

Organized crime and news treatment in Mexico: a longitudinal analysis of three news television programs

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“Societies become modern, the philosopher Hegel suggested, when news replaces religion as our central source of guidance and our touchstone of authority.” Alain de Botton 2014: 11; The News: A user’s manual

Abstract: Watching television serves a wide range of purposes ranging from entertainment to information seeking. Human beings require too fulfil certain psychological needs throughout the day; one of them is the need to locate themselves within a larger psycho-social context. This is one of the main reasons behind news in general and television news shows in particular. They assist people in evaluating their environment through visual and verbal information. Television news production follows journalistic criteria which incorporates media agendas fostered by political, financial and also aesthetic values. The study looks at the way television news making in three national networks portrays organized crime stories. By conducting a longitudinal content analysis in four different years (i.e. 1997, 2000, 2009 and 2013) of news stories covering organized crime in Mexico, this work allows to compare over time and across television networks they way crime news are framed on Mexican television. The study finds helps to understand how different social contexts might correlate to the way crime news are located within the news shows and also how different State institutions are related to this issue.

Keywords: Television news, crime stories, media effects, journalism, crime aesthetics

Introduction

The motivation that everyday leads millions of people around the world to choose a broadcasting mass media in order to find out what is happening at their surrounding is as automatic as routinely (Giles, 2003). Nowadays the news genre, along with other current subgenres, takes a central place for both, the production and consumption of global communication products. Getting informed about ‘what is happening’ through a television symbolic world, arise from a natural location instinct within human being’s psychology. We look for an orientation not only at a sensorial level but also through a framework of reference buildup that makes possible for us to answer the major question of what is taking place in our surrounding. Many people even plan their mass media routine use based on news consumption (Gauntlett & Hill, 1999).

Concerning crime and violence, the equation is apparently simple, the assessment of our surrounding ask us to calibrate our own notions of personal safety. Which of the news showed by the media can have a direct impact on us, which threatens could actually have an impact in our own life and, which ones are less likely to happen. Some kind of news referendum lead us to choose among two different perceptual poles: events that happen to others, but not to me (e.g. “Narco’s violent events only happen to people who are going down the wrong path”) and events that could actually happen to me (e.g. “I could be kidnapped so that they can ask my family to pay my ransom or they could kidnap a relative to demand me to pay it”).

These symbolic constructions also allow us to create a rational scaffolding to sustain our own vision of the world through cause-effect reasoning. Either by a motivational (for example, the desire to be informed) or a situational impulse (for example, passively watching television and getting in contact with news content as they “appear” in the available programming) the news are part of our daily television diet (Wonneberger, Schoenbach, & van Meurs, 2011).

A subjective diagnose with a correlational inference of the social reality. On the one hand the monitoring of the events that are happening and, on the other hand, its reasons and consequences including, of course, its direct implications in our own life. Research on

social cognition on the media have articulated two interdependent principles at the moment of ‘knowing’ and ‘interpreting’ a given social reality.

First, a heuristic and sufficiency principle in which people establish a heuristic threshold of the minimum amount of information needed to build a particular opinion. Second, a principle of cognitive accessibility dependent on mass media factors as the sensory activation frequency or remission (e.g. the frequency and tone of a specific news coverage event such as ‘breaking news’), or the liveliness with a news event is delivered, for instance, the kind of image used to illustrate it or the nature of the event itself (Shrum, 2009).

In the case of security, the topic of interest of this text, there is no difference. We need to build up and validate, even with a minimum of information, an assessment on the security (or the lack of it) within our immediate surroundings.

We make, therefore, the estimation that a principle will be as subjective as appreciative, how much can we say that we feel safe. How safe are others. Some authors have even establish the difficulty people have to put aside the perceptions of their own social world, from those of other people the chair the consumption mass media experience with or with those who uses mass media information as a conversation topic or element of social interaction (McDonald, 2009).

In a second place, the security assessment has, in addition, individual and social components, a causal construction. Why do these things happen? Who are responsible for them to occur? In any case, are they doing the right thing? Do I approve or not they management to face this issue? A great importance has been given to organized crime-related activities. Are the media exaggerating on these events coverage? All of them are questions, whose answer can be found, at an individual level, in our own ideological, political or cultural slant. But, can research on the mass media and their contents go beyond this subjective appreciation by providing data that confirms or bears witness to the way in which this information is built up by the media?

Preliminary notions on news and security

The current text not only acknowledges the relevance of the individual feature of the psychological information processing regarding the organized crime-related information

but also makes a particular consideration on the complex system of news production within the Mexican context throughout different moments of this country recent history. In the last years there has been an apparently tone and frequency increase of news related to organized crime activities and the police and military power of the Mexican state. The increase of this assumption is not accidental nor commercial media strategy in order sell more newspapers and to capture bigger audiences. There are actual indicators that show that the crime rates increase is a consequence of both, structural factors (such as corruption, social inequality and marginalization) and the public policy design and implementation in particular during the administration of the former president Felipe Calderón Hinojosa (2006-2012) (Guerrero, 2011). In spite of the fact that the current government administration of the president Enrique Peña Nieto has attempted to take distance from the proactive communication strategy that characterized his predecessor. It is clear that not neither the organized crime topic nor the human, political and material resources currently invested by the Mexican state haven't lost a relevant place in the public agenda.

Our study aims to address the criminal violence phenomenon and the television news in an empirical way that, one must say, implies the definition of an accurate and well delimited research design. We have decided to use television as the most suitable format to respond questions mainly for two reasons. The first one is that in Mexico during the last 50 years television has been the most consulted media for obtaining news information¹, which also offers a compact and precise audiovisual format, given the fact that television production and consumption's nature requires the use of different technical resources to capture and retain the viewer's attention. The second one is the close relationship of the executive power with television, which has been, in the last years, object of multiple analyses and questioning by attributing her, due to the high concentration in terms of property, a coincidental treatment with the presidential power in turn. More than taking the

¹ According to Nielsen IBOPE's monthly measurement published in June 2015, news shows are among the top-ten most watched programs in the two dominant terrestrial television channels in Mexico. For Televisa's Canal 2, *El Noticiero* conducted by Joaquin López-Dóriga occupies the 9th place. For TvAzteca's Canal 13, *Hechos* presented by Javier Alatorre was the 4th most watched program.
https://www.nielsenibope.com.mx/uploads/TopTen_junio.pdf

previously said as an actual fact, we have notice that, as a matter of fact, the presidential figure is given a news treatment bigger than any other public actor in a public charge, especially with respect to Channel 11 (Juárez, 2009).

