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EXPLORING THE CONTEXTUAL COMPLEXITIES OF VIOLENCE ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS: INTERSECTIONS, IMPACTS, AND SOLUTIONS

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Introduction

Violence has become intricately interwoven into the fabric of our modern-day digital ecosystem. The escalating accessibility and ubiquity of digital platforms across the globe have facilitated a corresponding rise in the frequency of violence enacted through these channels. Several studies have observed a growing prevalence of violence perpetrated on and through digital platforms. For example, Stubbs et al. (2022) argue that content depicting real-world violence is a common element of our contemporary digital landscape, resulting in severe psychological effects on platforms' users. In a similar vein, Matamoros et al. (2023) have highlighted the pervasive nature of humorous digital content, often employed as a means to disseminate and exacerbate cultures of violence. Conversely, some studies showcase how online humor, such as memes and online jokes, are deployed to poke fun at political violence: satirizing and potentially delegitimizing it (Gusic & Lundqvist, 2023).

The rising prominence of digital platforms in our daily lives has made online harms increasingly impactful, blurring the distinctions between online and offline violence, and rendering them seemingly irrelevant (Gosse, 2019). For example, Coombs (2021) argues

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that digital manifestations of violence directly impact various human rights, such as the “rights to privacy, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly, to name a few, as well as rights relating to freedom from violence” (p. 480). Similarly, Donovan et al. (2022) emphasize the role of digital platforms in contemporary cultural and informational wars in the United States, where

the weapons were memes, slogans, ideas; the tactics were internet-enabled threats like swarms, doxes, brigades, disinformation, and media-manipulation campaigns; and the strategy of the warriors was to move their influence from the wires (the internet) to the weeds (the real world) by trading fringe ideas up the partisan media ecosystem and into mainstream culture. (p. 14–15)

In the context of rapid technological development, global conflicts, and socio-cultural transformations, gaining a comprehensive understanding of the nature of violence, the role of platforms in its proliferation, and its impact on users is an essential undertaking towards fostering cultures of peace. In such circumstances, a crucial initial step involves contextualizing violent behavior and content within their cultural and historical contexts (Dwyer, 2017). Indeed, as noted by Stanko (2005), “what violence *means* is and will always be fluid, not fixed; it is mutable” (p. 3, emphasis in original).

This panel delves into the impact, reach, and various manifestations of violence, as experienced and perceived within specific socio-cultural contexts, through four studies conducted in different countries and regions. Employing diverse methodological approaches, such as interviews, content analysis, and ethnography, panelists explore various forms of violence and counter-violence, including memes, insults, and viral videos depicting physical violence.

The first paper delves into the impact and role of internet memes in shaping political discourse and narratives around violence in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The author develops an audience-centric analysis of memes dealing with political violence: an analytical approach that has hitherto been missing from the sub-field of meme studies.

The second paper explores social media narratives around the recent earthquake in Syria. The author reveals how such narratives serve to erase citizens' trauma and exacerbate violence against those already affected by natural disasters. This underscores the potential of digital platforms to perpetuate symbolic violence, normalizing and concealing power imbalances while amplifying and sustaining their harmful effects.

The third paper provides a critical examination of memetic platforms as hotbeds of inflammatory content, with a particular emphasis on TikTok and its role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the recent protests against religious agents in Iran. The author conducts a critical analysis of the platform's social media culture of “challenges,” highlighting how these memetic practices can motivate real-world participatory violence.

The fourth paper studies the mediation of everyday violence among Colombian young adults. Here, the author explores how social media platforms have fundamentally altered the way users perceive and interpret meaning-making processes around violence. These changes have crucial consequences in societies with prolonged or ongoing histories of

armed conflicts, leading to the normalization of harmful behavior both within and beyond digital platforms.

As researchers who have spent significant amounts of time in zones of conflict and witnessed the devastating effects of violence both online and offline, we aim to thoroughly examine the role of users, platforms, and digital practices in perpetuating this issue. With our diverse academic backgrounds and areas of expertise, we aim to bridge the gap between Western and non-Western perspectives on violence in digital spaces. Most importantly, through and across these case studies, we seek to uncover solutions for mitigating the harmful effects of digital violence, unveiling ways of supporting the construction of sustainable cultures of peace that take into consideration the critical role of digital technologies in our societies.

