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Visualizing Simultaneity in Diasporic Public Spheres: The Case of the Mexican Diaspora in the U.S.

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Abstract

This article argues that explorations of interactive spaces afforded by digital news media provide a dynamic platform to visualize the prospects for the political participation of diasporas in their countries of origin and residence. In this case, a breakdown of the frequency of comments across a variety of news sections about Mexico and the U.S. in Univision.com uncovered a lively range of interactions between news forum participants, signalling simultaneous interest in on-going events and processes in the two countries. The dual national orientations highlighted by these findings 'touch base' with the body of literature about media and migration, which has in recent times recognised the interconnectedness of immigrants-sending and receiving societies, whilst offering a more refined conceptualization of the concept of simultaneity in regard to diasporic public spheres.

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Introduction

This paper considers the prospects for the simultaneous participation of the Mexican diaspora in the U.S. within the discursive spaces of the two countries in the North American Free Trade Agreement region. Based on a quantitative analysis of over 11,000 comments in online news forums, this intervention contributes to the debate on whether Information and Comm-unication Technologies (ICTs) afford diasporas the possibility of simultaneous involvement in various national contexts. The idea of simultaneity in the experiences of diasporas is widely used but theoretically underdeveloped, and interdisciplinary gaps between the study of media and migration and critical theories of citizenship and the public sphere have yet to be bridged. Since international migration is a phenomenon in constant flux, it remains crucial to keep asking questions about how social reality shapes and is shaped by those human formations at the core of one of globalization's main processes. With this argument in mind, this article considers: *How does the concept of simultaneity inform our understanding of the political participation of diasporas in their countries of reference?* Our reflections rely on the assumption that the expression of views triggered by coverage of events and processes of significance in diasporas' societies of origin and residence are a form of participation in their respective public spheres. From this follows, as this paper will argue, that a) an analysis of communicative activity in these public spheres can provide clues about the scope for the actual civic engagement of diasporas in their societies of origin and that, b) such an approach renders the notion of simultaneity useful to understand the distinct orientations of diasporas towards different national contexts and, ultimately, those orientations' potential political influence.

The U.S.-Mexican diaspora

This paper assumes that people of Mexican origin who live in the U.S. are willing or inadvertent members of a diaspora, a characterisation that has been well established by various perspectives (e.g., González 1999; Rinderle 2005; Moreno 2011). As a word of Greek origin meaning 'scattered across', the term used to be applied normatively (Cohen 2008), but is now used in reference to the 'exemplary communities of the transnational moment' (Tölölyan 1996: 4) formed by sojourners, guest workers, exiles and political refugees who represent the bulk of the estimated 232 million people who live outside their countries of birth (Münz 2013). Sheffer usually defines the contested concept as 'a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries' (Sheffer 2003: 10–11).

The previous definition is deemed useful to describe people of Mexican origin in the U.S., who account for 65% of 53 million Hispanics in America. The Mexican diaspora is heterogeneous, composed of immigrants, their second-generation children and the latter's offspring (third and further generations). Whilst many immigrants never fully become 'diasporan' or 'active in the political arena' (Sheffer 2003: 17), they remain part of an imagined community

with common cultural elements. For example, nearly everyone in the Mexican diaspora has migrated or is related to an immigrant (The Economist 2006; Fry & Passel 2009). Given Mexicans' experiences of racial exclusion in the U.S. (Acuña 1996), persisting structural obstacles for access to schooling and health, a continued concentration in the Southwest and social and geographic proximity to Mexico, they share a sense of belonging which justifies their characterisation as a diaspora (Gonzalez 1999: 553; Rinderle 2005). Importantly, ideas of belonging to a diasporic community are developed in what Avtar Brah labels as 'diaspora space', meaning 'the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes' (Brah 1996: 181). This kind of thinking moves the focus from the diaspora as a human formation to the experiences that come with dwelling in diasporic spaces such as the online news forums in Spanish language that are analysed in this paper. Having clarified one key conceptual aspect shaping this work, one can move to an overview of the context for the political participation of the Mexican diaspora in Mexico and the United States.

