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#MigrantCaravan: The border wall and the establishment of otherness on Instagram

Recent media attention aimed at migrant caravans at the US-Mexico border has increased interest from different actors in the political and social spheres. Parallel to traditional and mainstream media, social media has become the prime context where narratives about the border develop, moulding broader societal perspectives on the immigration issue. Through a content and discourse analysis of 105 posts connected by the #MigrantCaravan or #CaravanaMigrante hashtags, we delved into how media representations of immigration on Instagram effectively establish otherness between the different characters involved in this phenomenon. The border wall emerges as one of the main components in these narratives and a symbol of the temporal and spatial stages of the migratory journey. Meanwhile, the voice of the main character, the migrant, is mostly absent, often conveyed through biased views, filtered by the opinions of posters about immigration and characterized by new narrative configurations enabled by the Instagram format.

Keywords: immigrants; border wall; Instagram; otherness; media representation; social media; new media

Introduction

Border walls along with their symbolic and physical meaning have long been the subject of close examination by scholars as us versus them rhetorical enablers (DeChaine, 2012; Nevins, 2002; Ono, 2012; Orsini et al., 2019). This characteristic of borders lends itself to further exploration as real and metaphorical places where narratives about immigration occur. Certain border walls have been the subject of more attention, such is the case of the US-Mexico Border, which has been deemed the most crossed border in the world,

according to Nevins (as cited in Ono, 2012). On social media, the ways in which posters with diverse opinions about the issue of immigration depict the wall and the characters around it takes on increased significance as citizen's news consumption is becoming more and more reliant on digital media in general and social media in particular, especially for those aged 18-44 (Newman et al., 2017).

Recently, the argument for the construction of a border wall, which has been a recurring theme throughout the Trump administration, has gained momentum in the current immigration debate and in the political sphere (Demata, 2017; Zurcher, 2019). The wall has been used as one of the main isolationist strategies, carrying a significant symbolic load (Dombrowski and Reich, 2017; Martin, 2017). In this sense, it becomes significant to describe how mediated narratives and images about the people and places around the border and what takes place in its surroundings create generally accepted ideas about "where America ends and something 'other' begins" (DeChaine, 2012: 7).

Along these lines, the establishment of otherness —understood at its simplest as "the quality of being other or different" (Otherness, n.d.)— emerges as a familiar paradigm with new dimensions. For the purposes of this study, otherness is understood in a dichotomic sense. On the one hand, traditional distancing from the other emphasizes differences and focuses on a constructed inferiority (Bourdieu, 1986; Greer and Jewkes, 2005). This is a perspective shared by Durkheim (1961) in terms of the otherness established between the individual and society as a whole. On the other hand, otherness understood as an emphasis on being oneself without attempting to be as the other, bypassing the social order or societal expectations and constructions. Thus, enabling the establishment of a person's own identity through his or her status as another (Orkin and Joubin, 2019). Moreover, the ways in which these symbolic representations are constructed can also establish sameness —e.g. when using Benson's (2013) *humanitarian*

frame in a “we are all human” configuration. Each of these different strategies are motivated by the intentionality of the message.

Hall et al. (2010) illustrated the historic role of dominant, mostly binary definitions of othering in the media and in society as a continuous attempt to self-identify in relation to others, achieve order, exclude to establish power, and enable fantasies about possible outcomes. The process described as an “exercise in symbolic violence” (Hall et. al., 2010:431). Another concept described by these authors is fetishism, where what is represented can only exist in relation with something that cannot be shown, effectively representing something beyond itself. Other authors have analyzed this problematic relationship of othering and media. Said (2008) illustrates how it has played a pervasive role in perpetuating (mis)representations of certain groups, in this case using the Islamic example. His argument establishes a solid relationship between “crises” as fertile grounds to position the “other” according to legislative and ideological needs. He describes how a variety of media including news media, film, literature and electronic media slowly — over decades— construct the “other” in order to exert power and minimize the group to a unit that is inferior, threatening and easily (mis)represented.

As to otherness and the wall, this inanimate object emerges as one of the protagonists of the current “crisis.” It appears as a simultaneous enabler of otherness and sameness. On the one hand, it marks the place where people change status by just crossing (Anderson et al., 2009); a place where labels abound, from person to migrant, from national to foreigner, from citizen to illegal, from human to detainee, from migrant to refugee. Conversely, it can be a place of encounter and connection (Newman, 2003), in some cases the border wall typifies the possibility of opportunity, dreams and advancement just beyond.

In this sense, the specific characteristics of social media lend themselves as worthy spaces for exploration of the strategies that enable otherness to emerge as both a paradigm of exclusion and differentiation and one of self-representation and identity through interaction. As Lesage and Natale (2019:5) explain, current media is characterized by “interdependency and complexity (...) making it harder to ‘bracket’ a specific medium from its surroundings.” The relationship between new and old media has been further illustrated as one of interplay rather than replacement (Natale, 2016). Current media trends have also been described by Jenkins (2006) focusing on the concept of convergence as one where the media industry and users collide and find each other as definers of what, when and where content is produced. These descriptions delineate the essential traits of current —including new and social— media. Today’s media environments are intricate, with information that is constantly intersecting, not only within digital platforms but also with traditional media. In this ecosystem, the lines between fact and fiction are blurred and the editorial board is no longer the main definer of content. Such everchanging configurations offer new ways to understand and analyze the establishment of otherness; moving it away from previous traditional, straightforward places where representations developed and challenging scholars to understand it within these new complexities.