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'MEME-ING' POLITICAL CONTENTION IN NORTHERN IRELAND: EXPLORING AUDIENCE RECEPTION OF INTERNET MEMES ABOUT POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN BELFAST

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Introduction and context

In April 2021, Northern Ireland was once again marred by outbreaks of violence, while politicians from the United Kingdom (U.K.) and Ireland grappled with the challenge of preserving a longstanding peace agreement in the region. The streets of Belfast bore witness to a week-long spate of unrest, during which numerous police officers suffered injuries due to attacks involving bricks, fireworks, and petrol bombs. This renewed turmoil coincided with the 23rd anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, a historic peace accord that ended three decades of sectarian violence known as 'The Troubles' (The Spectator, 2021). The hostilities reached a critical juncture as political leaders attempted to reach a consensus on new trade regulations between the U.K. and the European Union without undermining the aforementioned peace agreement. It is apparent that the enduring tensions between (Protestant) unionists and (Catholic) nationalists — who were the principal political adversaries during 'The Troubles' — lay at the heart of the 2021 disturbances in Belfast. Here, Brexit acted as a catalyst, reigniting hostilities along well-established political fault lines (BBC, 2021).

While political violence is a recurring phenomenon in physical spaces in Belfast, antagonisms have also increasingly 'gone digital'. As cars burned in the streets and clashes took place in parks and squares during the April 2021 riots, conflicts also played out online: partially as internet memes (henceforth: memes) which responded to and engaged with the riots in various ways. The same goes for the massive Belfast riots of 2012 — colloquially known as 'the flag protests' — which are considered to be the first riots in post-war Northern Ireland that were heavily mediatized through social media such as Twitter, Reddit, Facebook, and YouTube (Reilly, 2021). These protests, which at times involved violent clashes between protestors and police, started in December 2012 and lasted until February 2013. They were instigated by the decision to not fly the Union Jack from Belfast City Hall quite as often as before. Prior to this decision, the flag was flown every day of the year, whereas afterward, it was reserved for specific holidays. This shift in policy left a significant number of Protestants in Belfast feeling that the symbolic link between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom was under threat. (Reilly 2021; Young & Reilly, 2015). The fact that these protests were highly disruptive is also evident in the large body of memes which have been produced about them (Know Your Meme: Northern Ireland Flag Protests n/d).

Theoretical framework and contributions

This study seeks to shed light upon how people receive internet memes about political violence in contemporary Belfast. The large-scale riots of April 2021 and December

2012 discussed above serve as its primary case studies. Analyzing how people read memes about these riots enables one to grasp how they – in their everyday lives – position themselves politically vis-à-vis the political violence of the past (i.e., ‘The Troubles’) and its re-eruption in the present (as riots). Understanding memes along these lines thus treats them as discursive practices: an analytical point of view which previous communication research has firmly established (see for example: Shifman, 2013; Wiggins & Bower, 2015; Denisova, 2019; Wiggins, 2019; Mortensen & Neumayer, 2021). While much has already been said about the discursive power of memes, significantly less has been said about how they are received by their audiences. As noted by Trilló and Shifman (2021) the sub-field of memes studies would benefit from ‘a deeper understanding of how photo-based memes [...] are perceived by potential audiences’ (p. 2496-2497). Previous studies of memes have mostly dabbled in the notion of an ‘imagined audience’ (and its assumed reading of the memes in line with discourses) rather than talking to the people who inhabit the political context of the memes (see Wiggins 2019 p. 100-115 for an extended discussion on audiences and memes). The absence of an audience perspective is a somewhat serious shortcoming, as we are then limited to reading the memes as discourses and lack an understanding of how they are decoded in everyday life. Considering how audiences rarely (if ever) read media texts fully as intended by their authors (see for example Hall 1981/1973; Jenkins, 1992; Burgess & Green, 2009) – arguably makes notions such as an ‘imagined audience’ and the discursive ‘directionality’ of memes inherently flawed. Indeed, questioning such notions opens up space for analyzing audiences who read memes contrary to their intention, e.g., in ways which challenge instigations to violence.