After the Mexican government in 2005 cleared legislative obstacles for its citizens to participate in Presidential elections from abroad, experts from the Pew Research Center claimed: 'The new Mexican absentee voting program marks the largest experiment ever undertaken of expatriates voting in one Western democracy while living in another', (Suro & Escobar 2006: 2). However, from an estimated 4.2 million who were eligible to vote less than 1% registered to do so, with the result that only 29,348 cast their ballots in Mexico's presidential election

in July 2012, according to IFE, the country's electoral authority. In contrast, there are quantitative and qualitative reasons to assume that Mexican-origin people in the U.S. were key to the re-election of Barack Obama in the November 2012 Presidential contest (Padgett 2012), given that only 27% of Hispanic voters or 'Latinos' favoured Obama's Republican opponent, Mitt Romney (Lopez & Taylor 2012; Foley 2012; Rodriguez 2012). Considering that in recent years Mexicans in the U.S. have moved in large numbers to adopt the U.S. citizenship (Passel 2007), which entitles them to participate in electoral processes, one would have an excuse to conclude that there is an ongoing process of political assimilation amongst the Mexican diaspora.

The assimilation thesis would, however, be too simplistic, as it would overlook relatively recent changes in patterns of circular migration (Roberts et al. 1999) which allow individuals within the Mexican diaspora to run 'spatially extended relationships' in Mexico 'as actively and effectively as the ties that link them to their neighbors' (Rouse 1996: 13) in the U.S. After decades of northward migration from Mexico, a 'Mexican-American' social and cultural space has formed in the U.S. (Gutierrez 1998) whereby Spanish-language, religious activities, home town pageants, food, music, television, and magazines from Mexico and so on challenge the notion of 'linear cultural assimilation' (Park 1950; Park & Burgess 1969), whilst also promoting the possibility of transnational forms of citizenship (Fox 2005). Importantly, there is no reason to think that the process of cultural maintenance that is fostered by links with the homeland occurs at the expense of adaptation and settlement in

the host land, as there are 'ways of being and ways of belonging' (Levitt & Schiller 2004: 1003) which support both processes simultaneously.

There are forceful arguments that back up the notion of 'simultaneity' in the case of Mexicans in the U.S. (Rouse 1996). However, as far as their political participation goes, such simultaneity remains underexplored, with the evidence suggesting that involvement in one national context is seldom connected to engagement in a different one (Rivera-Salgado et al. 2005) and that, with a few rare exceptions (Smith 1998; 2006) which sample 'the dependent variable' (Portes 2001: 182), the links between diasporic participation in one country and the other are at best asynchronous (Ayón, 2006) and subject to changeable and unpredictable intensities (Soehl and Waldinger 2010).

Simultaneity: levelling the playing field

Exploring the views and opinions about processes of a public nature of population segments located in 'diasporic space' (Brah 1996) is one way forward to press the question of simultaneity and the political involvement of ethnic minorities in various national contexts. The matter is of importance in exploring whether the scope for such engagements operates exclusively within national Westphalian logics (Keane 1997; Fraser 2007) or post-national ones (Habermas 2001). Confirmation of the latter is needed if concepts, such as 'transnational' or 'diasporic' public spheres, are to make any sense for a critical theory of democracy and citizenship (Fraser 2007). Our view is that the study of media and migration can make a contribution to

such a question, given its affinity to the field of investigation that explores the role of ICTs (information and communication technologies) in our evolving experiences of time and space (Ling & Campbell 2009). Such a role for ICTs has systemically, if somewhat inadvertently, manifested itself in the study of media and migration through the notion of simultaneity, typically understood in its adjectival form (i.e. simultaneous), which, according to Collins' World English Dictionary, means 'occurring, existing, or operating at the same time'. Simultaneity requires a 'structural coupling' between psychic and social systems (Baraldi 1993) and a coordinated social grounding (Clark & Brennan 1991), processes which may be hindered by symbolic and structural asymmetries that influence experiences of simultaneity in 'complex linguistic ecologies' (Warriner & Wyman 2013: 1). Such a perspective would be relevant in studying how simultaneity occurs for members of ethnic minorities vis-à-vis those of majority populations. The latter premise could be connected with Kim and Ball-Rokeach's (2010) call to assess how questions of class, gender, schooling and so on impinge upon the orientations of Internet use among new immigrants for civic engagement.

