those who are missing, relatives begin the search on their own. The most frequent way of mobilization is through the formation of ‘colectivos de búsqueda’ (search groups). In 2012, the search groups scattered throughout the country decided to organize a massive march in Mexico City in order to gain strength by presenting their demands to the government in a unified manner and, at the same time, to make visible to society in general the magnitude of the problem of missing persons (Villarreal, 2014). Demonstrators named the protest “Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional: Madres Buscando a sus Hijos, Hijas, Verdad y Justicia” (March for National Dignity: Mothers Looking for their Sons, Daughters, Truth and Justice, hereinafter referred to as MDN). They decided to march again on the same date each year from then on, until their relatives are located. Since 2012, a main march has taken place in Mexico City and several marches have been carried out, simultaneously, in different cities of the country.

According to some journalist reports on the MDN, the personal qualities and traits of women demonstrators in the march have been assessed differently depending on who is commenting on them. It is common for these women to be labeled by government officials and some sectors of society as insane, whiny, as people who do not behave properly in public or who
make others uncomfortable with their complaints and demands. In contrast, officials from NGOs and international organizations who support their cause describe them as brave, as housewives who have become criminal investigators and who are able to gather evidence that government officials cannot or do not want to obtain (Turati, 2012). In this sense, a frequent claim of the members of the search groups is the indifference of most of Mexican population to the problem of disappearances and its lack of solidarity towards their search work, as well as the stigmatization of the victims by society, by assuming that they disappear because they were involved in criminal activities (Villarreal, 2014, p. 127-128). Criminalization of missing persons is also a pervasive conduct among government officials charged with investigating disappearances. Demonstrators allege that when they go to denounce the disappearance of their family member, officials of the Public Ministry often mock them, lie to them, blame the victim and, in some cases, even pressure them not to denounce (Turati, 2012). The negligence of the authorities and even their complicity with the criminals are recurrent complaints among the protesters. In response to this situation, since the first march in 2012, participants have demanded that the Mexican government recognize the magnitude and gravity of the problem of disappearances in the country, create laws and establish public policies to take real action to address this issue, and eradicate the discourse of criminalization of the disappeared (Díaz, 2017), among other things.

In the Mexican context, conditions such as the high concentration of media ownership, discretionary allocation of official advertising, use of advertisement funding as a control tool, and violence against journalists by organized crime, are major barriers to the practice of independent and critical journalism in mainstream news media (Hughes, 2006; Waisbord, 2010), which means that these media are prone to give unfavourable coverage to social mobilizations such as the MDN. However, the emergence of online-native news sites committed to the independence of their editorial line and to critical journalism, different from that of the mainstream news media (Harlow
& Salaverría, 2016; Harlow, 2018), opens the door for the MDN and other social mobilizations to have channels to disseminate their denunciations and proposals.

Studies on news coverage of social protest in Latin American countries show how mainstream news outlets often frame protests in a negative way, discrediting demonstrators or minimizing their demands (Kowalchuk, 2009, 2010; Lupien, 2013). However, we lack knowledge on how social protest is framed by online-native news sites. The present study addresses this gap by comparing and contrasting the reporting of the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional in a sample of three mainstream news outlets’ digital editions and three online-native news sites, with the purpose of increasing our knowledge about the specificities of framing of this mobilization in digital-native news outlets in Mexico. Through a textual analysis of news stories about the MDN, produced by each of those news organizations in 2012, and each year from then on, this investigation addresses the following research question:

In what ways does framing of the MDN differ between mainstream and online-native news outlets coverage?

The mainstream news outlets selected for the study are El Universal, Milenio Diario, and La Jornada in their digital editions (hereinafter referred to as El Universal online, Milenio online, and La Jornada online). These were selected on the basis of criteria such as their ownership (both El Universal and Milenio Diario are owned by media groups, whereas La Jornada is owned by a cooperative run by La Jornada workers union); the revenue their owner receives from official advertising; the preponderance they give in their news coverage to the publication of scoops, over investigative journalism. Also, the amount of online traffic they generate, and the availability of news stories about the MDN in their online repositories, were other criteria considered.

The online-native news sites selected for the study are Animal Político, SinEmbargo.mx, and Revolución Tres Punto Cero. These were selected on the basis of criteria such as their
ownership (none of them is owned by a media conglomerate); their business model (characterized by the variety of sources of revenue they use, beyond official advertising); the preponderance they give to investigative journalism in their news coverage, over the publication of scoops. Also, the availability of news stories about the MDN in their sites was another criterion considered.

The criteria used to select these news media (ownership, official advertising revenue, scoops or investigative journalism) are based on what the existing literature so far on native digital news sites mentions as aspects that distinguish them from mainstream news outlets. Firstly, most of the digital native news sites are privately owned, but none of them are owned by any media conglomerate (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). It is frequent that governments in Latin America establish quid pro quo relationships with media groups: in these arrangements, the governments favor certain media groups with money from government advertising in exchange for favorable coverage of their policies and actions in those media (Waisbord, 2010). This imposes severe limitations on journalists working in those media corporations who attempt to question the actions of government officials. Being independent of media consortiums gives to journalists in digital native news outlets the freedom to manage the editorial line they want without being restricted by editorial policies and interests common in oligopolistic mainstream news media. Secondly, an essential trait of these digital news outlets is the variety of funding sources they use, as opposed to traditional journalism, which is limited to one or two. Online-native news sites often resort to diverse sources of revenue such as advertising, donations, crowdfunding, marketing, events, training, merchandise, support from NGOs, international cooperation from foundations, among others, unlike traditional news outlets which have relied mainly on advertising and subscriptions (SembraMedia, 2017; Harlow, 2018; Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). The dependence of traditional newspapers on official advertising and the wide margin of discretion that the government uses to allocate these funds become major obstacles to criticizing the government for fear of losing these
revenues in retaliation. Not relying on a single source of revenue is crucial in terms of editorial independence, as it enables online-native news sites to take a critical stance towards the government without fear of facing financial difficulties as a result. Thirdly, while news production in traditional media newsrooms focuses primarily on generating news stories about immediate events, without going too deep into the facts, most digital native news outlets prioritize the production of investigative stories that delve deeper into the topics analyzed; this is, their main objective is not to publish the news of the day, but to carry out exhaustive research on the issues. Usually, their investigative journalism is about issues related to social movements, human rights, political and corporate corruption, organized crime, drug trafficking (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016; SembraMedia, 2017; Knight Center, 2013), i.e., issues that mainstream news media do not address most of the time, or do so only superficially. In view of the above, it is reasonable to expect significant differences in the type of coverage of social protests by each type of news media.

In this study, I examine how El Universal online, Milenio online, La Jornada online, Animal Político, SinEmbargo.mx, and Revolución Tres Punto Cero, have reported on the MDN, focusing especially on the type of coverage, episodic or thematic, they have carried out on this mobilization, and the possible use of description biases or labels about protesters to discredit the movement. According to Iyengar (1991), episodic frames depict public issues as individual events or specific examples, without providing further information about the context in which those cases occur. Conversely, thematic frames place public issues in a broader context, more general, indicating that occurrences reported are not isolated events. Thematic frames may focus attention on general outcomes or conditions, or also in the facts of an event providing information on the context related to those facts. Therefore, the same issue can be framed in an episodic or thematic way depending on what information is included and how it is presented. According to Iyengar, episodic coverage of public issues induces the public to attribute responsibility for these problems
to individuals, rather than to institutions or broader social forces. In contrast, thematic coverage contributes to people attributing responsibility for public issues to institutions, public policies or political actors (Feinberg, 2009). In this sense, episodic framing may be considered pro-establishment because of its emphasis on individuals’ responsibility for the causes and solutions of public issues. In contrast, thematic framing encourages people to hold institutions, public policies and political actors accountable for the origins and solutions of social problems (Feinberg, 2009).

The Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional is an important social protest to study for a number of reasons. First, it was originated to demand that the Mexican government implemented effective actions and policies to address the problem of missing persons. In this sense, it is a social mobilization that demands that the government fulfills its obligation to protect and guarantee basic human rights of people. Second, the march emerged as an effort to counteract the official discourse that sought to underestimate and criminalize missing persons. There is still a need to analyze the extent to which print and digital news media have promoted or hindered the achievement of this end. Third, seven years after it began, the problem that caused it has worsened rather than diminished, suggesting that the number of marchers has increased over the years as well. There are then more people affected who are demanding that the government meet its obligations. Fourth, there are no academic studies on what the news coverage of this march has been like in printed or digital news organizations. How have protesters’ reasons to mobilize, their allegations and their demands been presented in both types of news organizations? Has their discourse rejecting the criminalization of missing persons been communicated by the news media? These are some of the questions that need to be answered.

This news framing analysis aims to shed light on the main differences in news coverage of the MDN, between selected Mexican mainstream news outlets’ digital editions and online-native
news sites. Results gained from this comparison contribute to increase our understanding of whether and how online-native news sites work to give voice to social protests, and to inform society differently from the mainstream media, in an effort to improve democracy in Mexico.

The content of this thesis is organized in five chapters. Chapter two provides a literature review of issues related to the focus of this study such as journalism and democracy, the context of journalism in Latin America and Mexico, online-native news sites in Latin America, the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional, and concepts and typologies of news framing. Chapter three outlines the methods used in this study including textual analysis of news stories about the MDN for comparative analysis of MDN coverage between mainstream news media and online-native news sites. Chapter four provides the results obtained from both analyses showing the differences of MDN coverage between mainstream news organizations and online-native news sites. Chapter five discusses the findings as well as their implications for social mobilizations and independent journalism.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Role of News Media and Journalism in Democracy

Freedom of speech, freedom of press and right to information are fundamental elements of democracy. A society cannot be considered democratic if these rights are not enforced in it (Ramírez, 2008). The United Nations General Assembly acknowledged the right to information as a fundamental human right and its key role in promoting all other freedoms that the UN advocates (United Nations, 1946), which was unequivocally expressed in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). Nevertheless, the activities carried out by certain social actors can impact on the enforcement of those rights, significantly affecting the democratic nature of the society. Among these social actors, the media and journalists have an important role to play in strengthening or weakening democracy.

Some scholars argue that the news media and journalists have the possibility and responsibility to contribute to the strengthening of democracy by playing various roles: agenda setters, sources of information in a deliberative democracy, representatives of citizens before power, advocates of the people, watchdogs (Norris & Odugbemi, 2010; Waisbord, 2000, 2015; McNair, 2009). As agenda setters, the news media have a responsibility to inform the society at large about social problems so that the public can focus their attention on them, and to inform public officials about social needs (Norris & Odugbemi, 2010). As sources of information, journalists must provide the people with accurate and thoughtful information that allow them to participate meaningfully in society. As representatives of citizens before power, journalists help people’s opinions and thoughts reach the political elites. As participants, journalists are positioned to advocate particular political positions on behalf of people, as long this is clearly stated from the
beginning, and opinions are distinguished from facts (McNair, 2009). As watchdogs, journalists must monitor the exercise of power to contribute to accountability of government officials, informing the society about cases of malfeasance and corruption, and promoting transparency of governance as a result (Norris & Odugbemi, 2010; McNair, 2009; Waisbord, 2000, 2015). Watchdog journalism, in particular, greatly contributes to democracy through reporting of wrongdoing and injustices in political and economic elites, aiming to draw public attention to significant social issues, with the purpose of fostering democratic goals such as accountability, honesty, truth-telling, and transparency (Waisbord, 2015). All in all, when news media and journalists fulfill these roles, rational deliberation, inclusive participation and informed choices are promoted in society, which has a positive impact on democracy (Norris & Odugbemi, 2010).

From another perspective, some scholars have argued that the role of news media and journalism in relation to democracy is not really that positive. These may, in fact, contribute to undermining democracy. In this line, Herman & Chomsky (1988) focus their criticism on the structural factors in the media that determine the type of news they distribute. Herman & Chomsky’s Propaganda Model states that what the news media actually do is disseminate content that fits the interests and values of the economic and political elites, serving as propaganda tools for these groups. Their objective is to generate public support for the policies and actions that power elites seek to implement to preserve or expand their interests. Structural factors in the media generate incentives, pressures and constraints on the work of journalists, determining what they present as newsworthy. These structural factors include media ownership and control over the type of content being disseminated; the media's heavy dependence on advertisers as a source of revenue; the relations of mutual interest between the media and those who “serve as primary definers of the news”; the media’s ability to present “experts” who support and confirm the bias in the news (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). In a similar line of thought, in analyzing the media system in the
United States, Robert McChesney (Media Education Foundation, 2003) asserts that deregulation in restrictions on media ownership has led to the consolidation of increasingly large media conglomerates that disseminate biased content that favors their economic interests rather than the broader interests of society. So-called 'deregulation' is not really such thing, but the implementation of regulations that benefit media conglomerates and not society at large. These conglomerates have implemented a type of journalism that essentially 'regurgitates' the opinions that the owners of these media want to spread. Investigative journalism that seeks to find out what actually happens behind what politicians and big corporations publicly do is non-existent in those media. Their news stories are “high on sensationalism and low on information”. The result of this is a constant attack on the basic foundations of the democratic system (Media Education Foundation, 2003). It is important to note that, although these authors’ approaches refer primarily to the media system in the United States, media systems in other parts of the world present problems similar to those they mention, as is the case with Latin America, particularly with regard to their claims about the creation of laws favorable to conglomerates and the negative effect that concentration of ownership has on the type of news that media conglomerates disseminate (Waisbord, 2010).