Concerning the approach of this article, we have particularly developed an inquiry on the role of the mass media facing the criminal violence phenomenon. For that purpose four considerations that frame the potentialities and limitations of the current study have been highlighted. The first consideration is about conceiving freedom of speech as an unequivocal and essential condition from a democracy aspiring to be consolidated. The mass media in Mexico have been seriously questioned because of their apparent excessive use of violent incidents devastating the country with commercial purposes. Anyhow, the main argument of this critic is a very general one that turns into a platitude: violence, just as sex, sells and the media take advantage of that by prioritizing crime-related information above other less attractive topics for the audience. On the contrary, it has equally been sustained that the mass media, especially the local one, has decided to turn into this kind of news around due the unpunished threatens coming from the organized crime and the corrupt civil servants as well (Article XIX, 2013). From there emerges the major relevance to distinguish among different mass media objectives when talking about the organized crime-related news mass media agenda setting, which is clearly diverse and obeys to several and very different factors.

The primary freedom of speech notion will sustained that the media should be entirely sovereign when it comes to the selection process of the information they consider as news relevant. Such freedom would fit, however, in one single mandate, front the society processing its contents, which is the accountability. Even if the concept commonly refers to the accountability of those, whose public functions imply the legal obligation to administrate public resources and goods, in matter of mass media, the accountability has a no less important logic concerning, among other aspects, the editorial guidelines figure. The fact that we are able to know why our favorite announcer has made the decision of giving an event the range of news constitutes a substantial part of the freedom of speech exercise. The media can include and prioritize, at their discretion, the topic they consider to be most suitable within their informative agenda setting, that without justifying any of their

choices, even if the audience would expect knowing the editorial reasons behind the daily information selection, for example, in radio or television news program.

In second place, there is the concept from which a mass media accountability is required (Livingstone, 2011). Therefore, we talk about the concept of public interest and its multiples interpretations made under the institutional and corporate mass media perspective. Any mass media justifies its coverage starting from its own interpretation of what people consider to be relevant and want to hear. In other words the concept of public interest is where the freedom of speech and the editorial guidelines splice together. Based on a series of institutional parameters that defined the style and perspective from which information is presented (editorial guidelines) the media have the right to talk about what they consider to be relevant, (freedom of speech), while the criteria and the facts are defined by a third part who is absent in the discussion (the public interest), which is impossible to place in a given place and time. This is a kind of liberty that adopts a production criteria that justifies the particular interest of someone else (e.g. the editor or the media's owner) to interpret what kind of content people wants or needs to be delivered in the news.

We enter, then in a third element focused in the media's aesthetic buildup. This are not only information presenters, but, maybe involuntarily, in some cases, constructors of a news aesthetic. One of the features of this aesthetic is to be an ensemble of stylistic thematic elements which characterize a given expression, either an artistic or communicative one. For example, it has been proved that television is much less effective to transmit semantic information than written press (Gunter, 1997). In the case of the media, refer to its own aesthetic directly lead us to a production pattern that, through the years, turn into very particular storytelling stiles to narrate different sorts of mass media events. This includes the intonation and type of language used by a radio news announcer to the introductory music theme of a television news program.

The news aesthetic has, in addition, an educational purpose from the perspective of who produces a news television program. It is about a mass media pedagogy addressed to the viewer in which the format of the presentation, the structure and setting from which the

information is shown, constitutes part of the message itself, and, in consequence, an heuristic trigger to the processing of news information (Marcus, 2013).

Paraphrasing Marshal McLuhan, we could say that the message is within the format itself. So, one could expect a given narrative from the formal information framework, along with the production strategies used by a given mass media.

By last, there is an important aspect in any study, whose aim is to inquire into the news aesthetic, is the inclusion of a cultural framework of reference placed in the context where the information is presented. No one can ignore the fact that this global news programs have been adapting a standard format to present their news anchors and the information itself. When talking about mass media and violence in Mexico a particular and historical aesthetic should be recognize when it comes to the exposition of violent events in the national media (Monsivaís, 1992).

Few countries count with a particularly graphic press regarding the presentation of violent events as Mexico (Jáquez, 2001). It is enough to see the nearest newspaper stand to confirm the level of explicit content on the cover of some print media showing tragic deaths, traffic accidents, criminal executions and any other sort of violent event. At first it would seems that Mexicans are more used to consume high doses of graphically violent news contents in national media. So, coming back to this chapter topic of interest, it should not surprise that the media are accused of favoring the presentation of shocking images that, somehow, fit into very particular television violence aesthetic.

Conceptual remarks to analyze crime in television news programs.

The study of the criminal violence phenomenon media coverage requires, in first place, to make some conceptual precisions around the different components integrating what an interdisciplinary study of would call a complex system. (García, 2008). That is to say, it is an interdependent phenomena framework that, as a reflection of the empirical reality, would have no precise limits in its physical extension or in its theoretical problematizing. That is the case of the study on the organized crime activities made by the media. We must, therefore, specify that the research aims to establish a complex system configuration which is directly related to the research question.

The main objective of this study is to inquire which are the television news programs editorial guidelines (all of them) used by the mass media to present their audience organized crime-related news. Criteria that, as expected, look for joining together the media freedom of speech with the information needs of the audience. Therefore, the importance of delving into the conceptualization of three circumstantial elements linked to this question to answer in order to get better understanding on news editorial guidelines and the generation of audiovisual meanings.

In the case of the news, multiple studies set out their position as an institutional discourse generated by the media starting from specific events. See the news as actual discourses allow us to give them the meaning of a social construction, which makes possible to distinguish among the actual real events and its transformation into a news format with a particular narrative storyline.

It would seem to be an obvious conceptualization, however, the discourse of the mass media in relation with respect to the generation of informative ‘products’ is frequently justified as the ‘objective’ presentation of the actual events. It would seem, therefore, that the media, particularly the two major television chains in México, present within their television news programs the ‘facts’ and ‘events’ as they are, putting aside the fact that previous the news presentation there is an information selection process of what is ‘news’ and what is not.

For practical purposes, the author’s position supports that all the information delivered by a television news program, is the result of an institutional process in which the information is interpreted, framed in a particular discourse and packaged according to institutional criteria resembling a line of production. The conception that news are created by spontaneous generation and that the journalism labor only consist in the inclusion of little fragments of social reality in the content of a news television program, completely ignores the fact that is not only the nature of the event reported what turn it into news, but the editorial guidelines process behind.

From there, the second conceptual consideration that places editorial guideline as the parameter of reference to select certain events, discoursed, public figures and themes above others. It would be pretty inefficient to sanction the existence of this practice because

is actually that what distinguish the way in which different mass media present its informative content offer. The angle, frame and context presented by the media create a difference and particularity needed in the news content production. The problem lies in the presentation of inexistence objectivity at the moment of reinterpreting social phenomena transformed into news.

The discussion goes through a different path from veracity/falseness logic, and, it is presented in a more subtle way given the fact that the same story can be told in many different ways. And, it is exactly in that storytelling differentiation where the editorial guideline intervenes by turning the journalistic objectivity into an ideal as abstract as voracious. The recognition of what happens outside' the mass media industry from what happens 'inside' allows to analyze the phenomenon of the organized crime-related news production from a closer perspective of the media quotidian work.