One of the main arguments in this paper is, however, that before looking at the more complex structural aspects that shape mediated experiences of simultaneity, one must first level the playing field on which simultaneity is mobilised as a concept. In our field of study, simultaneity is implicit in the suggestion that diasporas lead lives that span various horizons of group dispersion, normally the countries of birth and residence. The notion has gained currency since the mid-1990s,

with research based on evidence demonstrating that individuals and groups from ethnic minorities consume media products, such as television programs and videotapes (Gillespie 1995; Kolar-Panov 1997), that evidence cultural dynamics grounded in activities taking place in various national contexts. The point is captured by Arjun Appadurai, when he describes Turkish guest workers in Germany and Pakistani cabdrivers in Chicago who 'watch Turkish films in their German flats, or … listen to cassettes of sermons recorded in mosques in Pakistan or Iran' (Appadurai 1996: 4). Resulting from the consumption and circulation of media content, 'diasporic public spheres' (DPS)[1] nurture forms of 'long-distance nationalism' (Appadurai 1996: 22). The process in question is sometimes more discrete, simply promoting feelings of belonging and nostalgia in relation to a homeland (Uribe-Alvarado 2009; Ray 2003). But discrete or not, researchers have noted that, while still limited, better access of diasporas to satellite television and the Internet allows them to maintain 'active links among their far-flung members' and 'to sustain inter-continental networks' free from the control of state actors (Karim 1998: 2). Implied in the work of these actors is the notion that experience of social reality has been sequestered from spatial location (Thompson 1995) and that, as Moores put it, 'the advent of "live" communications across potentially vast physical distances has introduced *a new kind* of simultaneity and inter-dependence into social life' (2012: 2, our emphasis).

The most recent generation of media and migration studies that invoke the new type of simultaneity and social interdependence described by Moores is present in studies about "Digital diasporas" (Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010; Brinkerhoff 2009; Everett 2009). In the majority of these accounts, the idea of simultaneity has either been taken for granted or used carelessly. In essence, the problem is that novel articulations about the agency of diasporas in various national settings deal with questions of what Moores labels 'the situational geography of social life' (2012: Ch. 1). Consequently, the idea of simultaneity deployed in the latest generation of media and migration studies has not acknowledged the difference between the physical and symbolic situations embedded in that 'new kind' of simultaneity that Moores describes. For simultaneity to exist, it must refer to activities that occur in parallel synchronous or asynchronous form as well as in the same dimension. Otherwise, the concept is reduced to a wild card that could be simply characterised as multitasking, purely a balancing act in which location becomes irrelevant. It must be noted that the problem addressed here has nothing to do with interpreting simultaneity literally as in 'at the same time'. Rather, the focus should be on the different activities as expressive of their connection to social space given that, once location is lost from sight, the matter of diasporic communication is reduced to an exercise in the interpretation of symbolic forms that do not consider the latters' interaction with structures of power (Thompson 1990). The case is one of asking: *What does the mediated capacity of diasporas to act simultaneously in different national settings say about their links with each of the social realities*

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[1] In this paper, we draw constantly on this expression and will therefore be abbreviating it as DPS.

involved? Emphasis must be given to the fact that such a question cannot be seriously asked when the answer involves dealing with *links* of a different nature, i.e., that occur in different dimensions. Thus, one can understand that the Mexican diaspora in the U.S. is more likely to participate in the elections of the U.S., not because it has assimilated, but because involvement in the ballot is materially facilitated by physical presence, whilst the cast of a vote in Mexico is precluded by procedural obstacles (Moreno 2012) – sometimes set strategically for political reasons (Smith 2008). Indeed, such political reasons do highlight the centrality of national political cultures as forces that influence the scope for the political participation of diasporas such as Mexicans in the U.S. (Moreno 2012a). Putting the interaction between national political cultures and the nature of political participation in perspective is as important as revealing how categories of class, gender, and age, for example, impinge on the role of ICTs in channelling such engagements. As stated earlier, however, one should first level the field on which simultaneity is mobilised if it is to have any analytical traction.