Methods

In order to address this research gap, I have conducted 19 semi-structured interviews with interlocutors in Belfast, asking them for their take on memes about riots and contentious politics in the city. In addition to semi-structured interviews, I employ digital ethnography. In digital ethnography, ‘we are often in mediated contact with participants rather than in direct presence ... we might be watching what people do online by digitally tracking them or asking them to invite us into their social media practices’ (Pink et al 2016, p. 21). In this study, I primarily draw upon digital ethnography to observe how people engage with discussions on rioting and memes about riots on various social media platforms, such as Reddit, Instagram, and Facebook. This complements the semi-structured interviews by anchoring them in broader online discussions about political contention and memes in Northern Ireland. Such online discussions help situate the interviews within a larger discourse about political violence and social media in Northern Ireland and provides important contextualisation to the interviewees’ answers.

Expected findings and analysis

As memes are inherently polysemic (Milner, 2013; Pettis, 2022, p, 264), semi-structured interviews and digital ethnography will help elucidate the extent to which there is a red thread running from the discourses of the memes to the meaning(s) made by their audiences. In essence: to what extent – and how – do people read the memes differently from what a discourse analytical approach would have assumed? To answer

this research question, I contrast and compare the findings of previous work on the discourses of memes about political violence in Belfast (Gusic & Lundqvist, 2023; Reilly, 2021) with the views expressed by my interlocutors. Previous studies on memes about political violence in Belfast have argued that they mock the political rationales of the rioting, thus in a sense discursively delegitimizing the violence in question (Gusic & Lundqvist, 2023). Still, this discursive-analytical approach leaves little room for analyzing audiences, and thus we are left in the dark about their experiences of reading these memes: including their *affective* engagement with them (which is an essential component in making people politically engaged through social media, as argued by Papacharissi, 2014). This study aims to ameliorate this shortcoming through an in-depth analysis of audience reception of memes about political violence in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The interviews for this study are currently being conducted in Belfast, and thus, the analysis will be developed once these are finalized – all in good time before the conference.

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SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE OF ERASURE AND INVISIBILIZATION IN ONLINE DISCUSSIONS OF THE SYRIAN CONFLICT

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the earthquake that affected Turkey and Syria in early 2023, discussions of the harrowing impact of the natural disaster intensified an ongoing representational struggle between Assadists and revolutionary Syrians online. On the one hand, pro-Assadist “anti-imperialist” accounts insisted that the humanitarian disaster was made deadlier due to economic sanctions imposed by the United States. On the other hand, pro-revolution accounts emphasized how the shelling of Northern Syria that the regime had exacted prior to the quake damaged key infrastructure, magnifying the deadliness of the following natural disaster.

In this study, I present an exploration of social media accounts of both pro-Assadists and pro-revolutionaries to explore narratives surrounding the impact of the 2023 earthquake on Northern Syria. I draw for this analysis on Herremans and Destrooper’s (2021) discussion of omission in the context of justice discourses in Syria as a dichotomy between erasure and invisibilization. To achieve this, I first examine five social media accounts belonging to “anti-imperialist/anti-sanction” advocates to illustrate how the omission of information on Syrian government attacks on Northern Syria prior to the earthquake contributes to the “erasure” (Herreman & Destrooper, 2021) of the violence directed at the Syrian subject. Next, I examine five social media accounts of revolutionary figures, arguing that their focus on countering “anti-imperialist” narratives—although a necessary form of resistance to political oppression and erasure (Medina, 2018)—shifted attention away from meaningful discussion of humanitarian aid to the affected, leading to the invisibilization of Syrians’ trauma (Herremans & Destrooper, 2021).

Theoretical framework and contributions

The contemporary media environment is defined by the primacy of proprietary, exclusionary, and US and European-based media platforms, a phenomenon Puschmann and Burgess (2014) term the “platform paradigm.” In this context, this project seeks to focus on key figures across multiple social media platforms and different media in an attempt to decentralize the primacy of any one platform in a digital media debate. Moreover, given the crisis of legitimacy and transparency surrounding Twitter as a platform (Roth, 2022), the study seeks to leverage the contemporary importance of the platform within the larger debate of justice in the Syrian conflict while also taking into consideration how Twitter debates interact with, diffuse to, and compare with their counterparts in digital news platforms such as *Enab Baladi*, *Newslines*, as well as other social media websites such as Facebook and Instagram. In so doing, this project is not only interested in capturing the “ephemerality” of social media platforms in general and Twitter in particular, but it also offers insight, or the “scoop” as Rogers (2009) puts it, of

the affordances of a platform may structure the horizons of public debate. At the same time, tracing discourses as they migrate from one platform to another offers insight into the impact a waning platform may have on the future of global justice debates.