In the light of these last considerations, it is therefore worth asking, what mechanisms can be implemented to overcome the structural factors that condition mainstream news outlets and thus have the capacity to carry out journalism that is not at the service of the economic and political elites? In response to this, several online-native news sites have emerged in Latin America implementing measures to overcome the structural factors that condition the mainstream news outlets, with the aim of contributing positively to the democratic environment of the region through journalism that is independent of the economic and political elites and responds to the interests of society at large. This will be explained in more detail later in this chapter.
Common Features of Journalism in Latin America

The ideal of critical and independent journalism is something on which scholars generally agree when it comes to examining how the media and journalists can contribute positively to the fulfilment of rights and freedoms essential to democracy. All too often, however, journalists face several difficulties in putting it into practice. Historically, conditions have been neither politically nor economically conducive to the development of independent journalism in Latin American mainstream media. On the one hand, the creation of mutually beneficial relationships between the state and the media have led to the emergence of broadcasters docile to the governments in return for allowing them high levels of media concentration, which hampers the dissemination of critical views of the regimes in most cases (Fox & Waisbord, 2002). On the other hand, the fact that mainstream press has relied excessively on official advertising as the main source of revenue, has made it vulnerable to the governments’ margin of discretion in allocating funds for advertising, in favouring docile media and punishing those with critical views. In several countries, oligarchies, newspapers and governments have maintained a close relationship through subsidies and official publicity, using the news media to defend and advance their mutual interests. In addition to this, there is considerable evidence of how governments have used tactics such as censorship and state-sponsored violence in order to control media holding critical views of the regime (Rockwell & Janus, 2003). The authoritarian nature of some political regimes in the region has also led journalists from mainstream news media to opt for positive government coverage, so as not to risk losing official advertising revenue, or being repressed or censored in retaliation for critical reporting on government issues (Waisbord, 2000).

In spite of this long adverse situation for independent journalism in mainstream news media, during the 1980s and 1990s some spaces were opened for the emergence of instances of watchdog journalism, as a result of transformations in political and economic conditions in several
countries in the region, as well as to changes in the politics of news organizations (Waisbord, 2000). The shift from authoritarian to democratic regimes created more favourable conditions for critical reporting, which was extremely difficult, if not virtually impossible, in previous military governments. Also, the implementation of free-market policies that led to greater (although not complete) economic independence of the press from the state gave some news media more room to be critical of the government without the risk of having major financial problems. These factors, coupled with the consolidation of a news production culture that encouraged the use of information leaked from official sources to denounce government wrongdoing, contributed to the upsurge of press denunciations at that time (Waisbord, 2000). However, despite the positive progress made by some news organizations during those years, media systems in the region still have to face general barriers to the exercise of independent journalism. Some of the main hurdles in this respect include the oligarchic ownership of media, mainly television which is the dominant medium; fragility in the rule of law that encourages violence against journalists; holdover of laws enacted during authoritarian regimes to inhibit critical journalism, which are still in force; high level of discretionary power of governments to allocate official advertising, rewarding docile news outlets and punishing critical journalism (Hughes & Lawson, 2005; Waisbord, 2010). Because these conditions were not actually transformed by the political and economic liberalization that countries in the region experienced during the 1980s and 1990s, they still constitute significant obstacles to independent journalism today. According to scholars, a series of institutional reforms would be necessary in most of the countries of the region in order to generate conditions that really promote the realization of such type of journalism. Some of these reforms are the designation of special prosecutors who investigate intimidations of journalists; creation of laws that protect journalistic sources and guarantee public access to information; establishment of non-partisan boards responsible for overseeing the allocation of broadcast concessions and government advertising, as
well as to increase transparency about the processes for allocating these resources; adoption of self-regulatory mechanisms by news organizations on the basis of ethical parameters, among others (Hughes & Lawson, 2005). To date, however, the absence of comprehensive implementation of institutional reforms in media systems in the region makes carrying out independent and critical journalism still a difficult task in most Latin American countries.

**Hurdles to Critical Journalism in Mexico: End of the Twentieth Century and Present Day**

In the Mexican context, for most of the 20th century the news media were subject to an authoritarian media system created by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) regime, in which news organizations lacked autonomy to determine the type of information they disseminated and served often as the government’s propaganda instruments (Hughes, 2006). Nevertheless, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s political and economic liberalization in the country opened the door for changes in some newsrooms incentives to produce news, which introduced the possibility of transforming the media system then in force. On the political front, starting in 1985, opposition candidates began to win some local and state elections, a trend that continued permanently until 2000, when an opposition party finally won the presidential election. The majority of these opposition governments described the then current practice of paying journalists in exchange for positive coverage as corruption, thus modifying the relationship between governments and the media. In parallel, beginning in 1986 the federal government started a process of deregulation and privatization of the economy, a process that accelerated into the 1990s, which gradually changed the type of major advertisers and diminished, to a certain extent, the state's ability to influence newspapers through advertising money. This, combined with the greater contact that Mexican journalists began to have with journalistic practices and cultures abroad, as consequence of the economic liberalization and political openness, led several newspapers to attach more importance
to consumer demands in regards to political information (Hughes, 2006). As a result, the Mexican media system changed from an authoritarian media institution to a hybrid media system comprising three types of media organizations: civic, market driven and adaptive authoritarian. The civic model (similar in certain respects to watchdog journalism) is characterized by giving voice to citizens’ needs and by holding the government accountable. Newsrooms in this category demonstrate autonomy, diversity in perspectives they provide the audience with, and assertiveness in the way they gather the news. In authoritarian model newsrooms lack autonomy because of the repressive nature of the regime or because journalists themselves decide to support the government because of their conviction in the aims it seeks to achieve; in this model, journalists commonly represent views supporting the current regime and have a passive approach to newsgathering. The market driven model is characterized by lack of autonomy in the newsrooms because news may be subordinated to market pressures, or because ratings or corporate interests may condition the news production. In this model, news organizations usually prioritize commercial purposes in monitoring powerful actors (Hughes, 2006). In the market driven model, the lack of autonomy in newsrooms occurs in a ‘liberal political system and market-based economy’; newsrooms may be restricted by the economic interests of the news organizations. In the authoritarian model, the lack of autonomy in newsrooms is mainly due to political issues such as the repressive nature of the government.

In this context, as positive as the emergence of civic journalism is, Hughes pointed out that its consolidation in the Mexican context would face important challenges such as the concentrated media ownership; the domestic advertising market; holdover of authoritarian laws such as regulations against defamation to protect the honor of public officials; extra state violence against journalists; and private media owners who are not always willing to give full autonomy to newsrooms, among others (p. 19). In fact, those major obstacles to the development of independent
and critical journalism in Mexican mainstream media still remain today. The most outstanding ones are concentration of media ownership, use of advertisement funding as a control tool, and violence against journalists by organized crime.

Worldwide, Mexico is one of the countries with the highest levels of concentration in media ownership, primarily in broadcast media (ONU-CIDH, 2011, 2018). According to the Media Ownership Monitor project (MOM), carried out by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social (Cencos), an insufficient regulatory framework is one of the main causes of the concentration of media ownership in a few hands (RSF-Cencos, 2018k). Up until 2011, the two largest television consortiums, Televisa and Televisión Azteca, accumulated together the highest percentage of television channels in the country (62 percent) in open television, due to the broad discretion with which the Mexican government handles radioelectric concessions. For 2017, Televisa controlled almost 70 percent of the free-to-air market and more than 60 percent of the cable and satellite market, whereas Televisión Azteca controlled about 30 percent of the free-to-air market (Freedom House, 2017). On the radio market, approximately 70 percent of stations with private operators belong to around ten media conglomerates (ONU-CIDH, 2018). In general, the government has tended to benefit broadcasters in exchange for them not criticizing or questioning the government's policies (Trejo, 2011; Huerta & Gómez, 2013). As a result, the newscasts of these consortiums have tended to privilege official positions and suppress or downplay other political positions, especially if they are critical of the government (Trejo, 2011). For many years, this has had an enormous impact on the type of news to which the Mexican population has had access, taking into consideration that television and radio have traditionally been the main sources of news and information for most Mexicans. Up until 2011, 95.5 percent of the population watched television to stay informed of events in the country, while 87.3 percent listened to the radio, and barely 16.1 percent read newspapers (Gómez et al., 2011, p. 26).
Television and radio were still the main source of information for the great majority of the Mexican population, above all other media.

In this line, although new technologies based on the Internet had opened up the possibility of having access to other sources of information, limited Internet access due to high connection costs, lack of telecommunication infrastructure, as well as the lack of digital literacy in the majority of the population, especially for the consumption of news on the internet, were significant barriers to the growth of news consumption through these platforms (p. 27). However, despite the low level of internet penetration at that time, people's news consumption habits began to change once they started using the internet: 78 percent of internet users claimed to use the internet as their main source of news and information over other media (p. 19). In fact, the trend of people consulting news on the Internet had already led to a fall in sales of printed newspapers and the migration of advertising to online platforms (p. 44). Of those who consulted the news on the Internet, 17 percent visited the online sites of printed newspapers, which remained the most visited over other news websites (p. 38).

In recent years, as Internet penetration in the country has increased, so has the number of people getting news via the Internet. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019, Internet penetration in Mexico is 65 percent (Newman et al., 2019, p. 127). The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI by its name in Spanish) estimated in the last 2010 census that 77.8 percent of the Mexican population lived in urban areas, while 22.2 percent lived in rural areas (INEGI, 2019b). The INEGI also states that Internet use is mainly an urban phenomenon, as 73.1 percent of the urban population has access to it, as opposed to 40.6 percent of the rural population who have access to it (INEGI, 2019a, p. 1). According to the same institute, 92.7 percent of internet users have access to it from a smartphone, 32.6 percent do it from a laptop, 32 percent from a desktop computer, and 17.8 percent from a tablet (p. 7-8). This increase in internet access has also
transformed people's preferences about the medium by which they get the news. According to the
Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019, the most popular sources of news in Mexico are online
and social media for the urban population, whereas television and radio are important for people
who has no access to internet (Newman et al., 2019, p. 128). Its findings show that 91 percent of
urban population uses online and social media as sources of news, 59 percent uses television for
the same purpose, and 38 percent uses print sources of news (p. 128). According to the same report,
81 percent of urban population gets the news through a smartphone, 35 percent does so via a laptop,
and 18 percent via a tablet (p. 128). These data clearly show that online platforms have become
important sources of news for a large number of people in Mexico, over traditional media such as
television and radio, which is likely to continue to increase in the coming years.

With regards to the print media, all newspapers are regional, although those published in
Mexico City generally present themselves as national in scope (Huerta & Gómez, 2013). In this
sense, one of the main characteristics of the printed press in Mexico is their great dispersion
throughout the country, with five cities concentrating the 34 percent of the country’s newspapers
(Mancinas, 2009). Newspapers printed in Mexico City stand out in terms of journalistic quality (p.
294). Even though there is no complete and reliable record of print media in Mexico, the database
closest to this is the Padrón Nacional de Medios Impresos (National Register of Print Media,
PNMI) of the Ministry of the Interior. Since it is a requirement to be registered in it to be able to
obtain revenues from official advertising, this register includes the main printed media (Gómez et
al., 2011). In 2009, some scholars estimated that there were 304 newspapers in the country, 34%
of which were printed in five cities (Mancinas, 2009). Based on the records in the PNMI, Gómez
et al. (2011) estimated that there were 279 newspapers in the country, whose combined daily
circulation was 6.16 million, equivalent to 57.75 copies per thousand inhabitants (p. 23). The
discrepancy between the two estimates in a relatively short period of time may be due to the fact
that many of those newspapers are published irregularly or have short print runs which causes them survival problems (Mancinas, 2009), or because the registration on the register is voluntary (Gómez et al., 2011), which would result in unregistered print media in the PNMI. Whatever the explanations for this or the precise number of news outlets, scholars agree that the presence of a large number of news outlets does not necessarily translate into a large plurality of ideas or extensive journalistic coverage (Mancinas, 2009; Trejo, 2001; Freedom House, 2017), because many of those newspapers do not subsist because of the profits from the sale of copies, but because of the revenues from official advertising.