Digital diasporas and Imagined Public Spheres

One argument advanced in this work is that the production of commentary about significant public processes in diasporas' countries of reference situates those symbolic forms simultaneously in the same playing field, in this case, a technological platform which allows them to interact with phenomena occurring in different countries with which they have direct, personal connections. Because their participation

in online news forums is textual, it can be argued that the opinions individuals put across in relation to events in different countries are virtually taking place at the same time and dimension. Such symbolic engagements can be articulated as simultaneous forms of civic involvement given that they function as statements in the public spheres of the countries in question. Over the last 20 years, a significant amount of related academic efforts have suggested that diasporas use of media is politically progressive; however, the majority have not quite established solid links with public sphere theory (cf. Fraser 2007). The most recent example is the work to which we have just referred on the notion of digital diasporas. In the collection of perspectives that Alonso and Oiarzabal put together, for example, the point is made that the 'info-spheres' diasporas create through their media inputs give way to deterritorialized communities, 'bounded by common interests and not by space or time' (Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010: 8). In so doing, diasporas are confounding ideas of the national, and producing a rather chaotic map 'that occupies multiple geographical locations', thus bridging the traditional boundaries 'between the land of origin and the land of settlement' (Alonso and Oiarzabal 2010: 9). Perhaps in response to the blurred picture that results from their exercise, Laguerre calls 'to develop a theoretical understanding of the diverse manifestations of the problem so that genuine public policy can be engineered' (Laguerre 2010: 49). According to him, this debate has emphasized questions pertaining to 'the digital divide' but ignored that 'Digitization has enhanced the sustenance of global interactions in immigrant enclaves' and 'provided tools for the creation or participation in virtual

public spheres to discuss matters of common concerns to the group' (Laguerre 2010: 62). Reference to such public spheres is provided by Everett, who argues that the growth of Afrocentric content in the World Wide Web since the early 1990s has forged a 'digital black public sphere' (Everett 2009: 2) which supports the grassroots activism of African Americans, and echoes the African diasporic consciousness that developed as part of the struggles for equality of people of African origin during the 20th century. In another recent example, Brinkerhoff defines digital diasporas as formations 'organized on the Internet' (Brinkerhoff 2009: 2). Looking at the cases of communities from Afghanistan, and Egyptian Copts, Tibetans, Somalis and Nepalese in the United States, she makes a case for the impact that their Internet-based activities have upon their host society and homeland. She particularly emphasizes the potential of digital diasporas to 'threaten global security' (Brinkerhoff 2009: 4), given their capacity to politically destabilize their home territories.

Before digital diasporas was a concept in circulation, many others explored diasporas' use of media in approaches which presumed such use fostered the development of diasporic or trans-national public spheres and, consequently, the maintenance of imagined communities (Karim 2003; Uribe-Alvarado 2009; Ray 2003; King 2003; Hassanpour 2003; De Santis 2003). While there are different configurations for the ways in which the public spheres of diasporas are produced, circulated and consumed (Naficy 2003), and even though some of the media consumed become part of hybrid cultures that reflect on the lives of

diasporas in their host lands and other sites of group dispersion (Cunningham & Sinclair 2001), the one defining element of this literature is its emphasis on the role of media for sustaining the cultural identities of ethnic minorities (Dayan 1999; King 2003; Cunningham 2001) Considered as sites for the public communication of 'globally dispersed communities' (Cunningham 2001: 135), these 'public sphericules' are considered as central arenas for the political tensions of diasporas in relation to their homelands. The emergence of computer mediated communication has meant that ethnic minorities are increasingly able to shape the linkages with members of their imagined communities all over the world, thus forming post-national public spheres (Karim 2003: 13–4) that use 'technologies of national desire' (Tsaliki 2003: 163), such as chat groups and web pages, to recreate the 'national imagined community'. Many more research efforts assume the existence of the public spheres in question (Mitra 2006; Mandaville 2003; Qiu 2003) but their nature is systematically expressed in cultural rather than political terms.

Exceptions to the dominant cultural perspective include Brenda Chan's argument (2010) about the Chinese diasporic public sphere as formed by Chinese students in the U.S. and other countries who join online virtual communities in newsgroups to 'rally' in support against discrimination of their fellow co-nationals in Singapore, or when they use online sites to raise funds in Singapore against the SARS epidemic in the mainland. Guobin Yang (2003) mobilises the concept of the transnational public sphere when claiming that various symbolic dimensions of the Chinese language converge in online spaces, such as

magazines, newsletters, chat rooms and bulletin boards, giving birth to a Chinese cultural sphere with political functions. One such function would be the Internet as a stage for transnational protests against what has been perceived as attacks on Chinese interests.