In third place we have the conceptualization of the own meaning, for the viewers, of the audiovisual contents in television. From the perspective of the social psychology we could define the informative note of a news television program as the result of joining together text and image. The audiovisual material richness of the images conjunction sounds and words has been pointed out in the past as a sensorial distinctive characterizing the television content processing (Petty & Cacciopo, 1988; Reeves & Nass, 1997). The message consumption delivered by television is more aesthetic than logic and constitutes a 'sensitive knowledge' (Ricoeur, 1976 in Fernández, 2003).

To summarize, the news production carries out the materialization of defined criteria whose editorial objective refers to the content production made by media. In the case of the television format, the main object of this study, we add that the presentation and the subsequent audiovisual contents processing performed by the viewer constitutes an esthetic phenomenon. A processing that synthetized both, the verbal transcription of the messages and its visual materialization. Regarding this point we will proceed with a review of the theoretical framework guiding the content analysis of this studio.

Information content and structure in news television programs

Approaching the study of the media's effects requires a framework of reference that is able to distinguish a diversity of macro aspects (e.g. political, cultural, and

socioeconomics) from those that could be denominated as micro (e.g. sensorial processing, subjectivity and attention) In the case of this study, it is common to operationalized the effects of crime-related news on the personal safety perception referred by the viewers. In a study made by Romer, Hall and Aday (2003) it was established a hypothesis on the cultivation of fear through the local news coverage on the crime within the community.

Following the proposal of Gerbner and its colleagues (1994) the aim of this study is to elucidate the way in which television has taken the role of a social reality educator, which is outside from the subject's daily experience. Romer et al (2003) came to the conclusion that the crime news coverage in local news programs could be conditioning the viewer's fear of being victimized and additionally reinforcing stereotyped perceptions of the places and the people with propensity to a conditional behavior.

Maybe one of the most emblematic researches regarding the study of mass television effects is the hypotheses established by George Gerbner (1919-2005) on the cultivation theory. This author's proposal consists in the affirmation that television has turned into the most relevant educator of the contemporary society, and, that its council power between the subjective reality from the social actors and the actual reality of the social experience is able to cultivate the society's cultural perceptions.

The cultivation theory has been largely used at the moment of sustaining critics around the media's focus in propriety and the resulting lack of diversity within its contents. From this perspective some critical arguments around the deliberated media's manipulation and the voluntary or involuntary effects of its contents on the society. Theories such as the cultivation one adopt a macro social perspective where the contents that have been produced by a few ones (the communicators) have a similar impact in the whole society (the receptors). Nevertheless this approach has also been questioned at the moment of generalizing the single and subjective reactions of those who process the information presented by a specific mass media. The cultivation theory is useful, however, to identify the existing relationship between social and cultural patterns from the symbolic reality constructed by television.

Regarding a more psychological perspective of the phenomenon, there is a model called the limited capacity model, Lang (2000), whose aim is to explain how information is

processed by human beings. This model assumes processing conditions in advance in, at least, four different levels. The first one focus the attention on the condition need for the information processing. That is to say that the attention degree, determined by an involvement level from the person processing a given content, can either facilitate or difficult the entrance of information to be process.

The second one is the codification that, from the perspective of the processing information psychology, a series of media stimulus are disarticulated into previously used codes by the subject who is processing the information. This codification and the whole information scrutinizing, lead to a third processing phase defined as storage. The process make reference to the way in which the disarticulated and coded information is stored within a thinking structure previously defined by the own subject, that is called by some communication theorists as a schema (Van Dijk, 1983). At last, and as a trigger of consequent further processes for processing information, there is the capacity of each person to recover information.

The limited capacity model

Lang's limited capacity model (2000) makes reference to the psychological resources possessed by a person at the moment of processing mass media information. The main argument of this model supports that every person counts with a certain amount of psychological resources to be assigned to each of these phases while processing mass media information. For instance, the assignment of these resources in the attentional stage will compromise, to certain point, the availability of resources to further processing processes such as the decoding, storing and recovering of information.

In other words, the overuse or resources to carry out a process (e.g. giving too much attention when being attracted by a mass media content of great impact) will reduce our resources to decode (e.g. understand) what has been seen and, eventually the information storing through a previously defined mass media knowledge (e.g. what kind of information was obtained, how is it related to our previous knowledge on this and other topics, how to make and interpretation and give meaning to it in a wider perspective than strictly the event reported. The same for the case of our own capacity to reuse information, which, if not stored in a proper way, will be more easily forgotten.

From there the great importance for this study of the visual conceptualization and verbal messaging in television. Each one of these information channels requires a specific amount of psychological resources that, in a long term, define the way in which people are impacted by the content they have been exposed to.

As it has been considered by the model of Lang (2000), our work emphasizes on two theoretical approaches regarding the mass media effects. Our specific reference is the study of the mass media agenda based on the theoretical proposal developed by McCombs (2004) and his postulate about the role of mass media to make suggestions regarding topics people think of the most, instead of imposing a particular way of thinking on them. The case of the organized crime-related information coverage in the news is an emblematic one in this study, because it points at the great relevance acquired by a given topic in the mass media as direct consequence of specific editorial guidelines parameters, even though it lets the valuation of the information that is being presented to the subjects. In addition, the priming effect approach (Bushman, 1998; Anderson & Bushman, 2002) supports the idea that the violent content in the media lead to the creation of cognitive-associative networks related to aggression.

At last angle to be considered, is the one that incorporates, from the already mentioned idea of the news information as a complex system, the communication strategy developed by political actors directly linked to the combat against crime and drugs institutional framing within a very different sociopolitical context. In our case, the sample allows to look at the informative coverage presented throughout four different years and under the administration of three different presidents. To know, Ernesto Zedillo (1997 and 2000), Felipe Calderón (2009) and Enrique Peña Nieto (2013).

Research questions

It has already been said that the main objective of this study is to offer a very detailed content analysis on the organized crime-related coverage made by the Mexican television. According to the theoretical framework of the study a several research questions have been posed along with some hypotheses regarding the way in which organized crime-related information is presented to the viewer in three news television programs.

First, given the longitudinal design nature of this study the first concern was to corroborate the current perception regarding the increase of news stories on organized crime in Mexican news programs. That is how the first research question of this study was made:

P1: ¿Is it possible to notice the increase throughout time regarding the number of news stories on organized crime-related activities by news programs?

In addition to the supposed quantitative increase in the number of news stories on organized crime presented by television news programs, there is evidence that might suggest an overexploitation from behalf of the media regarding this kind of information. The exposition mentioned refers to the news editorial guidelines setting, which supports the hierarchy of the information showed throughout the information programming. At first, we thought that this exposition was linked to the news editorial guidelines sustaining the information's hierarchical organization. Firstly, we depart from the idea that news teasers (e.g. the curtains used to make the previous presentation of the news stories to be presented) constitute an audience's attraction strategy for television chains (Chang, 1998). Second, considering the fact that information processing is a time-dependent one and that, as the news program goes on, the amount of viewers watching it decreases (Gunter, 1985), we anticipate the following hypotheses:

H1: The news stories on organized crime are used as a hook, by presenting them in the teaser of the television news programs, in order to invite the audience to watch it.