Politics and public opinion about immigration

In this context, the opinion of those creating, posting and disseminating information is an important consideration as U.S. public opinion regarding immigration has historically been subject to change as the political and informational climate changes, especially near election periods (McCarthy, 2018). Moreover, various studies suggest that attitudes towards immigration are deeply affected by the way in which it is framed (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009; Freeman, et al. 2013; Wright, 2002).

Historically, the situation at the US-Mexico border has motivated diverse ideological movements and rhetorical trends. Campbell's (2015) chronology of this crisis illustrates the discourse surrounding these events. She described the mid-1990s as a period of growth for the white supremacist movement near the border, supported by populist, far-right rhetoric. She went on to describe the rise of armed, vigilante nativist groups in the early 2000s focused on curbing illegal immigration at the border by using intimidation and rhetorical formulations characterized by racism, hate and calls to armed action. She also chronicles a "migrant surge" in 2014, marked by the appearance of unaccompanied minor migrants; Campbell (2015) highlights the use of private detention centers to house asylum seeking families as an important shift in immigration policy towards border crossers.

Similarly, the period surrounding the 2018 U.S. midterm elections was filled with coverage of the "crisis" at the border. This was reflected by news stories showing increasing numbers of immigrants at the border and the so-called migrant caravans garnering significant attention from the media, and also prevailing as some of the hot topics for political discourse from different figures, including president Donald Trump. After the deployment of 5,600 American troops to the border as part of the so-called *Operation Faithful Patriot* (Gibbons-Neff and Cooper, 2018), the focus of news platforms, concerned citizens and other stakeholders were aimed at the border during a crucial electoral and political period from early November to mid-December 2018. Jengelley and Clawson (2019) describe the sensationalization of these events in the media during this period, pulling the attention of the citizenry towards immigration, positioning the border as central in the discussion of political issues. They describe the use of a threat frame, and a disregard for data evidencing that the number of illegal migrants was lower than it had been since 2004.

The digital context provides a permanent record of public sentiment about any issue and immigration is no exception, Clark-Ibanez and Swan (2019) describe how social media is instrumental in the construction of stories about immigrants that —due to the format and ways in which content is created and disseminated— can consequently be supported, contradicted or challenged by readers, who can also use components of the stories as needed and in support of their own opinions/narratives.

In terms of the characterization of migrants, the current US administration has deepened a climate of political polarization by referring to any action by immigrants as illegal (Holpuch, 2019). This aligns with a solid body of research that supports the idea that mainstream media and dominant discourse from political figures have traditionally portrayed immigrants in a frame that focuses excessively on the illegality factor (Brouwer et al., 2017; Clark-Ibanez and Swan, 2019; Dunaway et al., 2011; Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Horsti, 2007).

Representations, interactions and content generation in the current media landscape

As has been established, the current trend towards a pursuit of identity and identification through self-representation (Rettberg, 2018) as well as opinion expression on social media as a predictor of civic participation (Valenzuela, 2013) lie at the heart of today's mediated communication. Another important characteristic of social media —the user-generated creation, adaptation, modification and propagation of content and a more visual, less textual depiction of issues— presents specific challenges when dealing with information. Milhailidis and Viotti (2017) argue that mainstream media is no longer necessary to reach audiences in the current digital, user-generated content environment. Likewise, Cacciatore et al. (2016), suggest that the new media environment requires a different approach with visual representation strategies in social media emerging as

powerful persuasive techniques. These two studies point towards a shift in the places and contexts where significant ideas that mold societal perceptions occur. This justifies the need for studies that explore the limits of traditional professional journalistic media representations in favor of the current convergent media environment where representations reside in the form of *spreadable media* (Jenkins et al., 2013) and its ability to move along social and new media and be reshaped as needed.

Although visual media representations have been extensively analyzed on traditional and mainstream media, social media platforms such as Instagram are unique in this sense because of the challenges they present for the user to discern fiction from fact. For example, on TV, programming genres generally adhere to a set of common practices (Lawrence and Boydston, 2017) and representations are framed within these genres. Even though stereotypes are an issue on television, a critical interpretation of its content and visual representations is facilitated by programming genres that adhere to certain common elements. Moreover, traditional media outlets often separate opinion-based content from news articles following specific journalistic standards. Social media, on the other hand, bypass these boundaries. Therefore, the study of representation becomes more complex, as more actors—including those who are less regulated by ethical and other guidelines—are contributing to these representations based on their own ideology, opinion and interests.

The social, relational and contextual experiences afforded by new media must also be considered in order to locate the places where this phenomenon develops. In this sense, Lister et al. (2008) describe the ways in which stories develop differently within new media, including the “relationships between embodiment, identity and community: different ways of (...) experiencing time, space and place changing how we see ourselves in the world” (p. 12). These new configurations give way to an array of forms of

communication, where information, opinions and facts are mixed together using audiovisual content generated from a lineup of stakeholders, including media conglomerates adapting to this new ecosystem, politicians and opinion leaders, but also created by a modern version of Toffler's (1980) prosumer.