Methods

This paper draws from digital ethnography, adapting the practices of participant observation to the study of online platforms as a field site (Hine, 2000). The project selects ten social media accounts held by key figures in the debate on global and Syrian justice to allow the systematic collection of posts made by individual “opinion leaders” on a debate, thereby adapting the methodological tools developed by scholars of Black Twitter (Clark, M. & Banks, A., 2022), feminist bloggers (Clark-Parsons, 2022), and journalists (Barnard, 2016). I trace the responses of public accounts in the crucial search and rescue and early emergency relief phases of the post-earthquake environment, from February 6, 2023, to February 28, 2023. In a sense, this study eschews the reliance on proprietary datasets curated by social media websites, such as Twitter’s API—an approach that is of particular importance given the diminishing access academic research may have to the platform’s data (Stokel-Walker, 2023). Thus, instead of focusing attention on following hashtags that are mired in the problematic aspects of Twitter’s search function and API access, I will focus on individual users known to Syrian audiences as key figures within the debate on justice in the crisis. After collecting the public posts made by key figures, the study applies multimodal discourse analysis to capture the complex interaction of visual, textual, and intertextual elements that inform the narratives surrounding the Syrian conflict shared in these posts.

Preliminary findings

The preliminary findings of this study suggest that the online discourse surrounding the earthquake in Syria contributes to the double erasure of the suffering of Syrians impacted by both natural disasters and government oppression. On the one hand, self-proclaimed “anti-imperialist” commentators participated in the “erasure” (Herremans & Destrooper, 2021) of the suffering of Syrian subjects by focusing their discourse solely on the impact of economic sanctions. Examples of this erasure include Twitter posts by prominent European political journalists and political figures in both the United States and the United Kingdom, blaming the suffering of Syrian citizens on economic sanctions (Benjamin, 2023; Medhurst, 2023;). On the other hand, pro-revolutionary accounts such as Global Justice and Razan al Saffour focused their attention on falsifying the narrative surrounding the impact of sanctions on delivering aid to affected Syrians, particularly focusing on the exclusion of humanitarian aid from economic sanction frameworks. Nevertheless, the centering of this debate rather than the issues facing Syrians impacted by the quake served to further invisibilize the suffering of Syrian residents of Northern Syria.

It is worth noting that some accounts sought to address the prevailing simplification of narratives around the earthquake—as illustrated by some commentators who tried to reframe and rectify the double-erasure of the suffering inflicted on Syrian citizens. Of note is the intervention of the leader of the Syrian Civil Defence group The White Helmets, who called for an end to the “politicization of aid to Syrians impacted by the earthquakes”

and posted several accompanying tweets shedding light on the magnitude of the humanitarian disaster facing its people.

Conclusion

The dynamics of invisibilization of Syrian trauma explored in this paper resonate with Galtung's conception of structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969), as the erasure of stories surrounding the earthquake results in further violence directed at Syrians. In this sense, the results of this study emphasize the invisibilization of trauma through social media as a form of structural violence that reinforces the image of the Syrian conflict as an intractable struggle and complex reality that is difficult for witnesses to grasp, let alone resolve. The latter, in turn, shrinks the justice imagination of both global onlookers and governments (Herremans & Destrooper, 2021) while confusing global audiences and disincentivizing aid contributions.

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PLAYFUL PLATFORMS: THE MEMEIFICATION OF PARTICIPATORY VIOLENCE ON TIKTOK

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Introduction

TikTok is a powerful social media platform that has granted a complex and multifaceted role in the terrain of contemporary socio-political conflicts. This study examines TikTok's position in two recent major warfare conflicts: the first is the escalation of violence between Palestinians and Israelis in May 2021, culminating in the Israeli military operation "Guardian of the Walls" in Gaza (Kingsley, 2021). The second is the wave of protests in November 2022 in Iran as a reaction to the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, who was murdered by Iran's "morality police" for failing to cover her hair in public (CBS News, 2022). The presence of TikTok has taken a prominent position in the mediatization of these conflicts, moving beyond the mere networked presence of Palestinian and Iranian publics. TikTok's infrastructure galvanized brutality through its novel play-based affordances and audiovisual grammar while propelling users to engage in participatory violence behaviors cultivated by the culture of #challenges.