H2: Regarding the placement of the news stories on organized crime within the television news program, it is expected that these are placed in its first section.

Being this mostly an exploratory study, the main aim was to inquire into the presence or absence of variables directly related to the professional exercise of TV journalism. The variables look for knowing the informative nature of the news presented by television, the editorial guidelines and the aesthetics that the three television chains

analyzed have used to structure the informative offer within its news spaces. That is how we additionally posed other questions:

P2: What kinds of images are used by the news programs to illustrate the organized crime-related news?

P3: What kinds of events are being reported by the news stories?

P4: Which is the primary source of information quoted by the news programs?

The purpose of these questions was to make an analysis through a timeline about the presentation of news information on television according to aesthetic criteria such as image and, also, with variables associated to professional journalism as the quoted source of the information reported.

Method

With the purpose of comparing organized crime-related coverage through time, the study used an historical sample of news information transmission in three stellar television news programs disseminated by three television chains. According to the Mexican market's configuration, the study selected the two prime time news shows at national level television network: 'El Noticiero' conducted by Joaquín López-Dóriga transmitted by channel 2 of Televisa and 'Hechos' conducted by Javier Alatorre transmitted at the same time by channel 13 of Television Azteca. In order to have a point of comparison a night news program of Channel 11 conducted by Adriana Pérez Cañedo, defined as a state mass media, was also chosen, which, given its nonprofit nature and its aim of public service, different production criteria than those of the private chains could be attributed to it.

The study analyzed two weeks of news television programs in four different years, 1997, 2000, 2009 and 2013. The unit of analysis was the informative news story and the filter of selection considered the codification of all the organized crime-related news stories. The method used consisted in a quantitative content analysis. That is to say, that a given amount of variables were operationally defined and coded based on an analysis protocol (Lacy, Fico, et al, 2003)-

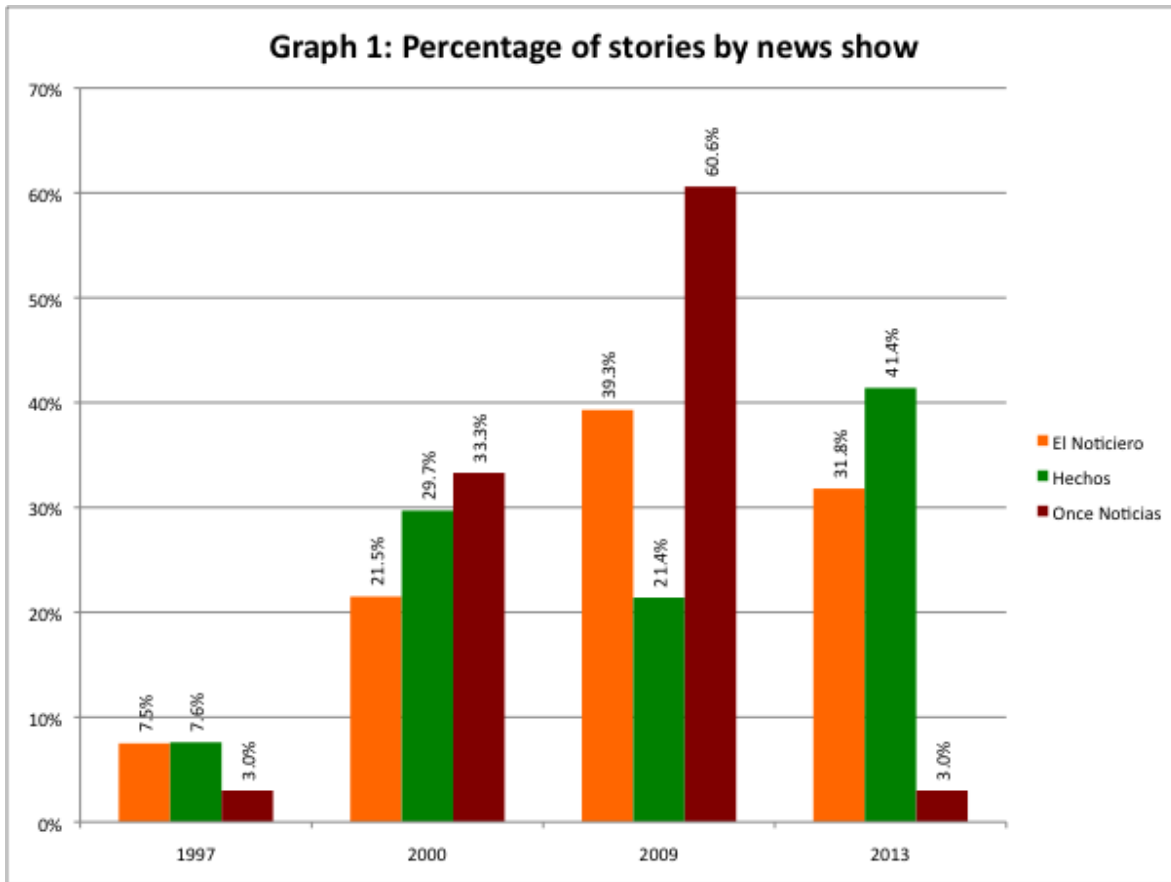
The news television programs were reproduced by two different computers through a digital format and were analyzed by a team of three encoders. In order to evaluate the

validity and reliability of the protocol a pilot sample composed by five news television programs was analyzed by the encoders. The index of coincidence among the encoders exceeded the 80% of the news stories, which confirmed the reliability of the measurement instrument used by the study. Data were captured and analyzed through a non-parametric statistical test (Chi-square) using the program SPSS V.20 to determinate significant differences.

