The "Courage For" Facebook Pages: Advocacy Citizen Journalism in the Wild

Saiph Savage
Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico &
UC Santa Barbara
saiph@cs.ucsb.edu

Andrés Monroy-Hernández
Microsoft Research
amh@microsoft.com

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a descriptive analysis of two popular Facebook pages used to circumvent the information blackout imposed by criminal organizations in the regions of Michoacán and Tamaulipas. The pages go by the name "Courage for Michoacan" (CFMich) and "Courage for Tamaulipas" (CFTam), and have more than 170,000 and 490,000 fans respectively. Here we analyze the pages' entire corpus of posts from their inception to the time we collected the data in the Spring of 2014, amounting to nine months with 6,901 posts of activity for CFMich, and 25 months with 18,977 of activity for CFTam. We then examined the pages' daily activity patterns, and traits of their news reporting: length of the report, locations and public figures they mention. We found that the these pages engage in a form of citizen-driven advocacy journalism, with the CFMich page focusing on state and country-wide affairs, while the CFTam one on neighborhood-level events. We conclude by discussing possible implications of our findings for the design of future tools for citizen journalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several journalists have been threaten for covering the Drug War [5, 2]. These attacks from organized crime, and even government officials [4], have forced many journalists to censor themselves [2]. Previous research has shown how this information vacuum motivates people to use social media to report, in real-time, the location and nature of drug related crimes and incidents [11]. This work has also documented the emergence of citizen "news correspondents" who use their Twitter visibility to receive and curate news reports of what happens in their communities.

In addition to Twitter, citizens are using other platforms, such as Facebook or YouTube, to report crime. In this paper we focus on a genre of Facebook pages organically named *"Courage for X"*, where X is the name of a state or region. The pages seek to provide online spaces for "courageous" citizens to report, comment, and engage in discussions about the crimes that afflict their communities. For instance, the about section of the 'Courage for Tamaulipas" Facebook page says: "Information for prevention and follow up of security incidents in Tamaulipas." This page created in 2012, reached prominence after a drug cartel offered a 600,000 pesos reward for the administrator's whereabouts [7]. The page has developed a language for reporting security incidents and vetting of information.

We set off to investigate some of the posting dynamics of these pages. We use data from two "Courage for" Facebook pages: *"Valor por Tamaulipas*[1], and *"Valor por Michoacán SDR"*[2], which is Spanish for "Courage for Tamaulipas" (CFTam) and "Courage for Michoacán", (CFMich). Of all the "Courage for" pages, these two have the most number of posts and the highest number of Facebook fans. The pages focus mainly on providing spaces where citizens can share reports and be informed of "situaciones de riesgo" (SDR) or "security incidents" which is the label people use on social media to refer to events such as a robberies, car chases etc.

Note that the citizen reporters of CFTam and CFMich are seemingly also acting as activists. In interviews [7] and internet postings [14, 15, 10] some of these citizen reporters have declared that they report crime out of the conviction that by raising awareness of the actual crime that is taking place they will benefit and transform their country. For instance, they think they can bring safety to other residents [7, 11]; or help to fight corruption [14]. We use CFTam and CFMich as a window to explore how advocacy citizen journalism looks like in the wild.

We characterize the posts of these two pages using analytical techniques similar to those for examining online discourse [3]. In particular, we focus on the locations, and public figures that these posts cover. We explore organizations, and public figures because they give us a glimpse into the interests of these citizen reporters, as well as the issues they may want to make more prominent or de-emphasize. Additionally, geographical locations help us to further profile and contextualize their news reports.

2. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

We used Facebook's public API to collect the full set of posts from the two "Courage for" pages (6,901 for CFMich and 18,977 for CFTam.) For CFTam we collected posts from the

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[1] https://www.facebook.com/ValorPorTamaulipas"
[2] https://www.facebook.com/ValorPorMichoacan

	Tamaulipas	Michoacán
Posts	18,977	6,901
Page Fans	487,871	158,000
Median Words per Post	29	32

Table 1: Characteristics of CFMich's and CFTam' News Reports.

page's start date on January 1st, 2012 until February 18th 2014. For CFMich it was between its creation in August 19th, 2013 until May 7th 2014. Table 1 presents a summary of the data we collected for each page.