Overall, Mexico is a country with many newspapers, but few readers (Trejo, 2001; Gómez et al., 2011). The weekly readership of newspapers in Mexico City, Monterrey and Guadalajara, the country's three largest cities, dropped from 33 percent to 32 percent of the population between 2005 and 2009 (Gómez et al., 2011). Most recently, a study by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) reported that the percentage of the population age 18 and older who read newspapers, magazines and comics decreased by 7.6 percent from 2015 to 2018 (INEGI, 2018), which suggests that consumption of printed newspapers has further decreased in recent years. In this sense, newspaper consumption levels are quite low compared to those of other media. In 2009, for instance, 66.50 percent of the population said they watched open TV; 22.50 percent watched pay TV; 20 percent listened to radio; nine percent used the Internet; and seven percent read printed newspapers (p. 17). Low levels of newspaper readership mean that revenues of most news outlets come from the sale of advertising, mainly to the government or political parties (Mancinas, 2009; Huerta & Gómez, 2013). In their study about the cost of advertising in major news outlets in relation to their circulation, Huerta & Gómez (2013) found that some newspapers that do not have the largest circulation have the highest cost in advertising. This is the case of El Universal and Milenio Diario, whose circulation in 2010 was 117,863 and 80,700 copies, respectively. At the
same time, the cost of advertising insertion in the main section in each of them was $150, 800 and $124, 155 Mexican pesos, respectively, the highest in the newspapers they compared (p. 133, 134). In contrast, newspapers with higher circulation like La Prensa (244, 299 copies) and El Norte (190, 080 copies) had a lower cost of advertising insertion ($29, 000 and $76, 680 Mexican pesos, respectively) (p. 133, 134). One explanation for this peculiarity is that the government seeks advertising insertions based on the political relationship it wants to establish with a given newspaper because of the audience it is aimed at, and not because of its greater or lesser circulation. La Prensa is a sensationalist tabloid and El Norte is a regional newspaper, whereas El Universal and Milenio Diario are considered serious and national newspapers. Advertising may be more expensive in smaller circulation newspapers, but it is more politically convenient (Huerta & Gómez, 2013, p. 133). In fact, El Universal and Milenio Diario were the biggest recipients of official publicity in 2016, during the government of President Peña Nieto (Castaño, 2017), and they both maintain a pro-government editorial line (RSF-Cencos, 2018b, 2018d, 2018g). Many other newspapers would disappear without official advertising revenue, so they try not to be critical of the government so as not to risk losing that source of revenue (Gómez et al., 2011, p. 46), which evidently compromises the independence of their editorial line.

The government usually takes advantage of this situation for its own benefit. The absence of clear rules on how the government should allocate the money for official advertising gives it a large margin of discretion in this regard, to pressure and punish, or reward and privilege certain media, depending on their reporting lines (ONU-CIDH, 2011, 2018). Although political and economic liberalization in the country during the 1980s and 1990s opened the door for changes in some newsrooms incentives to produce news, it did not produce transformations in factors such as the concentrated media ownership and the domestic advertising market (Hughes, 2005, 2006). At the time of the authoritarian PRI regime, the then President José López Portillo (1976-1982) once
said, “no pago para que me peguen” (I don’t pay to get hit), meaning that he did not pay the news organizations, through official advertising, to be criticized. From the political and economic liberalization of the country, the news media that depend on official advertising revenues have chosen to maintain a complacent stance toward the government, while others apply the "pego para que me paguen" (I hit to get paid), meaning that they take a critical stance toward the government until they come to an arrangement with it to be favored with money for official advertising, and then switch to favorable coverage of government actions (Mancinas, 2009). In general, the latter has been the position of media conglomerates that use their power and resources to pressure the government and obtain not only economic, but also fiscal and legal benefits.

The consequence of the scenario described above is that independent and critical journalism is not actually promoted in Mexican press as a whole. Critical journalists often face many obstacles in mainstream media in order to carry out their work. In close connection with this, it is important to note that Internet and the new technologies have transformed the production, distribution and consumption of news, leading to a drop in the circulation of print media and the migration of advertising to digital media (Gómez et al., 2011). Although the financial crisis for the Mexican press is not as severe as in other parts of the world, due to the income it receives from government advertising, it has led many mainstream news media to search for new business models, such as producing two editions, one in printed format and another in digital format (p. 46). In this way, mainstream news organizations are able to disseminate through these two formats the content they produce.

Another major obstacle that journalists face in their pursuit of critical journalism is the risk of becoming victims of extra-state violence. There are numerous cases of journalists dedicated to reporting cases of collusion between government officials and organized crime groups who have been intimidated, kidnapped, tortured or killed as a result of their journalistic work (ONU-CIDH,
which makes Mexico the most dangerous country in America to practice journalism, and one of the most dangerous in the world (ONU-CIDH, 2011; Freedom House, 2017). In fact, the press in Mexico is considered “not free”, according to Freedom House (2017). The state of defenselessness of journalists in Mexico is exacerbated by the lack of justice to resolve cases of murder and aggression against them, and the generalized impunity in this regard: around 99.6 percent of these crimes have not been clarified (ONU-CIDH, 2018). Such a high level of impunity produces several negative effects: it discourages denunciation of aggressions, encourages aggressors, generates self-censorship among journalists, promotes disinformation of society, and weakens the democratic system (Ramírez, 2008). This context of ongoing attacks on journalists is currently the greatest and most direct threat to freedom of expression in Mexico (ONU-CIDH, 2018).

In sum, watchdog journalism is far from being a widespread practice in Mexico in spite of the many news outlets scattered throughout the country. Factors such as the high concentration of media ownership, use of advertisement funding as a control tool, and violence against journalists by organized crime, are major barriers to the development of this type of journalism. Although these factors are not the only pitfalls to conduct critical and independent journalism in Mexican mainstream news organizations, they are certainly among the most significant. It is also in the light of this context that Mexican journalists have searched for alternatives to develop a different type of journalism from that of mainstream media.

Online-Native News Sites and Independent Journalism

The obstacles and constraints to the development of independent and critical journalism in traditional news media have led several journalists to look for other media, where they can do the kind of journalism they want. The emergence and consolidation of the Internet made journalists
seek to take advantage of the opportunities that this medium could offer them. This is how, for some years now, fully online news outlets have emerged in Latin America and Mexico aiming to perform a type of journalism different from that of traditional mainstream media.

Online-native news sites are those born online without a prior print version (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016), unlike mainstream news outlets, which first appeared in print and later launched their online versions. A number of scholars have studied the emergence of digital born news outlets as instances of ‘entrepreneurial journalism’. Although this concept poses significant challenges yet to be precisely defined (Harlow, 2018; Cohen, 2015), scholars have raised some basic elements that this type of journalism commonly includes: usually, journalists who have been staff reporters or newsroom staff members at mainstream newspapers, or who have previously worked as freelancers for news media, decide to become independent from traditional news organizations and become entrepreneurs by starting their own news business (Harlow, 2018). A common feature in this is the use of technological innovations to take advantage of the possibilities provided by the new technologies (p. 544). Both, the business side of news and technological innovations are key elements in the concept of entrepreneurial journalism.

According to Meléndez (2016), up until 2009 there were six online-native news sites in Latin America, but between 2010 and 2014 there was a “boom” in the emergence of more of these news sites. In their study about online-native news sites in Latin America, Harlow & Salaverría (2016) identified 67 digital-native news sites in the region. By combining measurements of their number of followers on Facebook and Twitter with traffic logs on their websites according to Alexa's global rankings, they found that 26 of these online-native news sites achieve the highest levels in both parameters, making them ‘highly influential’ in terms of the audience they reach (p. 1007-1008). Examples include: El Faro (El Salvador); La Silla Vacía (Colombia); 14ymedio (Cuba); Animal Político (Mexico); La República (Ecuador); Proceso Digital (Honduras); MDZ
A common feature in most of these online-native news sites is their strong purpose of ensuring the independence of their editorial line and to carry out a journalism different from that of the mainstream media (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016; Harlow, 2018). To this end, they have implemented a set of measures that enable them to achieve those goals. In this regard, the first distinctive aspect of online-native news sites is their ownership. Most of them are privately owned, but none of them are owned by any media conglomerate (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). As outlined above, it is frequent that governments in Latin America establish quid pro quo relationships with media groups: in these arrangements, the governments favor certain media groups with money from government advertising in exchange for favorable coverage of their policies and actions in those media (Waisbord, 2010). This imposes severe limitations on journalists working in those media corporations who attempt to question the actions of government officials. The case of Mexican journalist Carmen Aristegui exemplifies this situation. In 2014, Aristegui, widely known for her critical investigations of the Mexican government, was anchorwoman in the radio station MVS Noticias, part of Grupo MVS, a conglomerate of enterprises in television, radio and restaurants, owned by the Vargas family (RSF-Cencos, 2018h; MVS Comunicaciones, 2019). In her news program, she unveiled a series of reports her research team made about a $7 million USD home owned by then President Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife, former soap opera actress Angélica Rivera, in one of the most exclusive areas of Mexico City. The report was titled ‘La casa blanca de Enrique Peña Nieto’. The information gathered indicated that such property had not been included by the president in his patrimonial declaration, and suggested that it was the product of the exchange of favors with Grupo Higa, a construction consortium that had been favored with government contracts when Peña Nieto was governor of the State of Mexico (Aristegui Noticias,
2014). Despite the social outrage and the demands of the political opposition for legal consequences in this regard, no legal repercussions resulted from it all. In 2015, however, Grupo MVS rescinded its contract with Carmen Aristegui alleging the cost of litigation for copyright violations. According to some reports, after the departure of Carmen Aristegui, Grupo MVS was benefited by the government of Peña Nieto with official publicity and radio and television concessions in the amount of 6 billion Mexican pesos. The amount of money for official advertising was twice what it received before when Aristegui worked for them, and radio and television concessions were something they had already requested in previous governments, but had not been authorized (Tejado, 2019). For many analysts, the connection between the Aristegui dismissal and the benefits that Grupo MVS subsequently received is clear, showing the quid pro quo relationship that is common between the government and media conglomerates not only in Mexico, but in most Latin American countries too. This episode also shows the obstacles media conglomerates put in the way of critical journalism because of the economic and political benefits they seek to obtain or preserve. In this sense, after her dismissal from MVS Noticias, Carmen Aristegui and her research team launched their own online-native news site Aristegui Noticias (https://aristeguinoticias.com/), in which they disseminated and expanded information about ‘La casa blanca de Enrique Peña Nieto’, and continue to do the kind of journalism for which she is known. Thus, being independent of media consortiums gives to journalists in digital native news outlets the freedom to manage the editorial line they want without being restricted by editorial policies and interests common in oligopolistic mainstream news media.

A second aspect that distinguishes online-native news outlets from traditional mainstream news organizations is their business model. From an economic point of view, an essential trait of entrepreneurial journalism in these digital news outlets is the variety of funding sources they use, as opposed to traditional journalism, which is limited to one or two. Online-native news sites often
resort to diverse sources of revenue such as advertising, donations, crowdfunding, marketing, events, training, merchandise, support from NGOs, international cooperation from foundations, among others, unlike traditional news outlets which have relied mainly on advertising and subscriptions (SembraMedia, 2017; Harlow, 2018; Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). It is important to note that, although sustainability becomes an inherent issue in their business model, most of those online-native news sites have found ways to obtain the necessary funding to carry out their journalistic work, and some even make a profit (SembraMedia, 2017). Not relying on a single source of revenue is crucial in terms of editorial independence, as it enables online-native news sites to take a critical stance towards the government without fear of facing financial difficulties as a result. As explained earlier, the dependence of traditional newspapers on official advertising and the wide margin of discretion that the government uses to allocate these funds become major obstacles to criticizing the government for fear of losing these revenues in retaliation. By overcoming this major constraint to the independence of the editorial line, digital native news outlets have the possibility of disseminating news content that the mainstream news media are unlikely to publish.

A third distinctive aspect of these online-native news sites is their emphasis on investigative journalism rather than the dissemination of short news. While news production in traditional media newsrooms focuses primarily on generating news stories about immediate events, without going too deep into the facts, most digital native news outlets prioritize the production of investigative stories that delve deeper into the topics analyzed; this is, their main objective is not to publish the news of the day, but to carry out exhaustive research on the issues. Daniela Pastrana, General Director of Pie de Página (Mexico) summarizes this: “We’re not fighting for scoops. We’re interested in going deeper, even if it means that we come out after everyone else. One of our mottos is, ‘We don’t tell it first, we tell it better’” (SembraMedia, 2017,
Most of these digital native news outlets focus on presenting information that is fact-based and verifiable. This news approach has led several of these digital native news sites to produce stories that have been picked up by national publications in their respective countries, and some even by international publications such as the New York Times, BBC, Al Jazeera and The Guardian (SembraMedia, 2017, p. 16). International media attention has helped online-native news sites build credibility and prove the quality of their journalistic work. Usually, their investigative journalism is about issues related to social movements, human rights, political and corporate corruption, organized crime, drug trafficking (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016; SembraMedia, 2017; Knight Center, 2013). In some instances, investigative reporting has had a real impact on the political sphere. This is the case of Animal Político (Mexico) whose report ‘Las empresas fantasma de Veracruz’ (The Phony Businesses of Veracruz) in 2016, was picked up by international media such as AP and The Guardian (SembraMedia, 2017, p. 18). The report, which they produced in collaboration with the organization Mexicanos Contra la Corrupción y la Impunidad, details how the governor of the Veracruz State, Javier Duarte, used fictitious companies to divert 645 million Mexican pesos between 2012 and 2013. Following the publication of the report, political and social pressure on Duarte increased to the point where he was forced to flee the country, and was later captured in Guatemala in 2017 (p. 18). In other cases, the quality of these digital native news outlets’ investigative reporting has been recognized with awards and honors. For example, Connectas (Colombia) and Aristegui Noticias (Mexico) collaborated in the investigation of the Panama Papers from 2015 to 2016 that won the Pulitzer Prize. In 2015, Aristegui Noticias had also won the prestigious Gabriel Gracia Márquez Award for its investigation about ‘La casa blanca de Enrique Peña Nieto’. In 2016, Agência Pública (Brazil), La Silla Vacía (Colombia) and Repórter Brasil (Brazil) won each a Gabriel García Márquez Award for investigative stories in their countries. Sin Embargo (Mexico) has received the PEN Freedom of Expression Award and the
National Journalism Prize. El Gato y la Caja (Argentina) won a UNESCO award in recognition of its scientific coverage (SembraMedia, 2017, p. 19-20). All in all, those awards constitute an endorsement of the quality of their investigative journalism and have helped digital native news sites to boost credibility and confidence in their editorial independence (p. 19). Through investigative journalism most of them seek to strengthen democracy, promote plurality of views, defend human rights, and fight corruption either political or economic, among other goals (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). In summary, by being independent of media conglomerates and diversifying their sources of revenue, the digital-native news sites are able to maintain an independent editorial line that is put into practice mostly in critical investigative journalism. In this way, they are trying to renew journalism to become authentic alternatives to mainstream news media (p. 1011).