Conceptual Framework

This study offers theoretical concepts that are useful for understanding the inflammatory nature of platforms in times of conflict. The first concept is social media *challenges*. These are play-based collaborative tasks governed by a set of performative rules in which users are encouraged to co-opt a competitive creative mission initiated by random users (Kriegel et al., 2021). On TikTok, challenges become multimodal Memes. Based on an imitable combination of text, sound, and movement, challenges offer memetic templates for content creation, allowing an accessible framework for ordinary users to create within. When a challenge appears to users on TikTok's feed, known as the "for you" page (FYP), they can choose to participate by producing their own version in order to achieve algorithmic visibility (Abidin, 2021).

The second concept is *playful publics*. Those are algorithmically motivated cohorts of users who take part in the daily manufacture of memetic trends for the sake of granting virality to their social-political voices. TikTok's memetic architecture of #challenges renders networked crowds into playful publics who affectively convey their sentiment concurrently with emerging burning events by using playful performance methods. They utilize TikTok's whimsical and ludic attitude as their storytelling structure and are propelled by the platform's socio-technical affordances, encouraging them to work as a communalized collection of people driven by forces of imitation, affection, and play. TikTok's playful climate allows socio-political advocacy to weave into unexpected memetic formats that prompt political change (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2020), but may fuel offline violence, polarization, and extremism (Huang & Tingting, 2022).

Lastly, *cycles of amplification* (Phillips, 2015). This notion refers to the ways digital platforms create self-reinforcing feedback loops that increase the visibility and impact of content, including violence or extremism. TikTok's powerful dissemination system creates cycles of amplification, resulting in human and algorithmic manufacturers of virality. TikTok has faced allegations of human interference with a feature ("heating") artificially boosting the visibility of certain videos on the "for you" (Baker-White, 2023). In addition, TikTok's algorithmic amplification has been shown to be a potent mechanism that incentivizes users to create and distribute content in accordance with the platform's established norms, resulting in accelerated exposure (Kaye et al., 2022). Meaning, users who take part in TikTok's challenges increase their chances of being spotted by the algorithmic "eye," entering the platform's cycle of amplification that pushes their videos to the FYP, triggering and motivating playful publics into action.

Methods

Focused on the hashtags in English and in Arabic #HitandRun (#اضرب واهرب) and #TurbanFlippers (#عمامة_پُرانی) accumulating 1.2 billion views by January 2023), this study applied the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018), scrolling through TikTok's Hashtag page and forming a repository of users' audiovisual engagements throughout the times of both conflicts. The study focused on the platform's human and nonhuman actors, seeking to understand how TikTok's #challenge templates ignite and contribute to participatory violence behaviors, and how users were leveraging different features, practices, and styles for participation. Accordingly, a repository of 1,320 videos was created composed of identified 600 #HitandRun videos and 720 #TurbanFlippers videos, and with the help of multimodal content analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020), their memetic form unfolded looking at their audiovisual, textual and performative features, together with multifaceted modes of communication.

Preliminary observations

The #HitandRun challenge: in May 2021, supporters of the #FreePalestine movement fluxed TikTok with challenge videos that were mobilizing in a terrorizing call-to-action to hit and run random Israelis in the streets of Israel. This challenge was sparked by a widely circulated video showing a young Palestinian slapping an ultra-orthodox Jewish person in Jerusalem. This video surpassed 2.4 million shares overnight, generating a memetic influx of similar videos that stimulated the Palestinian public to take over the visibility of both the "for you" page and the streets of Jerusalem. Those videos were accompanied by a caption saying: "You will continue to delete, but we will continue to upload. It's either the Palestinian people or you." The message represented a three-fold narrative of "Intifada" (resistance, in Arabic): TikTok's algorithm moderating violent Palestinian content, the Israeli public fighting back by reporting violent videos, and the Israeli authorities "deleting" the Palestinians' wish to be recognized of as a nation in a territory where their existence is constantly under negation. The Palestinian public weaponized TikTok's play-based practice of challenges to inflame conflict in various hot spots in Israel while uploading videos from Palestinian users' accounts showing repetitive features of performative violence. In many examples, the documenter was infusing the executor's acts with an "Allahu Akbar" call ("God is the greatest" in Arabic), framing this challenge as an act of Jihad (the Muslim obligation for resistance in religious warfare; see Gawrych,

2002). Some Palestinians were seen attacking rabbis near synagogues and deliberately attempting to attack Israeli soldiers.