To further understand the significance of participation in this context, Van Dijck's (2009) analysis of user agency is enlightening. According to Van Dijck (2009), the era of User Generated Content is less of a creative and productive boom and more a continuum going from *joiners* to *collectors*, *critics* and *active creators*. She specifies that more than 80% of all users are actually passive, implying that User Generated Content is in fact controlled by a minority. It is important to specify that since Van Dijck's (2009) article was published, social media sites have implemented functions to promote interaction and content generation. In the case of Instagram, it has gone from a simple Flickr-type photo sharing app into an increasingly complex medium that is intimately connected to its parent company, Facebook. Instagram incorporates traits that resemble YouTube (Instagram tv video feed and channel creation), Snapchat (stories, stories' highlights, photo effects), Twitter (strict limits in the length of posts and videos, extensive use of hashtags), even offering content curation (through its collections function). It could be argued that what makes Instagram unique is the combination of content creation and dissemination functions that illustrate Van Dijck's (2009) different types of users while preserving simple interaction options (only one type of positive reaction on posts and private comments on stories) as well as an asymmetrical configuration (Hu et al., 2014).

These changes in the self- and community perception of individuals through new and social media, the ubiquity and complexity in the promotion of interaction and content creation, as well as the convergence of motivations and ideologies, have important implications for an issue that has received prominent media coverage —the Migrant

Caravan— and a medium that is becoming increasingly significant in the current media landscape —Instagram.

Instagram: A reflection of current trends in new media

Instagram has gone from five hundred thousand to one billion monthly active users from 2016 to 2018 (Statista, 2018) and this rising trend outlines its position of influence within the current digital environment. Instagram was the chosen platform for this study due to its growth, characteristics, and public.

Previous academic inquiry on Instagram addressing representation has focused on the self-representation of different types of Instagram users including identity and multilingualism (Blackwood, 2018) youth and sexuality (Calvo González and San Fabián Maroto, 2018) gender in self representations (Shumaker et al., 2017; Van Oosten et al., 2017) and the analysis of grouped hashtags and inanimate objects for self-representation (Baker and Walsh, 2018). Even politically-themed studies have delved into this medium from the self-representation perspective (Muñoz and Towner, 2017). Within these studies, the focus has traditionally been on the construction of the poster's identity. The novel approach proposed by the present study is the consideration of Instagram as a medium, where a large percentage of the young adult population is consuming news (Newman et al., 2017) and information, while expressing their opinions about important topics (Valenzuela, 2013), effectively becoming the setting where symbolic understandings of socially-constructed reality are molded (Searle and Willis, 1995).

A study by the Pew Research Center found that 75% of 18 to 24 year-olds in the US are Instagram users (Perrin and Anderson, 2019). This is important in the upcoming 2020 US elections, where it is estimated that 1 in 10 American voters will belong to the 18 to 23 age group (Cillufo and Fry, 2019). This data positions Instagram as one of the prime contexts where political discourse to persuade a crucial segment of the electorate

will develop. Moreover, another Pew Research Center study found that more than half (55%) of U.S. adults get their news from social media platforms, with 36% of Instagram users getting their news from this platform and 40% of Instagram users aged 18 to 29 consuming news in this platform (Shearer and Grieco, 2019).

The importance of social media platforms in democratic processes is also an important consideration. In this sense, recent inquiries suggest that Instagram—as a subsidiary of Facebook—may have been one of the strategically selected platforms to deploy disinformation by Russia in the 2016 U.S. election (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Also, the large number of politicians attempting to harness the power of Instagram ahead of the 2020 campaign (Hinsliff, 2019; Murphy and Sevastopulo, 2019) signals its importance in the current political and social arenas.

Materials and Methods

Using inductive methods based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 2006), three specific research objectives were formulated to frame and guide this research study:

(O1) Describe characteristics of posts connected by the hashtags #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante.

(O2) Identify characters and interactions of interest in the establishment of otherness.

(O3) Describe media representations of the immigration phenomenon within Instagram posts in relation to opinions towards immigration and considering the two hashtags.

Data Collection and sample

The hashtags: #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante delimited the sample. The English and Spanish versions of the hashtag were chosen in order to assess whether

messages in these two groups were pertinent to the establishment of otherness. Through time, these hashtags have also become popular within the topic in Instagram (with 15,697 and 16,017 posts respectively), increasing the significance of this analysis for the study of the migratory phenomenon at the US/Mexico border. The Instagram function that allows users to follow hashtags is an important consideration that further justifies a hashtag-based sample.

The cloud-based social media analytics tool Netlytic (Gruzd, 2016) was used to gather Instagram posts containing the two hashtags #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante every hour during the month ranging from November 15th to December 15th, 2018. Netlytic works through the Instagram API to access publicly available Instagram profiles and harvest post information. Due to the events taking place in the political sphere and at the border, mainstream media reflected these events (Gibbons-Neff and Cooper, 2018; Jengolley and Clawson, 2019), which may have caused a spike in Instagram posts using these hashtags during the dates of interest.

For the purposes of this study, only the hashtag function was used to collect the sample. Although Netlytic enables the analysis of a range of metadata, this information was not used in the present project. Thus, the data extracted and analyzed included: date of post, number of likes, poster textual comment, image (not filter) and hashtags used in the main comment.