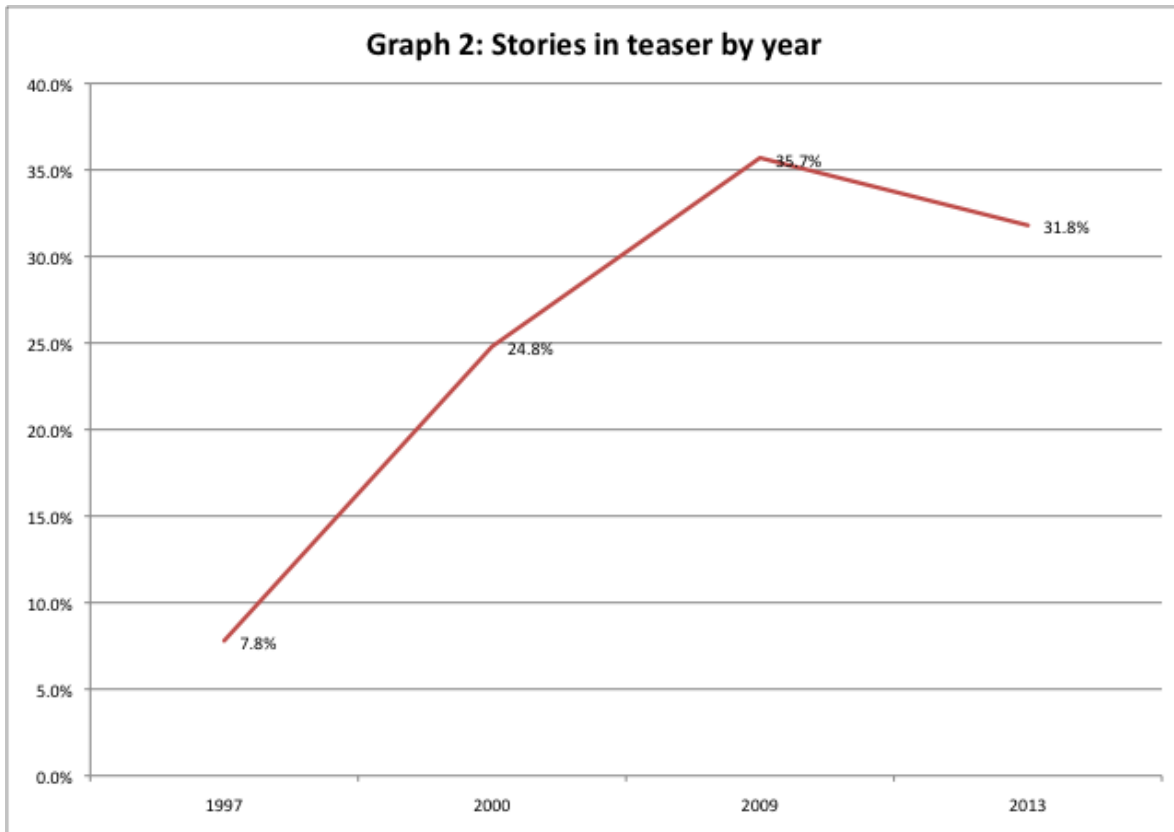
Results

At the end of the codification a total el 285 news stories were analyzed. The interest of the first question of this study was to know the number of news stories on organized crime-related news within the three news television programs that were longitudinally observed. As it can be appreciate in Graphic 1 it is possible to confirm that, effectively, there is a significant difference regarding the number of organized crime-related news stories presented by the three television news programs in question ($\chi^2=29.977$, $df=6$, $p<0.01$). The distribution of news stories in the last four years indicates that 2009 was the year in which a bigger amount of news stories were presented by Televisa and Channel 11, this last one reported an even more significant increase than other commercial chains concerning the presentation of this kind of information. The graphic points out at the performance of Channel 11 by having registered a significant amount of organized crime-related news stories during the most violent yeas of Calderon´s administration.

In the case of TvAzteca, where the major peak of news stories is reached in 2000 (that, in part, as a consequence of the capture of the drug trafficker Andrés Caletri during the period of the random sample in the year 2000), the increase between 1997 and 2009 is evident as well.

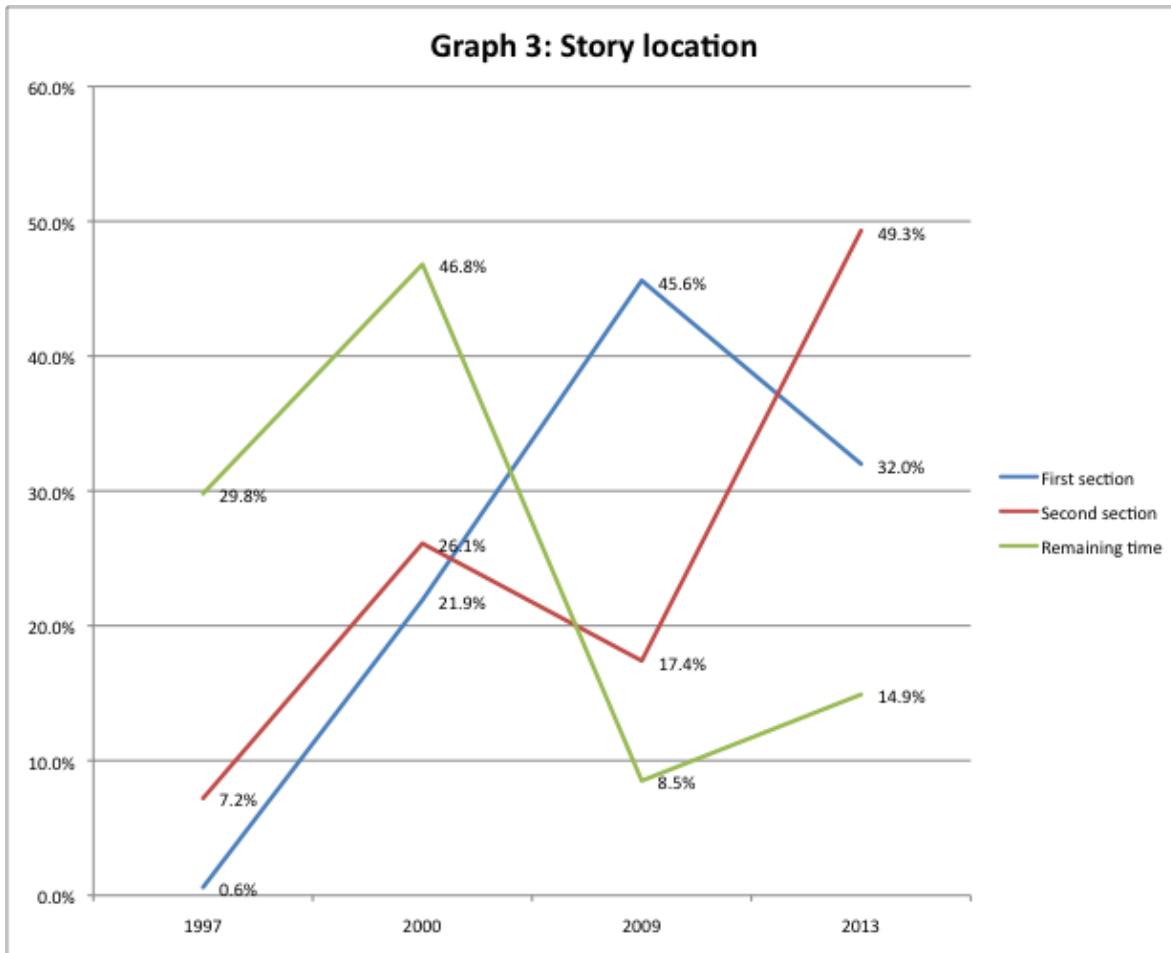


Given the frequent criticisms on the mass media use of the organized crime activities, the study anticipated the hypotheses that this kind of news stories will actually be included within the news programs teaser as a strategy to capture and keep the television news programs ratings, especially in the case of the commercial chains. Our data, as can be seen in Graph 2, support these hypotheses by showing a clear presence of organized-crime related news stories in the initial teaser of the news programs. Going from 1 of each 10 news stories in 1997 to 3 of each 10 in 2013. The difference, however, was not statistically significant, even though it was a statistical dichotomous variable.