We extracted the type of public figures and locations referenced in the CFTam and CFMich posts to obtain a descriptive assessment of the type of content these citizen journalists share online. For this purpose, we first familiarized ourselves with these two "Courage For" page by frequently reading their posts and exchanging notes and observations among the researchers.

2.1 Types of Public Figures and Organizations

Our goal was to characterize the type of public figures and organizations that advocacy citizen journalists mentioned in their posts. For this purpose we manually created a list of full, common, and nicknames from public figures relevant to these two regions, and then identified posts that mentioned any of the names. We collected the names from Wikipedia and from Proceso Magazine [3]. We considered that the public figures that were more likely to appear in the reports of these citizen journalists would be the figures involved in the drug war in Michoacán or Tamaulipas. For Michoacán we collected the Wikipedia articles in both Spanish and English about the drug cartel in that state and civilians who oppose them, i.e., the Wikipedia articles titled *"Caballeros Templarios","Grupos de Autodefensa Comunitaria"* and *"Knights Templar Cartel."* Similarly, for Tamaulipas, we collected the Wikipedia articles of: *"Cartel del Golfo,"* and *"Los Zetas."* We used these articles to manually identify proper names (i.e., public figures.) We did the same with *Proceso Magazine articles.* We used *Proceso's* online search to find articles related to these drug cartels and the armed citizens who oppose them, using the keywords *autodefensas, caballeros templarios, cartel del Golfo, and Los Zetas.* For each keyword, we went through each of the articles that appeared in the first page of the search results. We again collected all of the names that appeared in these articles. We then added or merged the alternate names for each public figure, both shorter and nicknames. For example, *"Enrique Pena Nieto"* was also known as *"EPN,"* or *"Jose Manuel Mireles Valverde"* was usually referred to as simply *"Mireles."*

We then grouped all of the public figures and organizations in our list based on their main affiliation (i.e., type.) For instance, *"Enrique Pena Nieto"* and *"Alfredo Castillo Cervantes"* were grouped together because both worked for the government. We obtained the affiliations using data from the *Proceso* and *Wikipedia* articles mentioned earlier. We considered that a public figure could have only one affiliation (as these parties are usually segregated.) Through this process, we identified four main types of public figures and

[3]Proceso, is a well-established magazine covering politics since 1976, available at http://www.proceso.com.mx/
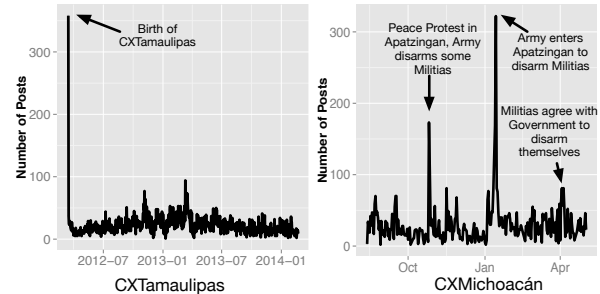

Figure 1: Overview of the daily activity of the two "Courage for" pages.

organizations: government, militia, drug cartel, and journalists (news reporters from traditional media) and labeled each of the public figures in our list into one of these types.

2.2 Locations

We identified the posts that mentioned a city or town in Michoacán or Tamaulipas. We used a list[4] from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography to identify comments that referenced such locations.

3. RESULTS

Our goal is to explore the type of content that these advocacy citizen journalist share online. For this purpose, we examined: (1) CFTam's and CFMich's daily activity; (2) the amount of coverage CFMich and CFTam give to certain type of public figure and location.

Daily Activity We plot the daily number of posts from CFTam (Figure 1a) and CFMich (1b). This initial analysis provides an overview of the behavior of these activist citizen reporters. It lets us examine whether CFMich's citizen reporters have similar posting patterns to CFTam's.

Figure 1 shows that CFMich's citizen reporters have more variation in their daily posting behavior than CFTam's. The citizen reporters of CFMich appear to create more reports on days when there are major offline events in Michoacán. What is particularly interesting is that the majority of the peaks correspond to days when armed civilians had conflicts with the Government. Other major offline events transpiring in Michoacán appear to have gotten less attention by these citizen reporters. For instance, on 14 January 2014, the day the Army entered the town of Apatzingan to disarm

[4]For Michoacán we used :http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/monografias/informacion/mich/territorio/div_municipal.aspx?tema=me
For Tamaulipas we used: http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/monografias/informacion/tam/territorio/div_municipal.aspx?tema=me