When looking at the number of posts per day, a spike took place on December 4th, delimiting sample dates. Subsets were taken from December 3rd to the 5th, 2018 for both datasets.

In order to approach the research objectives, non-probability sampling using the hashtags #migrantcaravan and #caravanamigrante was conducted. The first sample

contained 353 posts for #MigrantCaravan and 292 posts for #CaravanaMigrante for a total of 645 posts from 3 days. Each post (including image, video and text) constitutes one unit of analysis. Comments on posts were excluded from the sample because our focus is centered on the media representation of immigration as intended by the poster and not the reactions of Instagram users towards those media representations.

A first round of open, inductive coding was performed to further delve into posts and messages that respond to topics of interest to answer the research objectives. After an overview of the entire sample and the coding of 9.92% ($n=64$ posts) of the initial sample ($n= 645$ posts), a recurring pattern emerged in which the main characters in the images interacted in ways that indicated important relationships that called for further analysis.

The three main characters in Instagram post images gathered using these two hashtags were: immigrants, different types of law enforcement agents and the wall. This last *character* became an important entity that appears in 16.4% of the original posts' media (images and/or videos). No posts within the sample contained GIFS, just images or short videos. The appearance of different types of walls and the actions, relations and interactions that occur with this inanimate object emerged as an interesting aspect in terms of the research questions, the analysis of the immigration phenomenon and its development on Instagram.

Following the principles of purposive, criterion sampling defined by Palys (2008) as sampling on the basis of cases that meet a certain criterion, all posts that did not portray the wall visually in the image or video were excluded. Table 1 shows the sampling process from the initial to the final sample.

Table 1. Sampling Process. Created by the Authors

Sample	Criteria
645	Posts with the hashtag #MigrantCaravan and #CaravanaMigrante from December 3 rd to December 5 th , 2018 extracted using Netlytic.
582	Remaining posts after manually excluding posts that were no longer available or posts that were completely unrelated to the issue of immigration.
117	Remaining posts after excluding all posts that did not contain an image or video depicting the wall.
105	Remaining posts after excluding duplicates (posts that contained both hashtags and therefore were included twice).

It is important to note that other characters appeared on some posts that displayed the wall, including activists and politicians. This was true especially on posts that included a video. In these cases the characters are not included in the analysis because they appear sparingly on the image/video or because they do not appear with the wall. In some cases, even though the wall was illustrated in one part of the video, the character was not represented with the wall and was therefore excluded from this analysis.

Following iterative, inductive coding rounds, a code chart¹ was developed from these emerging codes and themes, through a thorough and continuous analysis of the data on Atlas.ti, while recording information about each post as a whole on an Excel

¹ The spreadsheet can be found here <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.8242082.v1>

spreadsheet². Even though the code chart is extensive, the code groups analyzed in this paper are included in Table 2.

Table 2. Codes used for analysis. Created by the Authors.

<u>Code</u>	<u>Definition</u>
WALL	This code group includes types of walls that appear in posts graphically and textually.
IMMOP	This code group describes the opinion of the poster regarding immigration, in the case of anti- and pro-immigration posts, this opinion had to be explicitly expressed, the rest of the posts were classified as neutral.
PATROL	This code group comprises terms and depictions of border patrol officers.
DEFIMMIG	This code group includes terms used to refer to migrants and visual depictions of migrants.
ACTION	This code group always appeared paired with a code within a subject code group (PATROL or DEFIMMIG) and it comprises the textual description of actions carried out by the subject.
DISTRI	This code group describes the spatial distribution of subjects in the image or video. It always includes the wall as part of this distribution.
HASH	This code group includes characteristics of hashtags (grouped or in-text) and the terms used as hashtags in the post.

In order to delve deeper into interesting code co-occurrences, c-coefficients were extracted from Atlas.ti. These indicate the “strength of the relationship between two codes and is similar to a correlation coefficient” (Friese, 2013, p. 291).

In terms of the ethical challenges that arise from employing user data without consent (boyd and Crawford, 2012) in digital environments, and to protect users and their identity, information was made anonymous to the extent to which it was possible.

²The spreadsheet can be found here <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.8058974.v1>

Limitations

Some limitations that were inherent to the method selected include the difficulty of evaluating the trustworthiness of the results and the research process. In order to minimize the effects of these methodology-related limitations, attempts have been made to curtail bias through iterative rounds of coding and by describing the research process and procedures in as much detail as possible. Other limitations relate to the platform itself, which changes constantly and in some cases these changes affect the availability of some posts. During this research project, the Instagram API emerged as an important potential limitation as it can significantly curtail the contents to which a researcher has access at different points in time. Finally, the selection of these two hashtags to delimit the sample may present a limitation as it may exclude Instagram users who are not familiar with the use of hashtags as Mayr and Weller (2017) explain and also other significant hashtags related to this issue.

Results

The initial content analysis of the 105 posts in the sample revealed that there was a higher number of posts for #MigrantCaravan than for #CaravanaMigrante as reflected on Figure 1.