In the case of the Mexican diaspora in the U.S., it's been found that Mexicans in that country use online resources to maintain social, political, and cultural links, and in general to promote feelings of belonging to a Mexican imagined community (Navarrete & Huerta 2006). Focusing on the formation of virtual communities, Cortázar (2004) has explored how intellectuals of Mexican origin converge around discussion newsgroups to exchange views about their professional careers and heritage, in ways which sustain a collective identity. In his work about the Mexican diaspora, González (2008; 2010) has found that the development of hometown websites is part of an associative process in which individuals exchange information and knowledge with the community of users, thus generating social capital. In their exploration of community websites used by Mexican immigrants in the US, González and Castro (2007) claim that these outlets provide newcomers with relevant information about jobs and health services, as well as keeping them in touch with their communities of origin. Cárdenas Torres' (n/d) analysis of virtual communities reveals the use of these tools by groups of immigrants who maintain a record of their involvement in projects that improve living conditions in their places of origin. Similar approaches have been produced by scholars of other Latin Americans in the U.S. Benítez (2010: 195), for example, has studied a variety of 'intradiasporic, interdiasporic,

diaspora and homeland, and diaspora and host society websites' that people from El Salvador use to maintain contact as members of an imagined community across a variety of geographic locations.

The research referenced in this section reveals a clear emphasis in the link between diasporas' use of ICTs and the role of such media in promoting imagined communities. Whilst it consistently mobilises the concept of the public sphere, however, it does not quite engage with the relevant theory that addresses the nature of media as discursive spaces with a democratic potential. In this respect, the talk in particular about diasporic and in general about transnational public spheres has been limited to describing the interactions of imagined communities across national borders, a description of transnational flows which has until now fallen short from reflecting on how such discursive streams may channel effective citizen action. In this context, Nancy Fraser contends that the 'concept of the public sphere was developed not simply to understand communication flows but to contribute a critical political theory of democracy' (Fraser 2007: 45). The literature referenced above advances implicit or explicit suggestions that diasporic communication sustain public spheres but, paraphrasing Fraser, they seldom do much along the lines of demonstrating that such public spheres marshal 'public opinion as a political force' (Fraser 2007: 45) capable 'to hold officials accountable and to assure that the actions of the state express the will of the citizenry'.

To date, few authors who study media and migration have systematically addressed the concerns expressed by Fraser. One who has is Angel Adams,

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whose definition of 'public-sphere activity' includes diasporas' use of the Internet for 'self-expression and group discussion in which participants define or redefine their sense of identity, community, and agency… opinion and agenda formation… and the channelling of opinion to public officials and institutions.' (Adams 2005: 352). However, Adams stops short from reflecting on public sphere activities that imply a simultaneous connection with the discursive spaces of the polities of origin and residence. Robert C. Smith's ethnographic work with the Mexican diaspora deals more effectively with this problem when he highlights the role of telephones, airplanes, and videotapes as tools which enable members of the Ticuani Potable Water Committee in New York to maintain contact and negotiations with authorities from their hometown in Mexico, Puebla, in a way that promotes 'the social construction of community' (Smith 1998: 197) in a transnational context. In this case, media and transport technologies afford immigrants in New York the possibility of a sustained physical and symbolic presence in Mexico, which results in 'the emergence of parallel power structures' (Smith 1998: 227) that were previously non-existent. Nevertheless, there are two interrelated downsides in Smith's work. The first is in relation to the fact that the notion of simultaneity is used unsystematically, purely at a discursive level to make the point that two things happen at the same time in different places. The second limitation is that the ethnographic approach depends on a specific set of informants who are more likely to be exception than norm, leaving little room to replicate the process of knowledge generation in *less convenient* samples.

Online news forums as Mexican diasporic space

A more strict use of the term simultaneity would demonstrate that activities comparable on a like-for-like basis can take place at the same time in different situational geographies. Whether or not a method exists that can be reproduced in different cases and produce comparable results is yet to be tested; as an attempt to make progress towards that goal, this intervention draws on the case of Spanish-language users of Univision.com's forums. After considering over 200 diasporic websites and other platforms based on Facebook and Twitter used by Mexican-origin people in the U.S., it has been determined that Univision.com constitutes the most relevant case to explore the idea of simultaneous participation in the public spheres of the two countries involved. As the most popular U.S.-based Spanish-language media operation on the Internet, Univision.com provides substantial news coverage about the U.S. and Mexico, attracting Internet users who are mostly of Mexican origin, according to Dan Murphy, vice-president of Research & Analytics of Univision Interactive Media. Interviewed in 2012 by one of the authors, Murphy explained that Univision.com's dominant Mexican profile 'might reflect the availability of Mexican-centric TV content, people, radio music, media, etc., or rather a lack thereof in terms of content from Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, Central America… within the U.S.'. Considering Murphy's words and the fact that 66% of the Hispanic population is of Mexican origin, it is assumed that the vast majority of online news forum participants on its website have Mexican roots. Consequently, by focusing on the

commentaries of news forum users in response to coverage about Mexico and the U.S., it is possible to visualise their interests in events and processes of a public nature in the two countries.