In the same way, the editorial decision to present this kind of information in the teaser of the news television program can be confirmed in Graph 3, in which the different year by year are statistically significant ($\chi^2=85.254$, $df=6$, $p<0.01$). It can be observed that six of each ten news stories organized crime-related are being presented in the first section of the television news program. As already discussed in the introduction of this work, the agenda-setting of a news television program is determined by an editorial criteria, which hierarchically organized the information.

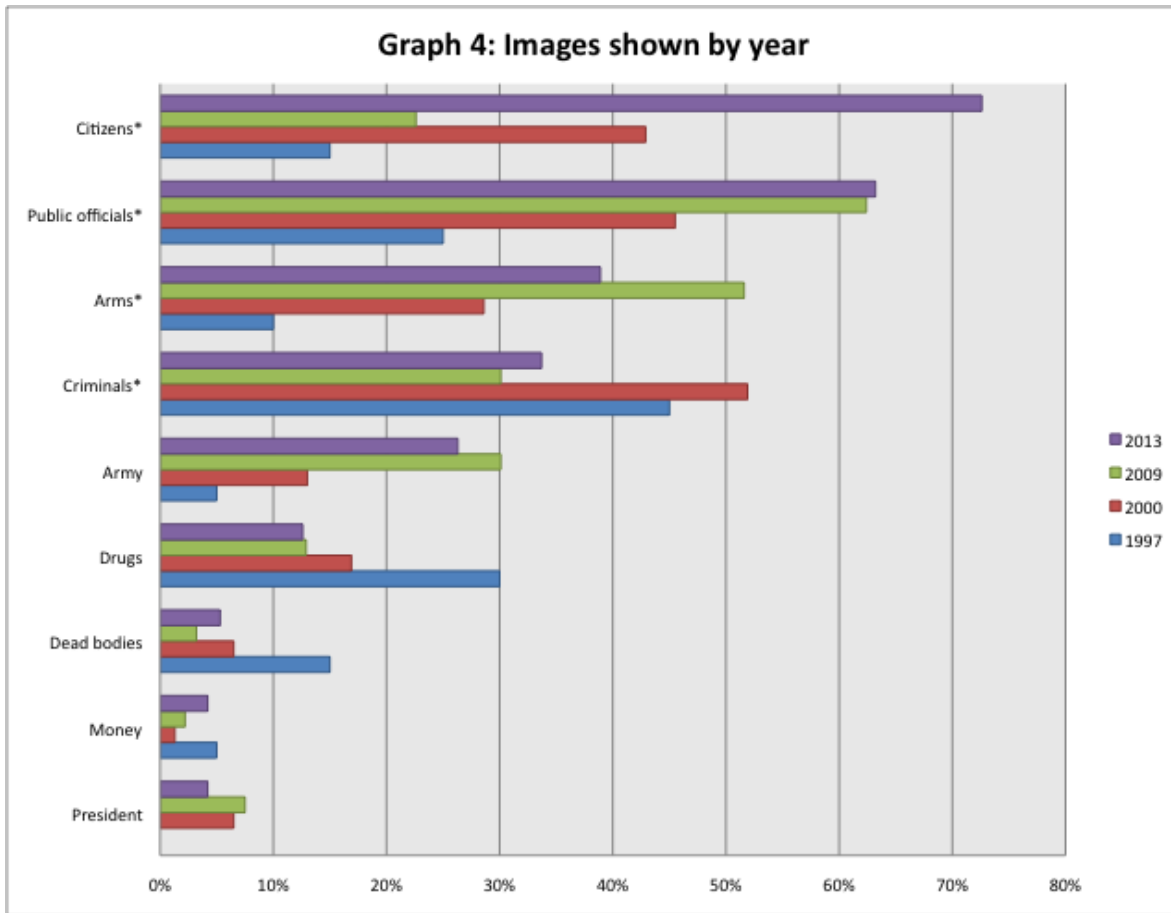
The trend changing can be more strongly appreciated between the periods from 2000 to 2009. In 1997 and 2000 most of the organized crime-related news stories were transmitted either in the third or last section of the news television program, while in 2009 this kind of information was mostly included in the first section. By 2013 is showed a reduction where is the second section the one that accumulates the largest number of organized crime-related news stories.



Regarding the kind of images used at the final edition of the news stories on organized crime (Graph 4) it was found that, only in four categories, some interesting variation throughout the four years studied (i.e. firearms, criminals, public officials and citizens) in which several significant differences could be appreciated. That is not to say that other categories show any further particularly interesting information on how television news, which ‘Army’ illustrates quite well, regarding the visual evolution of organized crime-oriented television news in Mexico.