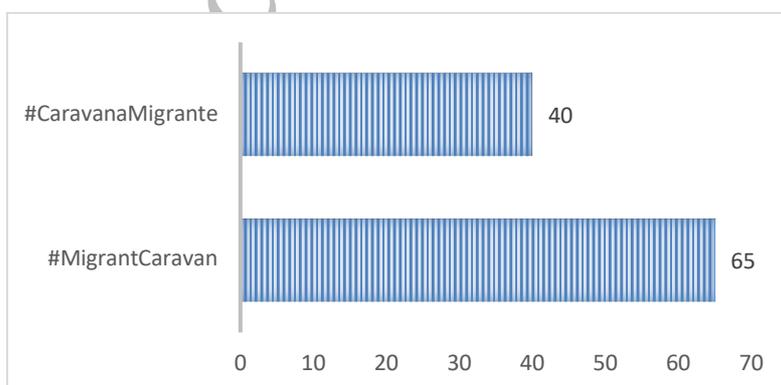


Figure 1. Number of posts by hashtag. Created by the Authors.

Explicit opinions regarding immigration were coded, revealing a higher number of pro-immigration posts, followed by neutral ones and finally those against immigration.

Figure 2 depicts these results.

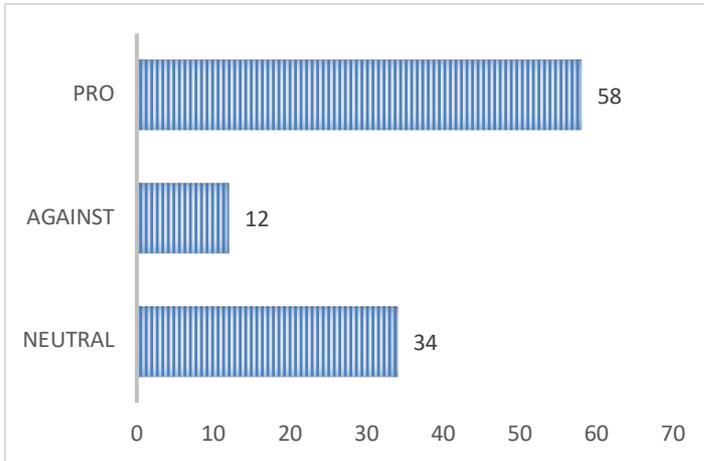


Figure 2. Number of posts per type of opinion regarding immigration. Created by the Authors.

Moreover, a query conducted on Atlas.ti using the cooccurrence table functionality revealed that none of the posts against immigration contained the hashtag #CaravanaMigrante and none of them were written in Spanish. Figure 3 displays the language of posts, with a significantly higher number of posts in English than in other languages.

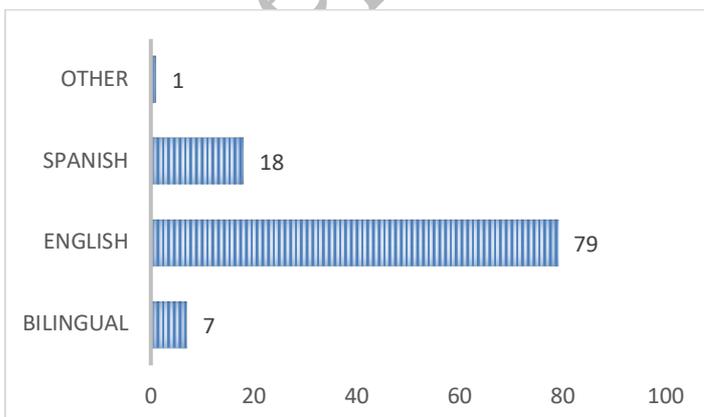


Figure 3. Post languages. Created by the Authors.

Codes to describe the types of walls presented visually and textually reflected a wide array of representations. Figure 4 displays the most common types of walls in terms of the codes used to describe their visual portrayal, the word clouds were created using their cooccurrence index with codes related to opinions on immigration. The results show that six types of walls are portrayed across quotes that are for, against and neutral regarding immigration: barbed wire, border, metal bar, chain link and concrete. The three wall depictions that are not present in the anti-immigration posts are the human wall, the shadow and the comparison with Gaza. The differences in the indexes reflect the higher numbers of pro-immigration and neutral posts overall as described on Figure 2 above.

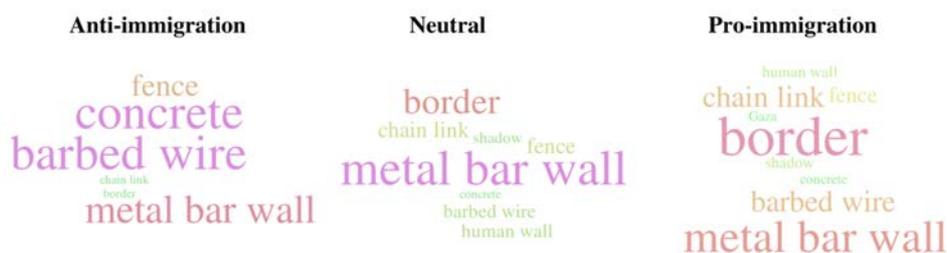


Figure 4. Codes and co-occurrence indexes between WALL and IMMOP code groups.

Source: Created by the Authors.

Different types of law enforcement officials were also represented. The codes used in these representations identified the attire they used, and the words used to describe their actions. Figure 5 displays the labels used to describe different law enforcement characteristics classified by the three types of opinions regarding immigration.