The #TurbanFlippers challenge: In November 2022, members of the #TurbanFlippers in Iran fluxed TikTok with challenge videos that were mobilizing another terrorizing call-to-action to flip and hit the turbans off the heads of unsuspecting Islamic clerics in public. Hundreds of memetic videos have swept across the “for you” showing Turban hats being knocked off in streets, buses, metro stations, and other public spaces in which Islamic clerics were attacked. The turban was targeted due to Mahsa Amini’s death for wearing her hijab “improperly,” leading participants to redirect their anger towards another religious headwear. In some, users were seen screaming “Allahu Akbar” calls, but this time not as a symbol of religious-based resistance but as a sign of mockery of the Shi’a clergy and their legitimacy in Iran. Some were yelling, “Clerics get lost!” and adding captions of #discrimination, #exclusion, rejecting of the gender-based abuse Iranian women have been subjected to by the clergy who verbally abuse them in public for their “inappropriate” hijab.

Discussion

Although the #HitandRun and #TurbanFlippers videos can also be seen as random documentation of violence, as the labor of playful publics, they adhere to the theme and structure of other videos while “lending themselves to finding new instances of related content.” (Rintel, 2013) Following a memetic structure, this “play” had specific rules: one user was to take the role of the documenter that was filming, and another user was to be the executor hitting random victims and immediately fleeing the scene. These videos’ memetic structure, interconnected by a shared dialect (the #), is an open invitation to the “theater of terror,” showing brutal acts communicated through orchestrated violence (Weimann, 1994), and even if not transmitted in real-time, might incite collective action. Moreover, the behaviors of playful publics carry a toxic potential for participatory violence to “travel seamlessly back and forth between online and offline spaces and transit into real-life political mobilizations.” (Borum, 2016)

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE MEDIATION OF VIOLENCE AMONG COLOMBIAN YOUNG ADULTS

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Introduction

Encountering harmful content, such as gender or racial violence, is an increasingly common experience for social media users (e.g., Matamoros-Fernández et al., 2022). The prevalence of harm on social media emphasizes the role of digital platforms as critical elements of contemporary ecologies of violence, whereby digital platforms enable new ways of practicing harm while transforming existing cultures of violence (Morales, 2023). Such integration of online manifestations of harm and cultures of violence is evidenced in Colombia, the setting of this study, where anti-social behaviors on digital platforms are grounded and bound to historical, socio-cultural, and political contexts marked by long-lasting armed conflicts. Looking to better understand how cultures and enactments of violence configure and are configured by social media, this study explores the mediation of everyday violence through social media platforms among Colombians.

Theoretical lens

Theoretically, this article relies on Jesús Martín-Barbero's approach to mediation—a lens that emphasizes how our modes of perception and language configure and are configured by the ongoing processes of cultural mutation (Martín-Barbero, 2002). To explore mediations, Martín-Barbero proposed a series of conceptual devices that map the processes of meaning-making of our surroundings, referencing the sensations, perceptions, and interpretations of the cultural experience we inhabit (Rincón, 2019: 263). In the last version of these mediation maps, Martín-Barbero sought to respond to the complexities of the digital environments (Martín-Barbero & Rincón, 2019), outlining four central mediations: spatialities, temporalities, technicities, and sensorialities. These four mediations are at the center of this study.

Methods

This article reports on the findings of an exploratory case study, where 18 young adults from Medellín (Colombia) were invited to collaboratively discuss the violence they experienced in their everyday engagements with social media platforms. The participants were undergraduate students from various universities in the city. Participants were organized into five discussion groups, with four to five young adults per group. Each group held four discussion sessions over the video conferencing platform, Zoom, where they all shared and reflected on the violence they experienced while using social media, such as insults to a friend over Facebook comments or videos shared on Twitter depicting war content. They also had a group chat on WhatsApp, where they discussed violence on social media as they experienced it.