Online-native news sites are an emerging focus of study that still needs further research in many respects (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016). In this sense, study is needed regarding how social protest is framed in their news coverage, and how their framing of social protest differs to that of mainstream media outlets, specifically their digital editions. A key element in news reporting of social mobilizations or social protests challenging the status quo or affecting political and economic elites’ interests is how participants, their denunciations and their demands, are presented in the news stories, i.e., how they are framed in media reporting (Iyengar, 1991; Smith, 2001). It is widely known that the way in which a fact is presented by a given media outlet to its audience can greatly influence the public’s attitude or behavior towards the issue reported. There is a corpus of research on how news reporting in Latin American mainstream media can favor or discredit social mobilizations (Kowalchuk, 2009, 2010; Lupien, 2013), depending on how they are framed in the news. However, we lack knowledge on how digital-native news sites frame participants, their denunciations and their demands in their reporting, and how this framing might be different to that of mainstream media outlets’ digital editions. Examining this matter is important.
considering that media other than the mainstream media usually give voice to social movements and activists (Harlow & Salaverría, 2016, p. 1010), whose demands do not receive positive coverage in the mainstream media most of the time.

Analyzing this issue is also relevant considering the level of Internet usage by Mexican population. Quoting a report by Internet Live Stats, the Media Ownership Monitor project (MOM), carried out by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social (Cencos), states that Mexico is one of the top ten countries with most Internet users in the world (RSF-Cencos, 2018i). Also, according to the aforementioned Digital News Report 2019 by the Reuters Institute, 91% of Mexican population in urban areas uses online and social media as sources of news (Newman et al., 2019, p. 128). In the light of these figures, it is reasonable to think that both online-native news sites and mainstream media outlets’ digital editions are likely to become an important source of news and information for a significant segment of Mexican population, which underlines the need to analyze how their news coverage differ from one another, especially regarding social protests or social mobilizations.

**Disappeared Persons in Mexico and the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional**

In this connection, the ‘Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional: Madres Buscando a sus Hijos, Hijas, Verdad y Justicia’ is a social protest launched by the relatives of disappeared persons, in 2012, with the purpose of demanding from the federal government concrete actions and policies to face the crisis of disappearance of persons in the country, and challenging the official discourse that criminalized the victims. The disappearances of persons became a huge problem in Mexico during the period of then President Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) as a result of the “war on drugs” that he launched. During Enrique Peña Nieto’s presidency (2012-2018) this issue became even bigger (Villarreal, 2014; Martínez, 2018). All these years, government officials at local, state and
federal levels have been derelict in resolving cases of missing persons, which has led sectors of civil society to mobilize to get information about the whereabouts of disappeared persons. The prolonged duration of this problem has created a serious human rights crisis that has been denounced by international NGOs like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as international agencies like the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (Amnistía Internacional, 2016).

Since authorities fail to take action in locating those who are missing, relatives begin the search on their own. The most frequent way of mobilization is through the formation of ‘colectivos de búsqueda’ (search groups). Usually, a missing person’s relative begins searching for his or her whereabouts on their own after having reported their disappearance to government authorities and hoped in vain that these would get results. Along the way, these individual trackers meet other people who share the same grievance and they decide to join efforts in their search for their loved ones. And this is how the ‘colectivos’ are formed (Villarreal, 2014, 2016). They have to deal with society’s indifference to their problem and the ‘social stigma’ associated with the missing persons due to the common prejudice that those who disappeared were very likely involved in some sort of criminal activities. Nevertheless, members of these search groups are strongly motivated for obvious personal reasons. They support each other in coping with the suffering generated by the disappearance of their relative and their ultimate goal is to find them alive. Since the disappearance of persons is not focused on just one region but occurs in several states, the search groups are present almost all over the country (Villarreal, 2016).

In 2012, the search groups scattered throughout the country decided to organize a massive march in Mexico City in order to gain strength by presenting their demands to the government in a unified manner and, at the same time, to make visible to society in general the magnitude of the problem of missing persons (Villarreal, 2014). Also, another purpose of initiating the march was
to present a different perspective to that of the federal government, as well as local and state officials, on the disappeared. The narrative of President Calderon's administration often belittled victims of violence (missing persons among them) as "collateral damage" in the war on drugs (Anguiano, 2014; Meyer, 2015), while officials from all three levels of government repeatedly criminalized victims by pointing out that those who disappeared surely had ties to criminal groups (Human Rights Watch, 2013; Morbiato, 2017). Through the march, demonstrators have wanted to show that the vast majority of those who are missing are ordinary citizens, that they do not engage in criminal activities and that they have no ties to drug cartels. Demonstrators named the protest “Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional: Madres Buscando a sus Hijos, Hijas, Verdad y Justicia” (March for National Dignity: Mothers Looking for their Sons, Daughters, Truth and Justice, hereinafter referred to as MDN). They decided to hold the march on May 10, a significant date in Mexican culture since it is celebrated the Mother's Day. With that action, their objective is to emphasize that on that significant date they, having a missing relative, have nothing to celebrate. They also decided to march again on the same date each year from then on, accompanied by sympathizers and NGOs that support their claims, until their relatives are located. Also joining the march were mothers of Central American migrants, mainly from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, who disappeared in Mexico on their way to the United States. Since 2012, a main march has taken place in Mexico City and several marches have been carried out, simultaneously, in different cities of the country. Up until 2018, they have made seven marches and the number of missing persons, instead of decreasing, has continued to increase (Saldierna & Camacho, 2018). Based on official data, in January 2016 there were 27,638 missing persons (Amnistía Internacional, 2016, p. 11). By April 2018, the number of missing persons was 37,435 (Martínez, 2018). It is important to note that the true dimension of the problem can be much greater since many cases are
not reported because of the mistrust of the population in the authorities. What is undeniable is that the problem of the disappearance of people has worsened over time.

Strikingly, the constant increase in the number of missing persons in the country has not sparked academic research in that regard, as studies on that problem are scarce. Most of the existing information about it is what some news media, NGOs or the people concerned have produced and disseminated. As an example of this, Villarreal (2014) in her study about the origins of the search groups in Mexico and the challenges they usually face, states that information for her research was gathered through the revision of newspapers on the Internet; content on search groups’ blogs, Facebook profiles and official websites; as well as documents and reports of human rights organizations (p. 110). In the specific case of the MDN, academic research is non-existent. The main sources of information about this social protest are the journalistic notes that some news media disseminate. In this sense, Villarreal (2014) emphasizes the importance of the few independent media covering the problem of disappearances, so that search groups can disseminate their complaints and proposals (p. 126-127). News media willing to report on their denunciations and demands are crucial for that.

According to some journalist reports on the MDN, the personal qualities and traits of women demonstrators in the march have been assessed differently depending on who is commenting on them. It is common for these women to be labeled by government officials and some sectors of society as insane, whiny, as people who do not behave properly in public or who make others uncomfortable with their complaints and demands. On the contrary, officials from NGOs and international organizations that support their cause describe them as brave, as housewives who have become criminal investigators and who are able to gather evidence that government officials cannot or do not want to obtain (Turati, 2012). In this sense, a frequent claim of the members of the search groups is the indifference of society to the problem of disappearances
and its lack of solidarity towards their search work, as well as the stigmatization of the victims by assuming that they disappear because they were involved in criminal activities (Villarreal, 2014, p. 127-128). Criminalization of missing persons is also a pervasive conduct among government officials charged with investigating disappearances. Demonstrators allege that when they go to denounce the disappearance of their family member, officials of the Public Ministry often mock them, lie to them, blame the victim and, in some cases, even pressure them not to denounce (Turati, 2012). The negligence of the authorities and even their complicity with the criminals are recurrent complaints among the protesters. In response to this situation, since the first march in 2012, participants have demanded that the Mexican government recognize the magnitude and gravity of the problem of disappearances in the country; create laws and establish public policies to take real action to address this issue; and eradicate the discourse of criminalization of the disappeared (Díaz, 2017), among other things. Considering that news media are the main source of information about the MDN, an analysis and comparison of how personal qualities and traits of participants in the march, their allegations and demands, are framed in mainstream news outlets and digital native news sites is relevant to knowing which news organizations are giving voice to this social protest and how they do so, if that is the case.

**News Framing: Concepts and Typologies**

Broadly speaking, a ‘frame’ is a central organizing idea that serves to give meaning to an issue, by providing the ‘interpretative package’ that helps to make sense of it (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The terms ‘frame’ and ‘framing’ have been widely used in media research, since their introduction into communication studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s, especially in relation to how journalists construct news events, that is, how reality and facts are interpreted and shown through the news (Portilla, 2012). However, it has often been the case that scholars
have different ways of conceptualizing news frames (de Vreese, 2005; Portilla, 2012). In this sense, Entman (1993) states that “typically frames diagnose, evaluate and prescribe”; in other words, news frames ‘define problems’, ‘diagnose causes’, ‘make moral judgements’, and ‘suggest remedies’. In his view, ‘framing’ is the activity by which some aspects of a given issue, fact or reality, are given more relevance above others in a given text (p. 52). In other approaches, ‘news frame’ can be understood as the patterns by which journalists and editors, select, interpret, present, emphasize or exclude information, when organizing their discourse (de Vreese, 2005). Other scholars have proposed the idea of news framing as a process that includes different stages such as frame-building, frame-setting, and the consequences that it generates at the individual and societal level (de Vreese, 2005). Frame-building refers to factors both internal and external to journalism that influence how news frames are structured. Frame-setting refers to the interplay between the news frames and the audience’s response to them depending on its previous knowledge and background. The consequences of news frames at the individual level relate to how a person’s attitude towards certain issue can be modified as a result of the exposure to specific news frames. The consequences of news frames at the societal level refer to how frames may contribute to configure social processes (p. 52). In this line, it would be ideal to be able to cover the three stages when analyzing the news framing to obtain a complete image of the whole process. However, in practice, the obvious challenges that such magnitude of research would entail mean that most studies focus on only one part of the above-mentioned process. Against this backdrop, for the purposes of this study ‘frame’ is understood as “an emphasis in salience of different aspects of a topic” (de Vreese, 2005), which is in accordance with the purpose of distinguishing the possible types of frames used in the news under study.

Research on news media framing has gathered evidence of how the media can influence public opinion by framing issues or events in one form or another (Valkenburg, Semetko & de
An important element in that evidence are the typologies that scholars have generated regarding the most recurrent news frames that the media use when reporting the news (Iyengar, 1991; Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; de Vreese, 2005, to mention a few). Examples of the types of news frames include: ‘episodic’ or ‘thematic’ (Iyengar, 1991); ‘human impact’, ‘powerlessness’, ‘moral values’, ‘conflict’, ‘economics’ (Neuman et al., 1992); ‘human interest’, ‘attribution of responsibility’, ‘morality’, ‘conflict’, ‘economic consequences’ (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), among others. By presenting the news using some of these frames, the news organizations predetermine the meaning that the audience should give to the fact or events presented, thereby influencing the direction of public opinion. Scholars on the types of news frames suggest that these are “structural and inherent to the conventions of journalism”, so they can be found in news at different moments in time and in different cultural settings (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54-55). Since research on Mexican news media framing is rather scarce when compared to framing studies about news media in other countries (Portilla, 2012, 2014), there is a lack of studies aiming to identify what frames the Mexican news media utilize in their coverage of social mobilizations. This gap in knowledge becomes more significant if we take into consideration the particular circumstances of journalism in Mexico, and the way these can influence how news media report major social issues, and especially social mobilizations. Taking this into account, the following chapter describes the different aspects of the methodology used in carrying out the present study to address that question.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Studies on news coverage of social protest in Latin American countries show how mainstream news outlets often frame protests in a negative way, discrediting demonstrators or minimizing their demands (Kowalchuk, 2009, 2010; Lupien, 2013). However, we lack knowledge on how social protest is framed by online-native news sites. The present study addresses this gap by comparing and contrasting the reporting of the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional in a sample of three mainstream news outlets’ digital editions and three online-native news sites, with the purpose of increasing our knowledge of how the selected news outlets frame the MDN in their coverage.

The Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional is an important social protest to study for a number of reasons. First, it was originated to demand that the Mexican government implemented effective actions and policies to address the problem of missing persons. In this sense, it is a social mobilization that demands that the government fulfills its obligation to protect and guarantee basic human rights of people. Second, the march emerged as an effort to counteract the official discourse that sought to underestimate and criminalize missing persons. There is still a need to analyze the extent to which print and digital news media have promoted or hindered the achievement of this end. Third, seven years after it began, the problem that caused it has worsened rather than diminished, suggesting that the number of marchers has increased over the years as well. There are then more people affected who are demanding that the government meet its obligations. Fourth, there are no academic studies on what the news coverage of this march has been like in printed or digital news organizations. How have protesters’ reasons to mobilize, their allegations and their demands been presented in both types of news organizations? Has their discourse rejecting the
criminalization of missing persons been communicated by the news media? These are some of the questions that need to be answered.