-----Figure 5 near here -----

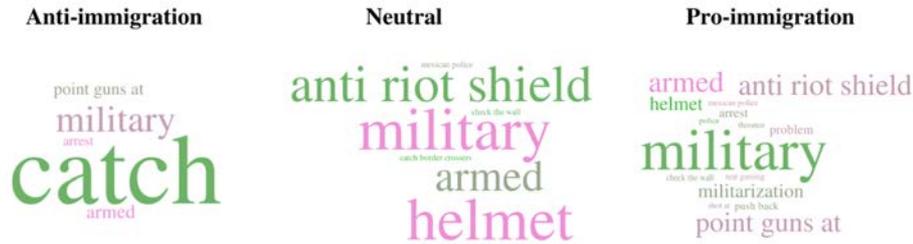


Figure 5. Codes and co-occurrence indexes between ACTION, PATROL, and IMMOP code groups.
Source: Created by the Authors.

The portrayal of migrants was coded from the perspective of the words used to refer to them, the characteristics conveyed by the images that depict them and the actions attributed to them in relation to the wall and other characters through textual narratives. These are related to the opinions reflected on the posts towards immigration (Figure 6).

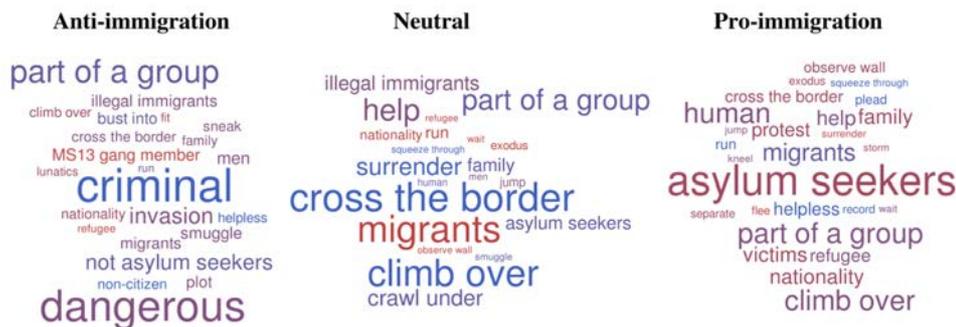


Figure 6. Codes and co-occurrence indexes between ACTION, DEFIMMIG, and IMMOP code groups.
Source: Created by the Authors

Upon a deeper look at posts, journalists and photojournalists emerged as an important voice, although they are not often depicted on images, there are signs of their

presence in the form of watermarks, photo credits and hashtags, accompanied by relatively neutral accounts of the events, suggesting journalistic assignments and content.

Figure 7 includes two posts that exemplify this journalistic presence.



Figure 7. Mainstream media watermark examples on Instagram.

Migrants, part of a caravan of thousands from Central America trying to reach the United States, try to jump a border fence to cross illegally from Mexico to the U.S, in Tijuana, Mexico, December 2, 2018. REUTERS/Aikis Konstantinidis #reuters #migrants #migrantcaravan #mexico #tijuana

are a small minority within the 8,000 to 10,000 migrants. And the majority are men, young fit, and military age.

FEDS CATCH CONVICTED MURDERER IN #MIGRANTCARAVAN: DHS

By Stephen Dinan - The Washington Times, November 30, 2018

#HomelandSecurity said Friday that a convicted murderer was among the members of the migrant caravan, and was

#border #frontera #wall #migrant #migrante #caravan #caravanmigrante #caravana #tijuana #mexico #usa #reportagespotlight #gettyimages #reuters #ap #news #photojournalism #reportage #documentaryphotography #documentary #burndiary #magnumphotos #viphoto #worldpressphoto #spicollective #noorimages #natgeoyourshot #everydaymexico #everydaylatinamerica

Figure 8. Different post texts that suggest journalistic content.

Posts suggesting journalistic content include hashtags and mentions of journalists and mainstream media sources as part of the text as is evident in the three extracts included in Figure 8. Moreover, watermarks on the image suggest copyright for some traditional media enterprises such as Reuters and AFP on both images included on Figure 7.

In terms of other themes that were significant in the inductive coding process, the distribution of subjects on the images was coded as a defining characteristic of the pictorial representations. The most frequent subject distributions displayed variations of the immigrant or immigrant groups in the foreground and the wall in the middle or background with or without other subjects behind the wall. In most instances, migrants are positioned on the Mexican side of the wall, usually in the process of crossing (86 instances). Significantly, border patrol agents and migrants appear together in the same image very seldom, both in opposing sides of the wall (6 instances) and on the same side of the wall (9 instances). Of the 9 instances where they appear together on one side of the wall, 7 posts contain the same image.

Figures 9, 10 and 11 exemplify posts and were coded with the different types of subject distributions. Data in this sense showed that in most cases, the migrant is depicted in the foreground across opinions about immigration, while the wall and law enforcement agents appear in the foreground mostly in neutral or pro-immigration posts.



Figure 9. DIST immwall.