Data analysis consisted of two phases of thematic coding. The first phase followed a codebook approach (Braun et al., 2019), deductively categorizing data into the four

mediations outlined by Martín-Barbero (temporalities, spatialities, technicities, and sensorialities). The second round was informed by a reflexive thematic approach (Terry & Hayfield, 2020), inductively coding the data inside each mediation into emergent themes.

Results

Spatialities: When engaging with social media content, results show that Colombian young adults inhabit multiple territorialities of violence, often simultaneously. Indeed, participants noted that social media enables them to easily access geographical contexts of violence that are far away from them, such as the Ukraine-Russia war, or spaces that are close to them, such as video content of a robbery down their street in Medellín. In this context, spatialities of violence are difficult to delimit for users, as violence that occurs over *there* and violence that occurs over *here* often collapse and collide. Certainly, the spaces of violence that participants inhabit are increasingly not the same as those that affect them or their communities directly, but rather whatever is trending on social media. As noted by a participant, “you log in on Twitter, and you think you see the world's panorama. But no, you go out on the street, and nobody knows what they are talking about on Twitter.”

Temporalities: Similarly to spatiality, the way users experience and make sense of the temporalities of violence has profoundly changed due to the proliferation of digital technologies. One of the most notorious changes is the foregrounded liveness of digital platforms (Lupinacci, 2021), which allowed participants to see acts of harm and terror in real-time. For instance, participants were able to easily access live transmissions of a massive brawl in a Mexican stadium, noting that “there are very strong images, even people shouting at others that they deserve to be killed.” Moreover, while platforms foreground being in the moment, they also transform how the past is understood and experienced. For example, a participant told a story about how she found a video of a massacre that happened three years ago near her house: “I was watching a news story [on Facebook] that happened in 2019 in Itagüí, and I had no idea. And I thought it was terrible when I read it (...) I mean, this horrible thing happened, and I found out about it 3 years later.” This example shows not only the potentiality to connect and reconnect social media users to stories of the past but also to enable spaces where hegemonic and anti-hegemonic narratives of Colombian historical memory are reconstructed and negotiated (Birkner & Donk, 2020).

Technicities: This mediation refers to what people do and narrate with technology, which is conditioned by both the materiality of the medium and the socio-cultural contexts in which they are used (Pieniz & Cenci, 2019). Overall, there are four technicities in Colombian young adults' engagement with violence on social media. First, enacting harm, where participants noted the potential to be violent on social media by drawing on the affordances of each platform. Second, entertaining themselves and others, which is better exemplified by the multiple examples of violence disguised as humor (e.g., a participant said that there “are some very delicate topics and they still make jokes. One laughs, but then realizes and says, ‘oh no, what is this?’”). Third, expressing points of view through and around violence, as participants noted that, in many cases, people expressed their opinions in ways that were violent toward others. Finally, participants also found social

media a productive space for informing themselves and learning about specific contexts of violence.

Sensorialities: Finally, sensorialities are a way of understanding how our senses and emotions, embedded in particular socio-cultural standings, mediate our processes and experiences of meaning-making. In this regard, participants recognize the emotional load embedded in their experiences with violence on social media. For instance, a participant reported sadness when exposed to violence against animals, “I see the little dog totally lacerated, wounded and... I want to cry.” Participants also reported despair, anger, fear, and even joy—especially around the humorous representation of violence in memes. The most common consequence of these various emotional responses to violence is the normalization of harmful behavior—which extends beyond digital environments and into their everyday lives. A participant discussing seeing violent content on social media recounted that digital violence “generates an instinct for someone to record and share it with the rest of the world. And instead of helping, it’s like they start to record it.”

Conclusion

Overall, the results of this study highlight how social media platforms profoundly transform processes of meaning-making of violence among Colombian young adults. Indeed, across all mediations, the increasing destabilization of meaning-making practices of the territories of violence that young adults inhabit on social media platforms is evident. These mediation processes emphasize challenges and opportunities for researchers, educators, activists, and policymakers to better understand and address violence on digital platforms.

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