	Tamaulipas	Michoacán
Locations	0.68%	0.38%
Public Figures and Organizations	7.0%	30.1 %
Reporters	.65%	.75%
Famous Armed Citizens	0.96%	15.24%
Organized Crime	3.06%	16.47%
Government	4.35%	14.12%

Table 2: Percentage of Posts referencing Public Figures or Locations.

citizens, the number of posts in CFMich spiked. However, on days when there were major confrontations between armed civilians and organized criminals, the total number of posts in CFMich was just slightly above average. For instance, on 8 February 2014 armed civilians took over the headquarters of the Knights Templar, the main drug catel of the region. CFMich reporters hardly covered this event, even though it was widely discussed amongst traditional media [12, 8].

The citizen reporters of CFTam on the other hand, appear to be much more consistent in the number of daily posts they provide. They appear to produce daily almost the same number of posts, even when there are major offline events transpiring in the state. For instance, CFTam reporters appear to report more equally all offline events, whereas CFMich reporters appear to give more emphasis to particular offline events.

Public Figures and Locations Mentioned To inspect further the type of content that these citizen reporters share, we examine how much each page mentions locations, public figures and organizations. Table 2 presents an overview of these percentages, highlighting also the percentage of posts that referenced certain type of public figures and organizations, such as "Organized Crime Members" or "Government Figures."
In general, CFMich reporters tend to mention more public figures and organizations in their posts than CFTam reporters. Over 30% of CFMich's posts reference public figures and organizations, whereas it is only 7% in CFTam.

CFMich citizen reporters appear to focus almost equally on public figures involving the government, armed civilians, and organized crime member; whereas CFTam reporters rarely mention at all any particular type of public figure or organization. However, citizen reporters from both groups reference almost equally news reporters and traditional news media. Also interestingly, both pages appear to include in their posts locations in almost the same percentage. Although CFTam appears to have slightly more posts with locations.

4. DISCUSSION
Through our study of the news reports in CFTam and CFMich, we obtained a glimpse of how advocacy citizen journalism is taking place. Interestingly, we observed that the citizen reports from these two pages exhibited different traits, although the pages organically carried the same name and were established for the same reasons.

We conjecture that the CFMich reporters are focused on state and country-wide affairs, while the CFTam reporters cover more neighborhood-level events. This would explain why the spikes in CFMich's daily activity match major offline events, and why they mention public figures more frequently. In the same way, CFTam's daily posting activity is likely more homogeneous because the number of incidents per neighborhood is usually constant [9]. Public figures are also less likely to be relevant to neighborhood news reports.

Currently, it is unclear why these two types of citizen reports are emerging. It could be that the cultural differences between these two regions is triggering the differences we observe. Perhaps the citizens of Michoacán simply value more "global" news reports that connect what an event means to the country as a whole. While Tamaulipas citizens care more about what is occurring in their neighbourhoods. It could also simply be that the crime in these two regions is different. One is more locally rooted whereas the other has its origins from national conflicts.

The differences could however, also come from the personal motivators of the leaders driving each of these Facebook pages. Leaders of CFTam have e.g., declared in interviews [7] that they report crime out of the conviction that citizens have a right to know what is occurring in their neighborhoods. On the other hand, the page admins from CXMich appear to be more concerned with exposing corruption from criminals and governments [14, 15, 10].

A common denominators that might arise in citizen journalism driven by advocates is that "just" reporting a story might not be their main driving motivator. These journalists might find more value in sharing stories that can create a change in other people's behavior, e.g., making politicians think twice before conducting illicit activities, as they might be publicly exposed.

The citizen journalist tools of tomorrow could be enhanced if they acknowledged that advocates can be some of the most engaged journalists [11], but they might have different motivators that drive their reporting. Future journalists tools, particularly those focused on crowdsourcing news reports [1], could perhaps detect the type of story a citizen reporter is most motivated to contribute, and then for a given event recruit citizen reporters with different personal motivators. This way, one same event could potentially be covered from the local community perspective and from a more global view, highlighting what the event might mean for a country and for a particular neighborhood. In this space, it could also be worth to explore how to visualize the specific interests and expertise of these citizen reporters [13, 6], to provide a human-in-the-loop approach for dispatching and recruiting reporters.

We hope our study helps to highlight some of the emerging behaviors of citizen reporters, and helps to discuss the direction of the next generation of tools for citizen journalism.

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