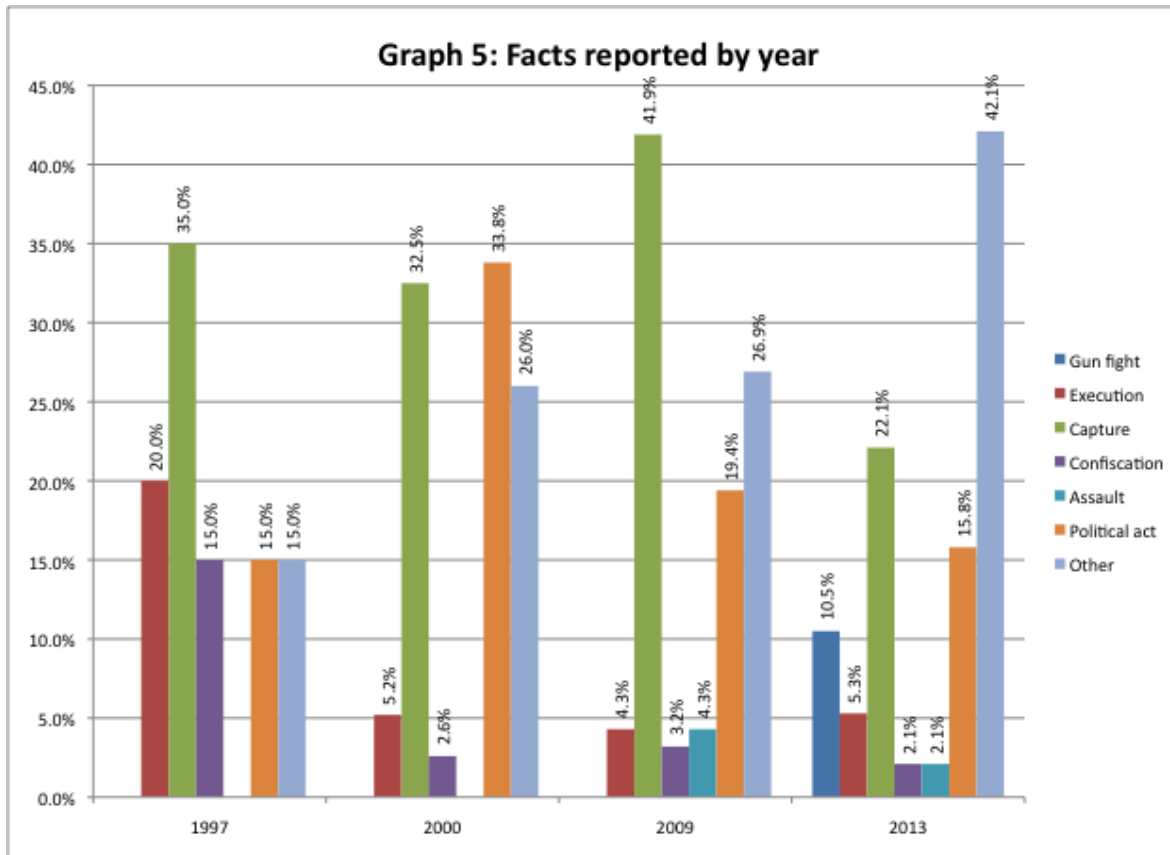
There are some interesting contrasts, as in the case of firearm and drug images. The first ones seem to be increasing while, in contrast, the second ones show a clear disuse. In 1997, 3 of each 10 news stories presented an image of some kind of drug, while, in the same year, 1 of each 10 were firearms images. This last category managed to appear, in 2009, in half of the news stories registered in our study and maintaining, to

the date, the place of the third most frequently used images in the visual aspect of a news television program. Other interesting fact is the increasingly presence or the army within news information. In 1997 images of the army or the navy were incipient, but, since 2009, these kin of images appeared in practically 3 of each 10 news stories on organized crime.



The aspect of major interest regarding the kind of images presented by the national transmitted news television program, contrary to the critics about the mass media sensationalism², is the news treatment, at least in the visual aspect, pretty prudent regarding the rawness of their contents. Images that, as in the case of some public officials and citizens, are the result of files or filling shoots taken to illustrate daily situations.

² Understood as the media's editorial intention to exploit images of high dramatic, negative and bloody impact.



Regarding the kind of events reported by the news stories, we found some significant differences ($\chi^2=59.324$, $df=18$, $p<0.001$), for example, the fact that “captures” are the main reported fact in a constant way throughout the four years here analyzed (Graph 5). Even if the higher point of this kind of news stories was reached during Felipe Calderón’s administration (2009), by 2013 it still remained as the second most reported fact in television news. It would be the opposite case concerning the executions that, from 1997 onwards, show a less significant participation in the informative nature of reported facts in the news stories. Closely related to captures, political acts are the most frequently reported events by news television programs.

Coincidentally, the presence of information about “confiscations” and “executions” seem to have decreased, from 1997 to the date, within the informative agenda setting of the analyzed news programs. In the year 2000 the major informative incident was centered in political acts (e.g. forums, inter-institutional partnerships, introduction of public policies, etc.). The second most reported fact in that year were the

captures. Nine years later, this proportion turns around by presenting more news about captures than political acts. However, a new informative category appears, “terrorist attacks”, whose presence will still be significant in 2009 and 2013.

Here it is worth to point out the image decrease of criminal suspects deliberately generated, from certain events, to its further mass media reproduction due to the great illustrative reach potential. That is the case of the recurring media’s spectacular presentations of criminal suspects throughout the administration of the former president Felipe Calderón, which are know no being as used by the current administration of Enrique Peña Nieto.

On the one hand, this might be the most crucial point within the findings of this research given that it illustrates a deliberated production, consumption and diffusion cycle of images, with a clear premeditation from behalf of the primary generator of information on this matter, the federal government.

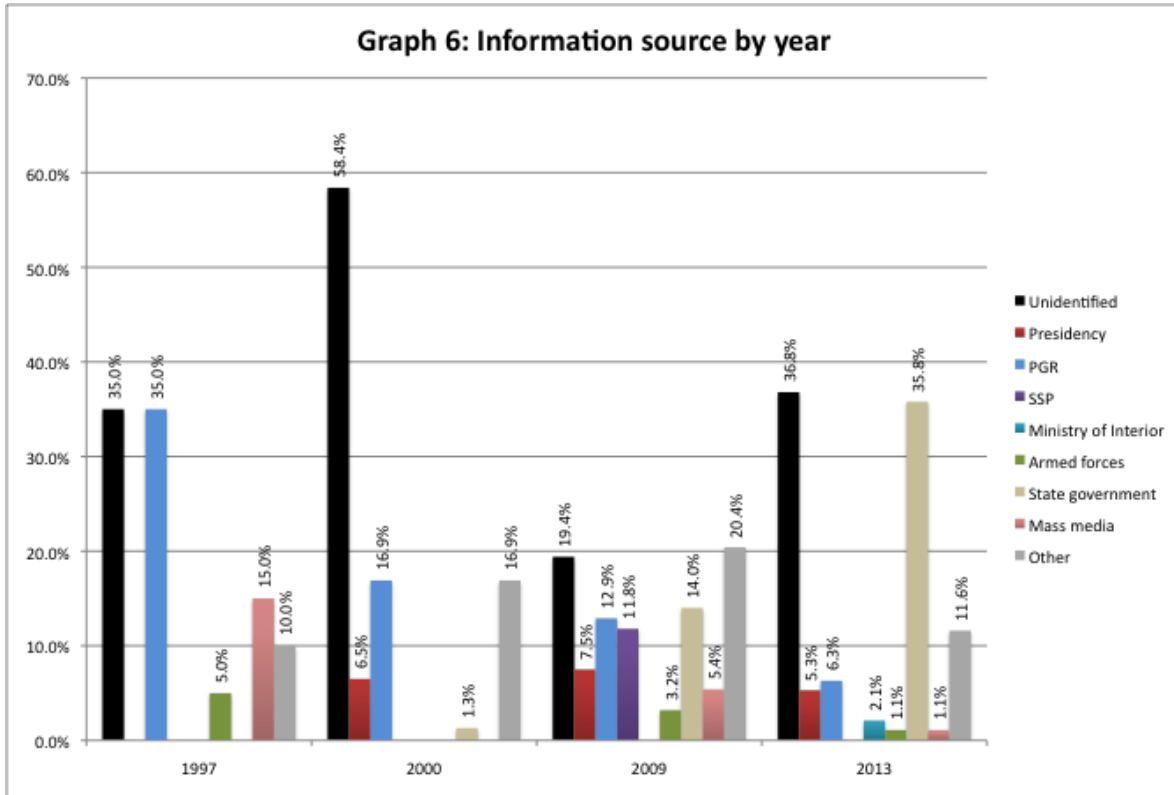
On the one hand, both, the images of public events attended by the three levels of government public officials and the mass media presentation made by the Mexican justice enforcement institutions, constitute planned actions of communication. That is to say that their main objective is the mass communication of information showing the Mexican state fight against crime organized groups.