The mainstream news outlets selected for the study are El Universal, Milenio Diario, and La Jornada in their digital editions (hereinafter referred to as El Universal online, Milenio online, and La Jornada online). These were selected on the basis of criteria such as their ownership (both El Universal and Milenio Diario are owned by media groups, whereas La Jornada is owned by a cooperative run by La Jornada workers union); the revenue their owner receives from official advertising; the preponderance they give in their news coverage to the publication of scoops, over investigative journalism. Also, the amount of online traffic they generate, and the availability of news stories about the MDN in their online repositories, were other criteria considered. The first of these news outlets, El Universal, was founded in 1916 and is distributed nationwide. It is owned by the media group Compañía Nacional Periodística which controls print and online outlets. Information available in the National Register of Printed Media of the Ministry of the Interior indicates that El Universal has a total circulation of 119,429 copies (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2018a). Its online version, El Universal online (https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/) was the number one in traffic among Mexican online news organizations in 2018, according to statistics by ComScore, a company dedicated to measuring websites traffic (Bermúdez, 2018). It has 10,355,000 unique visitors which makes it the most visited online news site in the country (RSF-Cencos, 2018c). In 2016, El Universal received 240 million Mexican pesos for government advertising, which constituted 10.38 percent of the federal government's total spending on official print advertising (Castaño, 2017). During President Peña Nieto’s period (2012-2018), its editorial policy was known for being conservative and pro-government. Indeed, in July 2017, “six columnists resigned their publishing space because El Universal was against the establishment of the National Anticorruption System” (RSF-Cencos, 2018b).
The second news outlet, Milenio Diario, was founded in 2000 and is also distributed nationwide. It is owned by the conglomerate Grupo Multimedios. Information available in the National Register of Printed Media indicates that Milenio Diario has a total circulation of 84,646 copies (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2018b). Its online version, Milenio online (https://www.milenio.com/) was number six in traffic among Mexican online news organizations in 2018, according to ComScore (Bermúdez, 2018). It has 5,945,000 unique visitors (RSF-Cencos, 2018f). In 2016, Milenio Diario received 4.22 percent of the federal government's total spending on official print advertising (Castaño, 2017). Its editor-in-chief, Carlos Marín, has been accused of “violation to journalism ethics” and of establishing agreements with the PRI, so that Milenio would not cover the campaign of the opposition candidate during the gubernatorial elections in Oaxaca in 2010 (RSF-Cencos, 2018g). The third news outlet, La Jornada, was founded in 1984 and is also distributed nationwide. It is owned by its employees through Cooperative La Jornada. It has a total circulation of 110,236 copies (RSF-Cencos, 2018e). There is no data available on the number of visits in its online version, La Jornada online (https://www.jornada.com.mx/ultimas/), and it is not included in the ComScore list of the 14 most visited news sites, indicating that the traffic in its online version is not among the highest. In 2016, La Jornada received 4.63 percent of the federal government's total spending on official print advertising (Castaño, 2017). In recent years, La Jornada has faced economic problems due to the fall in print sales and the decline in official advertising revenues due to its critical editorial line towards the government (RSF-Cencos, 2018e).

The online-native news sites selected for the study are Animal Político, Sin Embargo.mx, and Revolución Tres Punto Cero. These were selected on the basis of what the existing literature so far on native digital news sites mentions as aspects that distinguish them from mainstream news outlets. Those aspects are their ownership (none of them is owned by a media conglomerate); their
business model (characterized by the variety of sources of revenue they use, beyond official
advertising); the preponderance they give to investigative journalism in their news coverage, over
the publication of scoops. Also, the availability of news about the MDN in their sites was another
criterion considered. The first online-native news site, Animal Político, was founded in 2010 by
Daniel Eilemberg, a Colombian businessman and journalist who then also worked as “senior
vicepresident of Fusion - a youth TV and news network in co-ownership of Grupo Televisa S.A.B
and Univision” (RSF-Cencos, 2018a). Officially, Animal Político is owned by Elephant Publishing
LCC. and Printed Matter LCC. It has 1,918,000 unique visitors (RSF-Cencos, 2018a). Its business
model includes different revenue sources such as private investors, advertising sales,
crowdfunding, international donors, consulting, training to other media and civil organizations
(Meléndez, 2016; Animal Político, 2019). Its official advertising revenues are minimal and its
editorial line is characterized by being critical of the government (RSF-Cencos, 2018d). This last
aspect is reflected in its investigative journalism, which is key feature of Animal Político. Two of
its most representative investigations are Las Empresas Fantasma de Veracruz (The Phony
Businesses of Veracruz) and La Estafa Maestra (The Master Scam) in which acts of corruption
and huge diversions of public funds by high government officials are denounced. Animal Político’s
project El Sabueso (The Bloodhound) is devoted to fact-checking of data disseminated by
government officials, and it is signatory of the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), an
international network that brings together fact-checkers worldwide.

The second digital-native news outlet, SinEmbargo.mx, was founded in 2011 and it is
owned by SinEmbargo S. de R.L. de C.V., whose majority shareholders are the brothers Miguel
and Pablo Valladares. They are Mexican businessmen who also own another news outlet, El Pulso
de San Luis, as well as mining and telecommunications companies. SinEmbargo.mx has 3,468,000
unique visitors (RSF-Cencos, 2018j). Its business model includes revenues from private investors
and advertising sales; it has not received funds from foundations or international organizations so far. Forty percent of operating costs are covered with digital advertising revenue and the Valladares brothers’ investment covers the remaining 60 percent (Meléndez, 2016). Although in the past the Valladares brothers have held positions in government bodies because of their ties with the PRI political party, SinEmbargo.mx's editorial policy has been critical of the PRI government during President Peña Nieto’s period (2012-2018) (RSF-Cencos, 2018j). Its journalistic content prioritizes in-depth notes and reports on political, economic, social and sports issues in Mexico and other countries (Meléndez, 2016). The third online-native news outlet, Revolución Tres Punto Cero, was founded in 2012 by a group of small private investors who claim to defend the ideals of the left and progressive movements (Revolución 3.0, 2019). Among them are the journalist Carlos Payán, who was also one of the founders of the newspaper La Jornada, and Epigmenio Ibarra, who owns Argos Comunicación, a television and film production company. Revolución 3.0’s editorial staff claims to have more than 4 million unique visitors (Revolución 3.0, 2019). Its business model includes revenues from investors and franchises, as they sell the 3.0 brand to digital news media in other states of the country (Meléndez, 2016). Revolución 3.0’s Advisory Board is composed of experienced and recognized journalists in the journalistic field in Mexico. There is no information about its editorial line, but an exploratory review of its articles indicates that its news coverage is inclined towards a more favourable outlook on government actions, without significant criticism of the government.

In this study I analyze news stories that the mainstream news outlets online sites and the online-native news sites described above have available about the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional. These news stories were collected using similar search terms in the news repositories of each of these news organizations. The search terms used were ‘marcha dignidad nacional’, ‘madres desaparecidos’, ‘desaparecidos’. The period of news coverage over which the search for news
stories was conducted runs from the beginning of the protest in May 2012 to May 2018, over a total of 7 demonstrations. Because the date of this protest is the same every year since 2012 (May 10), the search for news stories was focused on a few days before the march, on May 10 the date of the march, and a couple of days after the march. This search strategy was deemed the most effective since this is the date range when information regarding the MDN is generated, and there is no further news about it the rest of the year. It was decided to collect only news articles that specifically addressed the MDN, so no other journalistic materials such as editorials, opinion articles, multimedia files such as image galleries or videos were included among the units of analysis. The purpose of this was to maintain homogeneity as to the type of materials that were analyzed among the different news organizations already described. In total, 101 news articles were obtained. Table 1 shows the number of news articles retrieved from each news outlet for each year.

Table 1

Number of News Articles Retrieved from Each News Outlet for Each Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>El Universal online</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milenio online</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Jornada online</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Político</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SinEmbargo.mx</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revolución Tres Punto Cero</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>101</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the lack of access to news stories about the MDN during the first years of the protest, in the case of some news outlets, can be considered one of the limitations of this study. In this sense, although El Universal online does not have available news articles on the MDN from 2012 to 2015, as well as Milenio online for 2012 and 2013, it was determined to keep them as objects of study given the characteristics of both to be owned by media groups, to obtain high
revenues from official advertising and their well-known pro-government editorial line. Also, the number of news articles that it was possible to retrieve from both news outlets provides suitable material for comparison with news articles from the other news outlets.

Since this is not a causal study, no hypotheses were raised to be demonstrated or refuted. However, in the light of the characteristics already described for each of the news outlets, significant differences in the type of coverage of the MDN by each type of news media were expected. The existing literature on news framing mentions some typologies of the most recurrent news frames that the media use when reporting the news. Examples of the types of news frames include: ‘episodic’ or ‘thematic’ (Iyengar, 1991); ‘human impact’, ‘powerlessness’, ‘moral values’, ‘conflict’, ‘economics’ (Neuman et al., 1992); ‘human interest’, ‘attribution of responsibility’, ‘morality’, ‘conflict’, ‘economic consequences’ (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

In the context of this study, the typology utilized by Iyengar (1991) is used for the analysis of the articles as it provides elements to understand how the news framing by the news media influences citizens' understanding of public issues, as well as the responsibility that government officials and their public policies have in relation to those problems.

According to Iyengar (1991), episodic frames depict public issues as individual events or specific examples, without providing further information about the context in which those cases occur. Conversely, thematic frames place public issues in a broader context, more general, indicating that occurrences reported are not isolated events. Thematic frames may focus attention on general outcomes or conditions, or also in the facts of an event providing information on the context related to those facts. Therefore, the same issue can be framed in an episodic or thematic way depending on what information is included and how it is presented. The difference between both approaches can be illustrated with the example of news reports about difficulties experienced by a homeless person. If the news report focuses on the specific situation of the homeless person,
emphasizing that his or her poor life choices led to it, without presenting information about the
social or economic context that may have influenced it, then the news report uses an episodic
frame. Conversely, if the news report describes the specific difficulties that the homeless person
experiences, but also includes information about the socioeconomic context that led him or her to
that situation, then the news report uses a thematic frame. As already mentioned, each type of
frame has a different influence on how the citizens understand the public issues reported by the
news media. According to Iyengar, episodic coverage of public issues induces the public to
attribute responsibility for these problems to individuals, rather than to institutions or broader
social forces. In contrast, thematic coverage contributes to people attributing responsibility for
public issues to institutions, public policies or political actors (Feinberg, 2009). In this sense,
episodic framing may be considered pro-establishment because of its emphasis on individuals’
responsibility for the causes and solutions of public issues. In contrast, thematic framing
encourages people to hold institutions, public policies and political actors accountable for the
origins and solutions of social problems (Feinberg, 2009).

Some scholars argue that news frames such as episodic and thematic are “structural and
inherent to the conventions of journalism”, so they can be found in news at different moments in
time and in different cultural settings (de Vreese, 2005, p. 54). Since research on Mexican news
media framing is rather scarce when compared to framing studies about news media in other
countries (Portilla, 2012, 2014), we lack studies aiming to identify what frames the Mexican news
media utilize in their coverage of social mobilizations. In this vein, the theoretical framework that
Iyengar’s typology provides to determine what types of news framing promote or hinder
democracy, as well as the likelihood of identifying such frames in Mexican news, makes it a useful
resource for analyzing Mexican news media coverage of the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional. At
the same time, however, it should be noted that other relevant aspects of news coverage that are
not sufficiently covered by episodic or thematic framing analysis may be present in articles on the MDN. Examples of these aspects are the way in which protesters are characterized and possible description bias, as well as the use of labels to refer to them. For this reason, the analysis of articles also explores the presence of these elements to generate a broader view of how the MDN has been covered by the news organizations under study.

The news stories were divided into two groups: articles from the mainstream news outlets (68 news stories) and articles from the online native news sites (33 news stories). Each article was read a minimum of three times using textual analysis. Textual analysis is a methodology utilized in a variety of disciplines such as cultural studies, media studies, mass communication, and others, with the purpose of drawing the most likely interpretation of reality that is conveyed in a given text. One key assumption of this methodology is that different cultures and social groups make sense of the world in different ways, this is, they interpret reality in particular ways, therefore, they represent that reality differently (McKee, 2011). The first objective of the textual analysis was to establish what type of framing (episodic or thematic) the news outlets in each group (mainstream or online native) use in their articles on the MDN. For this purpose, episodic, thematic and mixed categories were established to guide the analysis of the articles. Episodic refers to whether the article presents individual tragedies of relatives of disappeared persons without providing information about the context of the disappearance of persons (e.g., origin and growth of the problem, agents who commit disappearances, attitude of the State in the face of this crisis, among others), or without acknowledging this problem as a generalized issue in the country. In this sense, the article may suggest that the disappearance of persons is the responsibility of individuals for the type of activities they engage in. It is also considered episodic if the article focuses only on superficial aspects of the participants or the events that occurred during the march. Thematic refers to whether the article provides information on the context of the disappearance of persons (as
mentioned above), and whether this problem is presented as a generalized issue in the country whose exacerbation has been largely the responsibility of the State. Also, the article may include individual cases of relatives of missing persons, but these are shown as related to the generalized problem of disappearances that authorities are negligent in addressing. In this line, the article may suggest that local, state, and federal authorities are responsible for creating public policies and implementing institutional mechanisms to address the disappearance of persons.