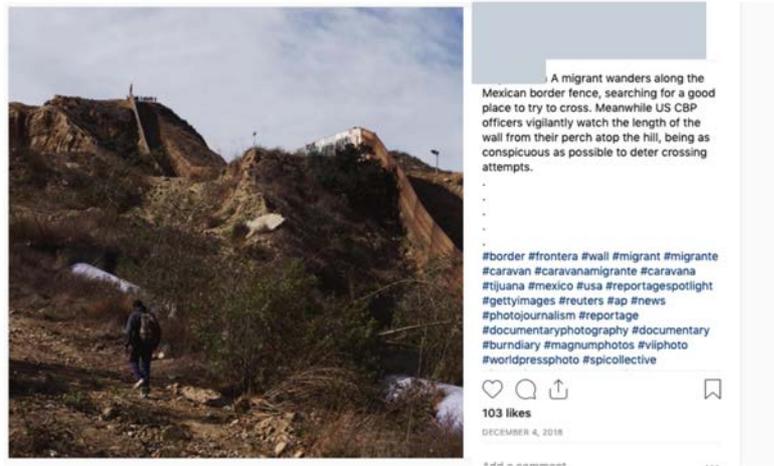


Figure 10. DIST immwallpatrol.

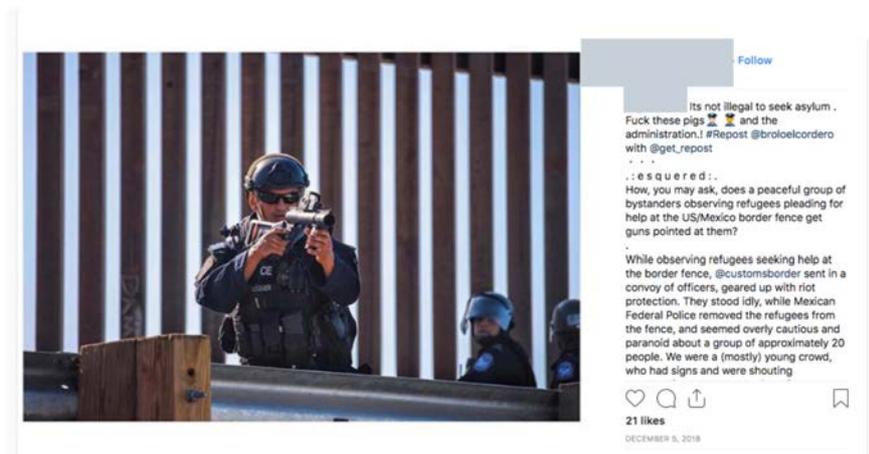


Figure 11. DIST patrolwall.

Discussion and Conclusions

In general terms, the sample displays a lower number of posts in the Spanish version of the hashtag, than in English. An overwhelming majority of posts are written in English. This suggests that the posts connected by these hashtags are written by and directed at the English-speaking community and the narratives are aimed at these readers. Moreover, posts that reflect anti-immigration opinions do not use the Spanish version of the hashtag #CaravanaMigrante and are always written in English within this sample. This is a finding that could be related to the fact that Instagram has an asymmetrical configuration (Hu et

al., 2014), and this relationship calls for messages to be customized to a specific group of followers. This also suggests that the discourse in the Spanish version of the hashtag is significantly skewed towards pro-immigration and neutral accounts of events at the border.

Otherness and the wall

The emergence of the wall as an important *character* in the context of migratory narratives is not a new idea. Some authors have described how borders have been a natural part of discourse related to migratory processes when they asserted that they “embody juxtapositions of belonging and exclusion, inside and outside, familiar and foreign, native and other” (Pottie-Sherman and Wilkes, 2016: 83). Alongside these authors, and as mentioned in the literature review, the wall as an establisher of otherness has been analyzed extensively (DeChaine, 2012; Nevins, 2002; Ono, 2012; Orsini et al., 2019). Our results support these findings as can be seen, for example, in the prevalence of words and depictions of immigrants that are connotatively negative in posts against immigration and rather neutral or positively framed on pro-immigration posts. We found that otherness is delineated when an attempt is made to exclude and distance the dominant, acceptable behavior from that of the migrant who transgresses against the wall in his or her actions. This is emphasized through verbs that strengthen the idea of contrast, collision and a certain level of violence, such as *plot*, *bust into*, *sneak* and *smuggle*, and labels that explicitly criminalize human mobility behaviors, such as *criminal*, *dangerous*, *invaders*, *lunatics*, *non-citizens*, *not asylum seekers*, supporting other studies that have found similar strategies in immigration representations (Brouwer, et al., 2017; Clark-Ibanez and Swan, 2019; Dunaway et al., 2011; Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Horsti, 2007). This emphasis on behaviors and labels focused on illegality have also been found to be

classic, straightforward strategies used to imply otherness (Greer and Jewkes, 2005) and establish migrants as a threat (Jengellely and Clawson, 2019).

Our analysis illuminates the new languages and modes of communication unique to Instagram. The visual distribution of characters within posts was one of the main strategies used to establish otherness in this sample. First, the metal bar wall, which is the most common in visual depictions, offers an opportunity for Instagrammers to illustrate the migratory journey from both sides, as one can easily see through such a wall. The findings in terms of the distribution of characters along the wall suggest a generalized trend of images that serve a narrative purpose for part of the story, which in the majority of cases is continued in the textual component of the narrative. For example, a post depicting a police officer (Figure 11) excludes migrants from the image, but the textual story included in the post focuses mainly on the “refugees” facing that police officer and “innocent bystanders”, who are located out of the range of the lens and are described as “observing”.