On the other hand, the trend of the analyzed news programs to cover such images denotes a production cycle looking for the least common denominator in matter of journalistic research and informative agenda.

Taking as reference the images usually nourishing a great percentage of organized-crime related news stories, it could be deduced that the television channels analyzed, from which two of them have the largest audiences, replicate the informative inputs that are being administered by those who are for this communication strategy, particularly the state and the federal government.

The research pose another question regarding the unknown about those institutions that were mentioned in the news stories as the primary source of information (Graph 6). In this case it was possible to find some significant differences, ($\chi^2=123.49$, $df=27$,

p<0.001), closely related to the change of strategy of the government administration from 2009 to 2013.



The most important fact to be highlighted regarding the source of the information explicitly quoted by the news television programs was the preponderance of news stories reported, whose source of the information was not identified. Only this category has the first place with respect to the inter-annual distribution in each one of the four years analyzed. Another interesting fact is the reduction of the Republic Attorney’s General Office (i.e. PGR in Spanish) as the most quoted source of information identified, which was the case in 1997 and in 2000. In 2009 there was a bigger source of information diversity, from which the “presidency” and the today’s disappeared Minister of Public Security (i.e. SSP in Spanish).

An interesting fact is the increasing force of state governments to be considered as source of the information reported by the television news programs. In 1997, ‘state governments’ didn’t even appear as sources of information while other ‘mass media’ took

that place, almost 2 of each 10 news stories in 1997 came from some other information source. This presence showed a yearly reduction until arriving to 1 percentage point in 2013. On the contrary, for this last year, 'state governments' turned into the most frequented source of information.

Given the Calderon's strategy major changes, which conferred both, the army and the navy a bigger and more active role in the fight against cartel activity, we hoped to find an important difference in their role as source of information. In spite of that, our data has no record of it, showing that the information coming from the armed forces was less, in some cases, than the information presented by the presidency or the media, that even in years of strong prominence from behalf of the army and the navy as it occurred in 2009.

These findings allow us to illustrate the empirical evidence that, within the scope of the content analysis, refers to the definition and implementation of editorial guidelines and illustrative trends of news production. This last one understood as the esthetic buildup of the organized crime-related information transmitted by the two national news television programs of bigger audience at national level and in other that claims to adopt the values of a public mass media. Now, some of the previously mentioned points and the conclusions of this work will be exposed.

It is very important to clarify that the information's selection process did not take place in isolation from a particular social setting. That is to say that there are actual trend variations regarding the commission of certain felony or the arrest of high profile criminals. However, the objective of our study was to perform a serious and reliable analysis with the available information.

Discussion and analysis

The content analysis of audiovisual production, as in the particular case of television, offer us the opportunity of making inferences about the criteria productions and the possible effects of this contents on the audience.

One of the first and most revealing findings of this study is the ascertainment that the information content presentation of organized crime-related news in México has experienced major changes during the last 17 years. These changes can be observed, at a quantitative level, through either an increase or reduction of the amount of news stories on

the topic in the two television news programs that lead the television audience levels (channel 2 and 13) and one more that constitutes the only single case of news information delivery by a government entity at national level (Channel 11). What we could transversely find within these three informative spaces is that today the activities of the organized crime are a much more significantly spoken topic than before.

In a complementary way, a second conclusion is concurrently drawn given the real increase of violent actions from behalf of criminal groups and Mexican state forces (Guerrero, 2011). It concerns the influence of the agenda setting of a news television program to hierarchically organize the information related to the topic. The major indicator of the increasing appearance of this news stories category in the teasers of the three news television programs is the criteria production of these news television programs to place criminal violence as a news consumption 'invitation'. It could be a commercial effort, as it has usually been denounced the exploitation of this kind of information as a mass media common practice, nevertheless, the most sensitive matter is the fact that, in the viewer's eyes, this information ends up being processed with more attention at the formal release of the television news program.

In other words, it is not about the organized crime-related amount of news stories or that the nature of the image attached is particularly violent, but the fact that both, the location in the teaser and throughout the first segment of the transmission, give them more relevance than other contents of the public agenda. Something that accurately illustrates the *framing* concept is when news programs organize their information settings around this kind of information and, also, a priming effect, defined as the perceptual bias, is added in order to privilege the evocation of organized crime-related news stories in the news programs above any other kind of information.

A third conclusion points at the great influence exercised by the three levels of government of the federal administration in the power to define the kind of informative inputs the coverage contents of the three most important channels should be produced with.

This might be one of the most relevant findings of this research because it puts in evidence three fundamental factors. The first one is the limited generation of investigative journalism different from the frequency and tone of the Mexican state institutional

communication to develop the informative contents that are been reported. The second one is the relevance of the communication strategy of the Mexican federal government to make suggestions on the topics and 'news' narratives to define which kind communication activities such as political acts or the announcement of the capture of a suspect should be released. The third one is the inconsistency between the already mentioned communication strategy of the executive power because of the media's repeated attention on this topic when it is, in fact from its own strategy, the audiovisual inputs and narrative offered, that more than a half of the organized crime related news stories is developed by the media.

That is how this study offers a first approach to longitudinally analyze television trends on organized crime-related coverage in Mexico. Doing so implies certain limitations, which enclose the conclusions of our study. First, it would be ideal to count with an annual sample of television news programs in order to establish a much stronger point of comparison than the sample incorporated in our study.

So, it shouldn't be a surprise, for those who have tried to retrospectively analyze news television programs, that the availability of certain kind of material modifies, in a capricious way, the sample to be analyzed. That has been our case, and we completely recognize it.

A second limitation is, of course, the establishment of a link between what is presented by this news spaces a link that articulates what is presented by this information news spaces and the citizen's climate of opinion. There have been several efforts to make a statistic correlation of the context within mass media with the behavior or the attitudes of a specific social group.

It cannot, here, been confirmed that these coverage trends are responsible of changing an hypothetical public opinion, given the important changes that have taken place since 1997 regarding the ways for obtaining information and the diversification of communication platforms where news contents circulate and are being produced.

Even putting aside this technological evidence, the discussion on the power of the media to influence people's opinions around different topics will be more guided by a multifactorial association than by a unidirectional causality. Both cases will required to take the news content analysis to an experimental level in order to estimate with more accuracy

the reach and limitation levels of the mass media power of influence regarding people's opinions around different topics.

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