Since the context included in a thematic article can vary in depth and detail among the different articles, the subcategories shallow, medium and deep were generated to indicate these variations. A shallow degree of context would be that in which information on the social context of the disappearance of persons is described very briefly, the absence of public policies or institutional mechanisms is mentioned without elaborating further on it, the allegations and demands of the MDN to address the systematic problem are synthesized without directly quoting the demonstrators. A medium degree of context would be that in which the article provides more details on the social context of the disappearance of persons, or it provides direct quotes from demonstrators about the public policies or institutional mechanisms they propose to address the disappearance of persons. A deep degree of context would be that in which the article elaborates on the social context of disappearance of people, or it provides comprehensive information on protesters' proposals for public policies or institutional mechanisms to address the systematic problem of missing persons. Lastly, because not all the news reports are exclusively episodic or thematic (Iyengar, 1991, p. 14), the category mixed refers to articles in which aspects of both frames are present.

The analysis of the news stories was guided by a series of questions designed to determine in which category (episodic, thematic, mixed) each article should be placed. Each question has only two answer choices: ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The questions used are the following:
1. Does the article report individual tragedies without providing information about the social context of the disappearance of persons?

2. Does the article suggest that responsibility for the problem lies with the individual(s) described?

3. Does the article provide information about the context of the MDN?

4. Does the article report individual tragedies and provide information about the social context of the disappearance of persons?

5. Does the article suggest that responsibility for the problem lies with the government (local, state, federal)?

It was considered that affirmative answers to questions 1, 2, and negative answers to questions 3, 4, 5 would indicate that the article uses an episodic frame. Affirmative answers to questions 3, 4, 5, and negative answers to questions 1, 2 would indicate that the article uses a thematic frame. Affirmative answer in any of questions 1, 2 and affirmative answer in any of questions 3, 4, 5 would indicate that the article is placed in the mixed category. This coding was used to analyse the set of articles corresponding to each group of news organizations (mainstream news outlets and online-native news sites). In the case of thematic framing, each article was coded as either shallow, medium, or deep thematic, so the possibility of considering any article as having simultaneously some shallow, some medium or some deep thematic content was excluded. This with the purpose of avoiding double counting articles. The coding of all articles was done by hand, so no software was used to automate the process. Also, the articles were coded only by me, so no intercoder reliability measures were sought. After completing the coding of all items, major themes and concepts were identified, and a comparison was made between the framing used by mainstream and online-native news outlets to determine how they differ in their way of framing the MDN.
The second purpose of the textual analysis was to explore the presence of aspects that could be related to a possible description bias because of the way demonstrators are characterized, or the use of labels to refer to them. For this purpose, open coding was used since the analysis of the articles was not restricted to the identification of given specific aspects, but remained open to the identification of diverse possibilities in which description bias and labeling protesters can be put into practice. In this line, no preestablished categories were used during this coding of the articles, but rather categories were written down as they emerged from the analysis of the news stories. It was determined that each topic related to description bias or the use of labels would be given an individual code, but the same code would be assigned to similar topics as long as the overlaps between them were considerable.

The results obtained will allow us to know how these news organizations cover a social protest like the MDN; how they inform or misinform citizens about the grievances and injustices that led them to mobilize, and about the demands they make for the government to fulfill its responsibility in the crisis of disappearances in Mexico. To the extent that each of these media outlets is inclined toward one or the other type of coverage is how it contributes to the strengthening of democracy in the country, or to its weakening. The results of this comparison are presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the results obtained from the comparison of frames used by the mainstream news outlets and the online-native news sites in their news coverage of the MDN, as well as findings about possible ways that some of these news organizations might use to delegitimize participants in the MDN. To this end, the results are presented in relation to each of the three categories established to analyze the frames used in the articles: episodic, thematic, mixed. Later, the findings about possible ways of undermining the goals of the movement are presented.

Episodic Framing of the MDN by News Organizations

As stated before, an article was considered to use an episodic framing when it presents individual cases or events without additional information on the context of the disappearance crisis; when it does not show that the disappearance of persons constitutes a widespread problem in the country; when it suggests that responsibility for that problem lies with persons who have disappeared because of the type of activity to which they engage; when it focuses only on superficial aspects of the participants or the events that occurred during the march. Following these criteria, the analysis of the articles shows that two mainstream news outlets and one online-native news site used the episodic framing in their coverage of the MDN in greater proportion than other news organizations. As Table 2 shows, the mainstream news outlet El Universal used this frame in 38 percent of its articles; the mainstream news outlet Milenio used it in 54.16 percent of its articles; the online-native news site Revolución 3.0 used this frame in 37.5 percent of its coverage. In contrast, the mainstream news outlet La Jornada used the episodic frame in 13 percent of its
articles; the online-native news site Animal Politico used in 16.66 percent of its coverage. The last online-native news site Sin Embargo did not use episodic frame at all. This indicates that two mainstream news outlets more frequently provided episodic coverage than the online-native news sites. These findings also suggest that the type of news organization does not determine the use of this type of framing, but perhaps it does influence the frequency with which it is used. In this sense, it is important to note that the number of articles analyzed is low, so definitive conclusions about the coverage patterns of each news organization cannot be drawn. Therefore, the results reported throughout the chapter are tentative, with the understanding that further research would be needed to examine how these organizations behave over time.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Framing</th>
<th>El Universal online (N = 21)</th>
<th>Milenio online (N = 24)</th>
<th>La Jornada online (N = 23)</th>
<th>Animal Político (N = 18)</th>
<th>Sin Embargo (N = 7)</th>
<th>Revolución 3.0 (N = 8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Episodic</td>
<td>38.09 %</td>
<td>54.16 %</td>
<td>13.04 %</td>
<td>16.66 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>37.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Thematic</td>
<td>23.80 %</td>
<td>25 %</td>
<td>4.34 %</td>
<td>11.11 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shallow</td>
<td>19.04 %</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
<td>34.78 %</td>
<td>22.22 %</td>
<td>28.57 %</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>9.52 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>39.13 %</td>
<td>44.44 %</td>
<td>71.42 %</td>
<td>25 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep</td>
<td>9.52 %</td>
<td>8.33 %</td>
<td>8.69 %</td>
<td>5.55 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Mixed</td>
<td>9.52 %</td>
<td>8.33 %</td>
<td>8.69 %</td>
<td>5.55 %</td>
<td>0 %</td>
<td>12.5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding how these news organizations used episodic framing in their reporting of the MDN, the aspects that stand out in El Universal and Milenio coverage are the reporting of individual cases or events, without information on the context of the problem of disappearances and without reflecting the systemic character of this issue in the country. These aspects are reflected in two common themes in the episodic articles of both news organizations: a) the description of cases of relatives of disappeared persons and the emotional impact that this tragedy generates in them; b) the mere description of the acts carried out by the demonstrators during the
march. An example of this is an El Universal article which mentions testimonies of relatives of disappeared persons who express the suffering they are experiencing and how this situation has affected their health. One of the mothers mentioned expresses "we are dead in life, there is much pain, much absence, (...)[All translations are mine]. Another mother whose daughter and grandson disappeared expresses "these actions (the search for her daughter and her grandson, the protest) leave me exhausted, it is a tremendous emotional impact, my chest hurts, my [blood] pressure goes down, I can’t go on, it is almost four years without Jessica and without Max" (Miranda, 2016). The article does not present additional information that would allow the reader to understand the dimension of the problem of disappearances as a national crisis. Similarly, Milenio episodic articles focus on decontextualized individual testimonies. An example of this is an article quoting a mother who says that now on May 10 she has nothing to celebrate, as it used to be a time when her family gathered to celebrate and now "it's a day of sadness, of despair" (Velázquez & García, 2018). Again, information about the context of the problem is missing from the article.

Along with the focus on decontextualized individual cases, another common element in El Universal and Milenio episodic articles is the focus on the actions taken by demonstrators during the march or on the course they followed during the protest. In this case, some of the information reported in the articles refers to the streets they marched through, the slogans they shouted, the posters the demonstrators displayed during the march, where they stopped to protest, or what other activities they engaged in during the protest. In other words, the attention and space of the article refers to a description of the events of the protest without delving into, for example, the causes that give rise to the mobilization, the demands that the demonstrators have, their proposals for legislation or institutional mechanisms to deal with the crisis of disappearance of persons, to name a few. In most of the articles in El Universal and Milenio, even the name of the MDN is absent in
the information, that is, the articles refer only to "the march", "the protest", without making it clear to the readers that this is not the only occasion on which that protest takes place, but that it is a periodic mobilization originated by a problem that has been present for a long time. In other words, failure to properly identify the MDN and to provide the context of the mobilization creates the impression that it is just one more protest by a group of people whose motivations are not sufficiently clear to readers.

In the case of La Jornada, its three episodic articles have elements similar to those mentioned above, such as the presentation of individual cases without the larger context of the crisis of disappearance of persons and the description of facts during the march. However, the information their articles present has a different nuance. An example of this is an article in which the individual cases reported do not emphasize the emotional impact that the disappearance of the child or relative has had on the demonstrators, but rather they highlight the difficulties that the demonstrators have had to face during the search for their loved one (Camacho, 2014). In another article, the journey of the march and some of the actions carried out during the march are reported (Olivares, 2018a). In both articles, however, there is no additional information on the context of the crisis of disappearance of persons, their demands, etc., which generates a limited perspective of the MDN.

With respect to online-native news sites, the way Animal Político and Revolución 3.0 use the episodic framing in their articles coincides with the way El Universal and Milenio focus on describing events and the route of the march, without providing additional information about the context of the mobilization. In an article by Animal Político, for example, the path of the march during the protest is reported, some of the actions they took along the way and some of the participants are mentioned (Zepeda, 2013). Information about the context of the problem of disappearances is absent in this and its other episodic articles. However, one difference with El
Universal and Milenio articles is that Animal Político does not mention individual cases that highlight the emotional aspect of the tragedy. The information focuses solely on the description of the events during the march. Something similar occurs in Revolution 3.0 articles that focus only on the events of the march without providing information on the larger context of the problem of missing persons. In this case, Revolución 3.0, like El Universal and Milenio, fails to properly identify the MDN because in its articles it does not mention the name of this mobilization and refers to it as "the march", "the mobilization", thus generating a limited representation of the MDN by not showing it as a protest that is repeated year after year due to the persistence and aggravation of the crisis of disappearances in the country.

In summary, except for one online site, the other news organisations used the episodic framing to a greater or lesser extent in their coverage of the MDN. Two mainstream news outlets and one online-native news site used this framing in at least 37.5 percent of their articles. Conversely, one mainstream news outlet and one online-native news site used this framing in 13.04 and 16.66 percent of their articles, respectively. The way in which the five news organizations used episodic framing is similar in terms of the preponderant focus of the articles on the events that took place during the march. However, the differences in the use of this framing relate to the use of decontextualized personal cases that emphasize the emotional impact of the tragedy on the mothers of disappeared persons by the mainstream news outlets, while online-native news sites do not use this approach in their episodic articles.

**Thematic Framing of the MDN by News Organizations**

In this category, an article was considered to use thematic framing when it provides information on the context of the disappearance of persons; when this problem is presented as a generalized issue in the country whose exacerbation has been largely the responsibility of the State;
when it includes individual cases of relatives of missing persons, but these are shown as related to the generalized problem of disappearances that authorities are negligent in addressing. Since the context included in a thematic article can vary in depth and detail among the different articles, the subcategories shallow, medium and deep were generated to indicate these variations. To avoid double counting any article, each of them was coded as either shallow, medium, or deep thematic, so the possibility of considering any article as having simultaneously some shallow, some medium or some deep thematic content was excluded. Following these criteria, the analysis of the articles shows that, although all six news organizations used the thematic approach, two mainstream news outlets used the shallow thematic framing to a greater extent than online-native news sites. In turn, online-native news sites used the deep thematic framing in greater proportion than the mainstream news outlets. As Table 2 shows, El Universal and Milenio used the shallow thematic framing in greater percentage than La Jornada and the three online-native news sites. Conversely, La Jornada, Animal Político, Sin Embargo and Revolución 3.0 used deep thematic framing in greater percentage than El Universal and Milenio. In the case of Sin Embargo, its articles used mostly deep thematic framing and medium thematic framing, so this online-native news site did not use shallow thematic framing. In other words, La Jornada, Animal Político, Sin Embargo and Revolución 3.0 prioritized in their coverage the use of deep thematic framing while El Universal and Milenio were more inclined towards the shallow thematic framing.

The forgoing indicates that there are differences in the level of depth and detail that these news organizations use in their coverage of the MDN. These differences are mainly reflected in how they treat this theme: who is responsible for the emergence and aggravation of the disappearance crisis. In this regard, El Universal and Milenio articles usually present some of the accusations of demonstrators against government officials for their negligence in dealing with that problem. However, the focus of the articles and the information presented do not delve into the
Mexican government's responsibility in that regard. Conversely, La Jornada, Animal Político and Sin Embargo articles usually do present information on the MDN highlighting the government's negligence in addressing the crisis and its responsibility in allowing it to escalate. This difference can be illustrated by contrasting some articles from these news organizations.