In this example, the threat and violence represented by the border patrol official are conveyed through the textual construction of the other: the migrant facing him, the bystanders who are part of a group of young people, families and children, non-threatening others who make this contrast and identification possible. These findings support what Hall et al. (2010) described as representation that can only be understood in relation with the unseen. These strategies develop in parallel with stories from traditional news media about the militarization of the border in an attempt to contextualize, from a pro-immigration perspective, the so-called *Operation Faithful Patriot* (Jengellely and Clawson, 2019). This is an example of one of the affordances of social media; allowing individuals to interpret and resignify information from the mainstream media to

subsequently disseminate among their social media followers (Clark-Ibanez and Swan, 2019).

Border narratives frame migratory phenomena and enable the establishment of otherness in its temporal and spatial sense (Anderson et al., 2009). An example of this type of post is featured in Figure 9, which depicts migrants before crossing but is accompanied by a text that narrates how they surrendered when they reached the other side, even though no image in the sample depicts the surrender of migrants. A few narratives coded as pro-immigration or neutral display this same type of narrative. This supports previous studies in which migrants are represented as victims and the issue is framed as a power struggle (Johnson et al., 2011) and one of control (Horsti, 2007). In these Instagram posts, the migrants' ultimate feat is crossing the border (effectively changing their legal status). Otherness is established through the description of their actions after crossing. The power struggle as defined by Johnson et al. (2011) is broken when these migrants surrender to authorities, implying need, humanity, victimization, rather than acting to escape or commit acts of violence as may be implied in other storylines. Perhaps this is an attempt to counter other narratives that position the migrant in a frame that justifies anti-immigration policies (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Chavez, 2001; 2013).

Otherness is also effectively established between posters/Instagrammers/photographers and subjects when the wall in the image is used as a device to establish the immigrant as a separate entity from the poster. In this visual and textual discourse, images are always taken from the perspective of an individual who is not part of the migrant community, or at least not explicitly. Otherness is set up in this sense when an activist uses the *humanitarian frame* (Benson, 2013) as a device to

victimize the (im)migrant and appeal to the guilt or compassion of the reader. It could be argued that the humanitarian portrayal of migrants can be construed as an attempt to establish sameness; but even posts that appeal to humanitarianism display characteristics of otherness in the form of third person accounts and disengagement with the subject of the narrative. Otherness is also established by using strategically grouped hashtags with the intent to position the poster in relation to the image (Baker and Walsh, 2018) and in relation to the subjects in the human mobility narrative. This finding may reflect an attempt by the Instagrammer/poster/photographer to position him/herself within the migratory phenomena through the use of an opinion, expressed as a hashtag.

The attempts to position immigrants as *others* in posts is widespread. This positioning is used to differentiate characters within the images and posts, facilitated by the presence of the wall. This positioning also allows one to become a passive participant in the events depicted by the images. In other words, the instagrammer is, almost always, an external witness to the events being documented and posted. In very few cases do posters frame themselves as active participants or provide personal accounts for such events. This is interesting considering that Instagram is a platform traditionally used for self-representation. In this sense, our findings suggest that the migrant and the human mobility phenomenon are used as tools to establish the poster's position towards the phenomenon, while emphasizing his or her level of humanity and legality through strategies of otherness.

These findings have important implications, especially when considered in terms of the political representativeness of Instagram users likely to be active in the 2020 US election —where the 18 to 23 age group is critical (Cillufo and Fry, 2019) and a similar age group (18 to 24) comprises 75% of Instagram users in the US (Perrin and Anderson, 2019). The polarized views of posters and the different strategies used to establish

otherness support recognizing social media as a powerful tool for political persuasion and representation. These findings support arguments suggesting that social media platforms such as Instagram are fertile grounds for political manipulation and polarization (Vaidhyanathan, 2018). Gaining a deeper understanding of the configurations and mechanisms that enable this type of social media discourse to permeate and reach first and second-time voters becomes an important line of inquiry for future studies.

Future studies could delve into the motivations of posters while crafting Instagram posts related to issues such as immigration and the representation of its actors, as well as issues related to other migratory and mediatized phenomena around the world, such as the social media representation of current European migrations, recent Venezuelan migratory events, among others. Other focuses could include comparisons between different types of social media platforms to analyze whether these types of narratives and representations are typical throughout current mediated communication.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest

FIGURES

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Figure Captions

- Figure 1. Number of posts by hashtag. Created by the Authors.
- Figure 2. Number of posts per type of opinion regarding immigration. Created by the Authors.
- Figure 3. Post languages. Created by the Authors.
- Figure 4. Codes and co-occurrence indexes between WALL and IMMOP code groups. Created by the Authors.
- Figure 5. Codes and co-occurrence indexes between ACTION, PATROL and IMMOP code groups. Created by the Authors.
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- Figure 7. Mainstream media watermark examples on Instagram.
- Figure 8. Different post texts that suggest journalistic content.
- Figure 9. DIST immwall
- Figure 10. DIST immwallpatrol
- Figure 11. DIST patrolwall

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