As an example of the above is a El Universal article in which a representative of one of the search groups participating in the MDN demands that the President of the Republic and the Secretary of the Interior stop pretending to attend to the problem, and implement real actions to attack it:

Where are our children? You are responsible for Mexico's security. We want answers and we want them now, no more sham, no more denial, Veracruz is plagued by disappearances, the disappearances in Veracruz continue, numbers of girls, boys, young people, without the authorities showing any interest (Ávila, 2016).

The rest of the article continues with other charges of the same nature against these and other officials. However, a more elaborate explanation of the pattern of omissions and disinterest that the governments of Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto have maintained in relation to this problem is absent from the article. In the case of Milenio, its articles are usually shorter so the information it presents is even more succinct than that of El Universal. This is clearly seen in an article in which it is briefly mentioned that according to some organizations that participate in the MDN, it is the responsibility of the State that the conditions of insecurity and violence persist in the country, which allows criminals to commit crimes and remain unpunished (Rojas, 2014). In a couple of other sentences, it is only mentioned that the demonstrators demand to meet with the Secretary of the Interior, with the Attorney General of the Republic, and that lack of coordination between the authorities to deal with cases of disappearances causes these not to be properly
investigated. Again, there is no detailed information about why the government is responsible for the worsening of this crisis in the country.

This brevity with which El Universal and Milenio address the attribution of government responsibility for the problem of disappearances contrasts with the greater space that La Jornada grants to this issue in its coverage. An example of this is an article that reports on protest marches that took place in different cities in the interior of the country. The information focuses on highlighting the accusations of the demonstrators against the different levels of government for their failure to address the crisis of disappearances. In the state of Jalisco, for example, which ranks second nationally in the number of missing persons, protesters accuse the federal government of focusing its attention and resources on combating a drug cartel, rather than channeling resources to search for missing persons. Information on marches in other states mentions that demonstrators demand the resignation of officials unable to resolve the problem, and directly accuse state and federal security forces, as well as government-tolerated paramilitary groups, of being involved in the disappearances of persons (Correspondents, 2015). A similar approach is repeated in another article in which different participants in the march held in Mexico City accuse the federal administrations of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) and Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) of initiating and maintaining a 'war', that instead of arresting the criminals has caused enormous damage to society.

This is expressed in the statement that a representative of the MDN read during the demonstration:

Felipe Calderón: You are responsible for having declared a war against the organized crime that became a war against the people. History will condemn you for that. Burden your conscience with our pain. Enrique Peña Nieto: you are responsible for not having corrected the error of your predecessor, knowing that it was costly in blood and suffering. You
corrupted yourself to unimaginable levels and you behaved like a liar in front of all of us.

(Olivares, 2018b)

The article also provides figures on the increase in the number of people disappeared during the governments of those two presidents and cites other excerpts from the movement's statement emphasizing the government's responsibility in aggravating the crisis. As can be seen, the three mainstream news outlets cover MDN allegations of government responsibility for the problem of disappearances, but La Jornada differs from the El Universal and Milenio for the greater breadth it provides to the issue.

In the case of the online-native news sites Animal Político and Sin Embargo, their treatment of the issue of government responsibility is closer to La Jornada's approach. Animal Político, for example, gives voice to the protesters' denunciation of the State's responsibility for the escalating crisis of disappearance of persons, due to the government's attitude of denying the existence of the problem and the institutional shortcomings to address it as a consequence of that attitude. At the beginning of his six-year term, President Peña Nieto promised to listen to the families of the disappeared; however, he continued with a policy similar to that of his predecessor Felipe Calderón of denying the existence of such a crisis. For this reason, an article by Animal Político quotes a spokeswoman of the MDN who reproached the Peña Nieto’s administration for continuing to deny the problem: “We call on the new federal authorities: no more corruption, no more impunity, enough that they cover their eyes and do not see reality, because in Mexico people are still disappearing (...)” (Martínez, 2013). Linked to the denial of the crisis is the issue of institutional deficiencies. Because the federal government did not accept that there was a crisis no concrete measures had been taken or mechanisms created to deal with the problem, which was also denounced by the MDN: “(...) the government has no search protocols, there are no DNA banks, there are no databases of missing persons, the authorities have nothing” (Ibid.). In other article,
Animal Político publishes the complete statement that the MDN issued in one of the protests. In this communiqué, the demonstrators denounce, among other things, that the Mexican State is responsible for the aggravation of the crisis due to its inaction, its negligence and its strategy of seeking to tire the relatives of disappeared persons so that they renounce continuing the search:

we came to the conclusion that the powers of the State have disappeared, there is no State that seeks missing persons, that seeks truth and justice, (...) Mothers from Mexico, we only have ourselves, there is no State, it disappeared before our beloved children.

What there is now is a den of thieves, corrupt and dehumanized governors who bet that we will tire, that we will collapse, that we will give up, so that impunity will settle again and in it will enrich the worthless politicians of all colors (all political parties) that dye the Mexican State (Martínez, 2015).

In a similar vein, Sin Embargo’s treatment of government responsibility is characterized by providing more extensive information than that presented by the El Universal and Milenio. In one of its articles, Sin Embargo disseminates the claims that demonstrators in the MDN make to Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto for having initiated and maintained the 'war' against drug trafficking, which in reality has generated more damage to society than to criminal groups. In this article, the opinions of the mothers or relatives of disappeared persons are presented, as well as those of other personalities who show solidarity and support for the cause of the MDN. One of these characters is the Catholic priest Raúl Vera López, who has supported and accompanied the MDN since it began in 2012. According to Vera Lopez, the inaction of the government to address disappearances of persons is only apparent because the government actually “is not absent, nor lacking in capacity, has the capacity to assassinate and fill our country with crimes. Their presence is criminal because they need terror, fear and discouragement to plunder our homeland” (Gándara, 2018). The denunciations of the demonstrators coincide with those of Vera López in terms of
blaming the federal administrations for the situation of violence and insecurity they have brought about in the country, and in which the disappearances of persons occur. This is evident in the statement that one of the spokeswomen for the MDN read in one of the protests:

Peña Nieto: you corrupted yourself to unimaginable levels [...] you will have the eternal stain of scorn for being a puppet of impunity, of the corrupt fugitive rulers (...) You believe you will go to your 'white house' with a large pension but the nation claims you this bloodbath, (...) the truth is that you decided to do nothing to combat impunity. (...) Peña Nieto: you corrupted yourself at great levels and presented yourself as a liar before all of us, before the 50,000 disappeared. The nation claims that you are responsible. (Gándara, 2018)

Other sections of the article present quotations from UN and Amnesty International representatives who endorse the allegations made by MDN demonstrators about government neglect and disinterest, which has led to the exacerbation of the problem of disappearances. This emphasis on highlighting government responsibility in the disappearance crisis is also repeated in other articles in Sin Embargo, so its reporting approach, as mentioned above, is along the lines of La Jornada and Animal Político.

The third online-native news site, Revolución 3.0 usually presents more succinct news stories, so these do not have the level of depth and detail that the articles of La Jornada, Animal Político or Sin Embargo. Revolution 3.0 does in some cases provide information on the government's responsibility in the disappearances crisis, but without going too deeply into it. For this reason, its articles have a style more similar to that of El Universal or Milenio. In one of its articles, for example, it briefly communicates the accusations of demonstrators against Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto for having initiated and maintained the harmful war against drug trafficking (Redacción, 2018). However, the rest of the piece does not provide more details or
delve deeper into how the government has contributed to worsening the disappearance of people. The information about that theme remains brief and concise.

In summary, pointing to the federal government as the primary culprit for the emergence and aggravation of the disappearance crisis in Mexico is a common element in all six news organizations. None of them presents information that points to the victims of disappearances as those responsible for living the problem. However, there are differences in the depth and detail of the information the news organizations provide about state responsibility. The mainstream news outlets El Universal and Milenio feature articles pointing out the responsibility of the federal government for the worsening of the crisis, but no further depth or additional information is provided. The Revolution 3.0 online news site's reporting approach resembles that of these two news organizations. Conversely, the mainstream news outlet La Jornada develops an informative approach that emphasizes the responsibility of the federal government for the aggravation of the problem of disappearances, through broader information on the subject. In this sense, its informative approach has more similarities with those of AP and SE, which present articles that develop this topic with greater breadth.

**Mixed Framing of the MDN by News Organizations**

An article was considered to use mixed framing when it presents aspects of both episodic and thematic frames. As Table 2 shows, the mixed framing was used in a low percentage by these news organizations as all of them were below 13 %, indicating their tendency to use more either episodic or thematic framing. In general, news organizations include similar elements in their news stories when using mixed framing, such as showing brief testimonies of relatives of disappeared persons who relate the circumstances in which their relative disappeared, the obstacles they had to face during the search, the emotional or health impact of living with that tragedy. Usually the
articles include four or five testimonies of this type interspersed with brief mentions of numbers of disappeared persons, or the situation of disappearances in the country. In this way, both frames are combined in the same article when presenting the information on the MDN.

**Findings on Ways to Undermine the Goals of the MDN**

As stated in the previous chapter, another objective of this study was to explore the possible presence of description bias or the use of labels to refer to demonstrators in the MDN, whose purpose would be to undermine the goals of this social protest. A first aspect that stands out in relation to the description of the demonstrators is that none of the six news organizations describes them in a negative way or questioning the genuineness of their cause (e.g., seeking to receive money from the government or obeying the interests of political parties). In general, the six news organizations describe demonstrators and their cause in a positive way. It should be noted, however, that within this positive coverage in general terms, isolated examples of allusions to the movement that may generate an unfavourable opinion towards it, if the reader is not correctly informed about the motives of the demonstrators to mobilise, were identified. These examples relate to the possible 'nuisance' that the MDN causes to the flow of vehicular traffic by occupying some major avenues of the City of Mexico to march. Usually, these examples are present in articles that use an episodic frame. An article in El Universal reports that mothers of disappeared persons "will hold protests in the nation's capital". The motives for the mobilization or the purposes of the demonstrators are not reported. It then mentions the route that the mothers will follow during the march, who will participate in the protest and, finally, the article ends by saying "it is recommended that citizens take their precautions" (Redacción, 2017). In other words, readers are not summoned to attend the march to support or show solidarity with their cause, but rather they are warned of the disruption to traffic that the protest generates. A similar example can be found in a Milenio
article that succinctly reports on the demonstrators’ reasons for carrying out the march. Although brief, the overall information in the article is positive. However, a short paragraph mentions that the march "affects traffic on Insurgentes and Paseo de la Reforma avenues (two important avenues in Mexico City)", which may convey the image that it is a mobilization that generates inconvenience for the inhabitants of the capital. These examples were identified only in these two mainstream news outlets, El Universal and Milenio. No similar examples were identified in the other news organizations. It is important to emphasize that these are only isolated cases and that they do not constitute a constant pattern in the coverage of both news outlets, so it would not be accurate to speak of a permanent unfavorable characterization.

A second aspect that stands out in some articles of these news organizations is the contrasting characterization of mothers who participate in the MDN. Some articles highlight their strength, their fighting spirit to pressure the government and to do the work that the government does not do. Other articles present them as people who are overwhelmed by the weight of the tragedy they are living through and hesitant to move forward. Given the complexity of the situation in which mothers live when faced with the disappearance of a loved one, it is reasonable to assume that in real life both attitudes coexist in them. However, it is interesting to examine how mothers can be characterized in one way or another in some of the news stories. In this line, the online-native news sites Animal Político and Sin Embargo, usually present in their articles the image of strength and courage of mothers in different ways: one is by presenting direct testimonies from some of them or the communiqués they read during the marches, in which they state that they will not give up despite the difficulties they face; another way is by presenting testimonies from personalities outside the MDN who highlight the courage these mothers show and present them as an example of the fight for justice. An example of the above is an Animal Político news story transcribing the complete communiqué that a representative of the MDN read during one of the
marches. In this document, the mothers state that they have concluded that the government does not care about solving the problem of disappearances, and that the only thing it wants is to tire them out so that they surrender and abandon the search for their relatives. In response, they assert that the latter will never happen:

But we have also arrived at a conclusion and a truth as clear as the previous one: we will never tire (...) We will never give up. We will burn heaven and freeze hell if necessary, until we find our own, wherever they are and no matter how they are. And we will also find those responsible for having plucked the most beloved flowers from our garden, and we will make them pay with the judgment of true justice and with the same judgment of history (Martínez, 2015).

In a similar vein, an article by Sin Embargo mentions the testimony of one of the mothers from Central America who states that they have had to adopt different roles to do the work that the Mexican government does not do. Due to the government's inaction, they "have had to become lawyers, police, investigators, experts, tracers of graves, and even legislators to make laws to look for them" (Gándara, 2018). To these testimonies of the demonstrators is added the opinion of Perseo Quiroz, Executive Director of Amnesty International Mexico, who says of them that "their courage to continue their struggle and achieve truth and justice is a manifestation of human dignity in the face of this human rights tragedy" (Rosagel, 2014). A similar opinion is expressed by Jan Jarab, representative in Mexico of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who points out that the effort and work of these mothers is an example for the entire Mexican society since they constitute

a light of dignity and courage, in the midst of times when bad news assaults us daily (...) It is their voice that must be heard and achieve change. You have already played an important
role in the Law of Disappeared Persons, but it is only a first step and the work is ahead (Gándara, 2018; Martínez, 2018).

This image of courage and fortitude to face the personal tragedy they live in contrast to that of other articles, which present the image of mothers overwhelmed by the pain of losing a loved one and whose strength to demand that the government do its duty seems to have been exhausted. An example of this is the testimony mentioned earlier in a El Universal article in which a mother expresses feeling exhausted by the wear and tear that all this tragedy entails: "these actions (the search for her daughter and her grandson, the protest) leave me exhausted, it is a tremendous emotional impact, my chest hurts, my [blood] pressure goes down, I can’t go on, it is almost four years without Jessica and without Max" (Miranda, 2016). Along with this image of physical and emotional exhaustion is sometimes presented the image of mothers who no longer demand that the government fulfill something that is their duty and obligation, but appeal to the humanity of state officials. This is the case of the testimony of a mother published in an article in La Jornada, who appeals to the feelings of the authorities: "We ask the authorities to touch their hearts. They are parents, all we want is for them to do their job, that's all" (Villalpando, Martínez, Morelos, Ovalle, 2013). In other cases, the call that mothers make is to society in general to take pity on their pain and give them information that can help them find their relative. An example of this is the testimony of a mother published in Sin Embargo:

There are no words to express the pain that one feels; to have this mutilation in the soul. I want to ask people who know something, to tell us, so that we can find our children or the one who took them; I want to ask them to have pity on our pain and to give our children back to us (Gándara, 2018)

At this point it is important to mention that this characterization of mothers highlighting the emotional aspect of their struggle is not necessarily a negative element that seeks to question
the legitimacy of their mobilization. In some cases, these characterizations are accompanied by the
denunciations and demands that they make during the march, so that the same article also transmits
information about the general movement. The use of these characterizations seems to have rather
the intention of adding a personal element to the denunciation of the disappearance of people, so
that the reader can have an idea of how a tragedy of this type affects physically and emotionally
the people who live it. For these reasons, the contrast described between the two ways of
characterising mothers is not considered a form of negative characterisation or description bias.
Thus, in general terms, no evidence of description bias was found in the coverage of the MDN by
these six news organizations.

With regard to the possible use of labels to refer to demonstrators, no derogatory or
negative terms were identified towards them during the analysis of the articles of the six news
organizations. In general, most of the articles examined refer to the MDN participants as 'the
mothers' or 'the demonstrators', and the use of these terms does not indicate an offensive or
dismissive purpose. In this sense, it can be stated that the analysis of the articles found no evidence
of the use of disqualifying labels to refer to the demonstrators of the MDN.

As a final part of this research, the following chapter presents the discussion and
conclusions that can be drawn from the results obtained in this study.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research question we have sought to answer in this study is: In what ways does framing of the MDN differ between mainstream and online-native news outlets coverage? According to what was mentioned in the literature review, it was expected that online-native news sites would provide broader and more detailed coverage (thematic) of the MDN compared to mainstream news outlets, which were expected to provide less favorable coverage (episodic). This assumption is fulfilled in the case of Animal Político and Sin Embargo, but not in the case of Revolución 3.0, which is characterized by a coverage closer to that of El Universal and Milenio. These two mainstream news outlets show a tendency to use the episodic framing more frequently, unlike the online-native news sites Animal Político and Sin Embargo which use the deep thematic framing more frequently. In fact, La Jornada uses deep thematic framing more than episodic framing, while Revolución 3.0 uses episodic framing more than deep thematic framing. It can be said, then, that the type of news outlet (mainstream or online-native) does not necessarily determine the type of framing that a given news organization uses most frequently. Differences in the type of framing most frequently used in news coverage do not depend on the type of news organization, but rather on other variables.

In this sense, the evidence seems to suggest that factors such as the type of ownership of the news outlet and the revenue it gets from official advertising may have a greater influence on the type of coverage that each news organization makes: the two mainstream news outlets that most frequently use episodic framing (El Universal and Milenio) are owned by media conglomerates, while the news organizations that most frequently use deep thematic framing (La Jornada, Animal Político and Sin Embargo) are not owned by any media conglomerate. Similarly,
El Universal and Milenio are the two news organizations with the highest official advertising revenues, while La Jornada, Animal Político and Sin Embargo have much lower official advertising revenues. These two variables, the type of ownership of news outlets and the revenue from official advertising, would seem to be more related to the episodic or thematic coverage a news organization carries out. This is, ownership by a media conglomerate and high official advertising revenues seem to lead to greater episodic coverage, while ownership by other than a media conglomerate, and low official advertising revenues, seem to lead to greater thematic coverage. However, it is also possible that other kind of variables may be influencing the type of coverage it provides. In the case of the mainstream news outlet La Jornada, its critical stance towards the government is well known regardless of the political party from which the President comes. Therefore, the preponderance that gives to thematic framework in its coverage makes sense. In the case of the online-native news outlet Revolución 3.0, its editorial line is not critical of the government, so the preponderance of episodic framing in its coverage also makes sense, as episodic coverage can be considered pro-government. Both news organizations are independent of any media conglomerate and get small revenue from official advertising, so these two factors alone would not explain the differences in their coverage. On another note, there is no information available about the ideological orientation of most of these news organizations, with the exception of La Jornada which is generally considered a left-leaning news outlet, in order to analyze the extent to which that ideological orientation influences the type of coverage that each news organization carries out. For these reasons, subsequent research that analyzes in greater detail the way in which the variables mentioned interrelate to favor a certain type of journalistic coverage would be necessary.

In the light of the previous findings, is it possible to state that online-native news sites are more democratic than mainstream news outlets? Do online-native news sites give more voice to
marginalized actors than mainstream news outlets? Again, the answer would be affirmative in the case of Animal Político and Sin Embargo, but negative for Revolución 3.0. The results show that the denunciations and demands of the demonstrators in the MDN were reported in greater detail and breadth by Animal Político and Sin Embargo, than by the rest of the news organizations. These online-native news sites have indeed given voice to the MDN protesters. The coverage of the third online-native news site Revolución 3.0, being mostly episodic, is far from transmitting in depth and detail the demands of the MDN. Then it cannot be said that an online-native news site, just for being a digital news site, will spread widely and in detail the denunciations and demands of a social mobilization critical of the government. However, while the online-native character of a news organization does not in itself guarantee more favorable coverage of a social mobilization, it does provide a greater likelihood of this happening if the digital native site is independent of a media conglomerate and its revenues do not depend on official advertising, as in the case of Animal Político and Sin Embargo. In this line, the results of this study coincide with the critique made by Herman & Chomsky (1988) regarding the structural factors that generate pressures and restrictions on journalistic work. According to them, structural factors such as media ownership and control over the type of content being disseminated, along with the media's heavy dependence on advertisers as a source of revenue, among others, determine to a great extent the type of coverage news organizations carry out. The predominantly episodic coverage of the two mainstream news outlets, El Universal and Milenio, can be understood as a result of those structural factors mentioned by Herman & Chomsky.

According to Somavía (1981), a requirement for democratizing the media is to find the form of ownership that allows the dissemination of information that represents a diversity of social actors, and not just economically and politically powerful groups. One possible alternative is social property, which is neither state nor private controlled. The case of the mainstream news outlet La
Jornada is an example of this possibility, since it is owned by the cooperative of workers working in it and its coverage of the MDN has been predominantly thematic, disseminating the demonstrators’ denunciations and demands. However, the Animal Político and Sin Embargo cases also show that a type of private ownership, independent of any media conglomerate, can provide the necessary space to develop a journalism that gives voice to social mobilizations that question government actions and policies. In this sense, these two digital sites exemplify a different alternative to the one proposed by Somavía, showing that private property is not necessarily negative in itself, but that its contribution to the democratization of information depends on the commitment of media owners to that goal.

On a different note, the results obtained by analyzing the news stories of the six selected news organisations indicate that, overall, all of these news organisations present the MDN in a positive light. Literature on news coverage of social protests indicates that news organizations owned by media conglomerates tend to portray mobilizations critical of the government unfavorably, minimizing their demands or discrediting protesters. The results of this study indicate that the two mainstream news outlets that are owned by media conglomerates and which receive the most advertising money from the government, El Universal and Milenio, have not sought to discredit or negatively portray the MDN in their news coverage. This goes in a different direction to what has been suggested in the literature on the subject.

What are the explanations for this divergence? Is the fact that the MDN marches are peaceful, without resorting to violence or acts that disrupt the daily activities of city dwellers related to it? In other words, it is relatively easier for a news organization to negatively present a protest if demonstrators destroy or damage public places, block streets, or otherwise carry out riots. News organizations seeking to affect social mobilizations can use these types of acts as material to discredit protesters. Since the MDN conducts peaceful marches, which do not carry out acts
such as those mentioned above, it does not provide the media with material to present them negatively. It could be argued, in this sense, that there are other reasons to delegitimize social mobilizations and not only because of violent acts, which is true. However, in the analysis of the articles there was also no evidence of attempts to discredit the MDN using other motives, e.g., seeking money from the government or being funded by opposition political parties to criticize the incumbent president.

So, can the fact that most of the demonstrators in the MDN are mothers explain this? Probably, yes. It is possible that because most of the participants in the MDN are mothers seeking their children, this alone will lend legitimacy to their cause and make it very difficult for a news organization to attempt to disqualify this mobilization without exposing itself to losing credibility as news media. In other Latin American countries, being mothers has helped women’s movements to legitimise their mobilizations even in authoritarian or conflict situations. Such is the case of the Mothers and the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina, who, by presenting themselves as mothers and defenders of the family, have managed to consolidate their political legitimacy and strengthen the resonance of their demands (Bonner, 2007), even though their movement has not always been able to have a favorable coverage in the media due to the repression of military dictatorship, and the evident risk to which journalists who dare to spread news against the regime were exposed. A similar case occurs in a mobilization of women in Nicaragua, where women who lost a son or daughter during the contra war base the legitimacy of their movement on the pain they feel because they are mothers, a grief that is not comparable to that of some other female relative (wife, daughter, etc.) of the fallen person (Bayard de Volo, 2006). So, with this background as a reference, it is reasonable to think that the fact that most of the demonstrators in the MDN are mothers looking for their missing children lends legitimacy to their mobilization on its own, and prevents pro-government news organizations from finding reasons to discredit them. It would be
ideal to be able to interview journalists or reporters from these mainstream news outlets to gather direct information about their opinions on the MDN, and their reasons for presenting this mobilization the way they do.

With regard to the content of the articles analyzed, it should be noted that they focus mostly on mothers who participate in protest marches and that no specific information about disappeared persons is presented to characterize them in greater detail. This is significant since one of the main demands of the mothers of the MDN is to combat the criminalization of the victims of disappearance. The absence of information about them means that the discourse of the mothers defending their relatives against criminalization is not being disseminated by the news organizations. This is an important issue on which the MDN demonstrators need to work to ensure that in subsequent marches this discourse is included and disseminated by the different news outlets.

When the MDN is examined from the point of view of the social construction of target populations, it can be seen that the MDN points in a different direction to some of the postulates that the social construction of target populations has regarding mothers as a social group. In this view, mothers are considered a dependent group, whose orientation towards the government is passive, therefore with a low mobilization potential; furthermore, mothers consider it is normal that government treats them with pity. From this perspective, mothers are considered a powerless group whose problems are individual and must be faced in the private sphere (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). The case of mothers who have formed search groups all over the country and who mobilize in the MDN shows that, with their activity and work, they are configuring a social construction for them that is different from what the social construction of target populations proposes. In this sense, it has been shown in the previous sections of this chapter that a fundamental aspect of their mobilization is to demand that the Mexican government fulfill its duty to search for disappeared
persons and to create the laws and institutions that contribute to that purpose, which is far from being a passive role vis-à-vis the Mexican government. Similarly, the formation of search groups and the implementation of the MDN in Mexico City and other cities in the country shows, on the one hand, that their mobilization potential is not low at all and, on the other hand, that their problems go beyond the private sphere and have become a shared problem, a social issue of enormous dimensions. Precisely because the mothers of the MDN are not satisfied with being treated with pity by the government, they have organized and mobilized to demand that the State fulfill its duty and obligation. For these reasons, the emergence of search groups and their mobilization in the MDN can serve as case studies to analyze how this social group is laying the foundations for a social construction different from that which has traditionally been assigned to them.

In general, the findings of this research constitute a modest contribution to knowledge about how news organizations today can concretely contribute to democratizing information, by giving voice to social actors who are often not represented in traditional mainstream media. The high level of concentration in media ownership that has led to the formation of media conglomerates in different parts of the world remains one of the main challenges to the democratization of the media themselves and, consequently, of the information they disseminate. However, as has been shown in this study, there are currently news organizations that disseminate information about social actors who disagree with the current state of affairs, and demand the government to implement changes in its actions and policies. This indicates that it is possible to find ways to sidestep media conglomerates and establish news organizations focused on disseminating a diversity of voices, and not just the voices of economically and politically powerful groups.
The online-native news sites in Mexico require more extensive study in order to understand which of them, and to what extent, if any, contribute to democratizing information in the country. In this sense, further research can focus on analyzing the acceptance that this type of news organizations are having among Mexican population, in order to determine if they can constitute over time a counterweight to mainstream news outlets with pro-government agendas. Similarly, the Marcha por la Dignidad Nacional also requires a deeper study to understand how the movement has evolved over the years, and what protest strategies they could implement in the short and medium term, in order to make the current federal administration respond more effectively to their demands.
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APPENDIX: QUOTED NEWS STORIES