A virtual methodology (Hine et al. 2005) was devised to demarcate Univision.com's 'sphere of analysis' (Schneider & Foot 2005) in ways which help to think about it as a DPS. Univision.com's news section '*Noticias*' is divided into several sectors, the first two of which are '*Estados Unidos*' (United States) and '*México*'. Each of these is also divided in sub-sections, some of which are permanent, like 'Latest news', and others which vary on the basis of special events, such as Obama's second-term inauguration or the visit of the pope to Mexico. These divisions are assumed to act as boundaries between the Mexican and the American side of the DPS; such divisions provide ways to generate and organize an archive of comments made in response to news stories in each of the countries. The archive was generated during 2012, when a team of three members spent several sessions copying the comments of users in response to the news stories captured in the archive.

Findings and discussion: simultaneity of connection

The archive of comments for U.S.-related news reports was obtained from sections '*Lo Último*' (Latest news), '*Destino* 2012' (Destiny 2012), exclusively dedicated to the Presidential election, and '*Latinos en USA*', focusing on events where newsmakers and members of the largest ethnic minority in the U.S. are directly involved. In the case of Mexico, the archive was drawn from sections '*Últimas Noticias*' (Latest Headlines),

'*Elecciones* 2012' (Elections 2012) and '*Vida Cotidiana*' (Everyday Life)[2]. Selecting equivalent news segments for Mexico and the U.S. resulted in a comparative platform in which PSAs in the form of comments, Facebook and Twitter shares, supports the idea of Univision.com as host to a dynamic DPS. As shown in Table 1, U.S. section '*Lo Ultimo*' shows that 146 news items generated a total of 2315 comments and that these stories were shared 5611 times on Facebook and 1719 on Twitter. Mexico's '*Últimas Noticias*', which is the equivalent to '*Lo Ultimo*', had 997 comments in response to 137 stories, as well as 4463 and 1492 shares on Facebook and Twitter, respectively. As for the coverage of the elections in the U.S. section '*Destino* 2012', 82 comments generated 4234 comments and 1425 and 1064 Facebook and Twitter shares. Mexico's equivalent, '*Elecciones* 2012', resulted in 2366 comments out of 83 news reports, and 3987 and 1207 reposts on Facebook and Twitter. Figure 1[3] is helpful to visualise the public sphere activity of Univision.com's users in relation to news reports in Mexico and the U.S., as it

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[2] Activity in section '*Vida Cotidiana*' was under-recorded due to data loss, which explains the considerably lower rate of activity appreciated at the bottom line in Table 1. This does not, however, affect the scope of the analysis, given that the other four comparative sections generated information that was substantial enough to make comparisons between two national public spheres.

[3] By plotting the total amount of comments in each of the quantified news forums, as well as Facebook shares and tweets, Figure 1 provides an overall picture of DPS activity in Mexico and the U.S. Whilst the graph is clearly asymmetric, its geometry suggests that activity in the public spheres of each of the countries involved is present, and therefore in need to be analysed rather than simply assessed in terms of a predominant national orientation (i.e., political assimilation).

suggests that participants in forums engage in discussions about relevant events and processes taking place simultaneously in two national contexts. Importantly, the resulting statistics point towards two avenues for further analysis of online content. The first relates to what the numbers, which result from the measurement of comments, tell us in the context of existing debates about DPSs. The second suggests ways to move the debate forward, particularly in relation to the contribution that 'virtual methodologies' (Hine 2005; Markham and Baym 2009) can make to enhance investigations in the field of diasporic communication.

Whilst participants in Univision.com's news forums engage in the public spheres of both countries, it is difficult to ignore the numbers showing that PSA in relation to news about the U.S. is considerably higher than in relation to news occurring in Mexico. At first sight, this imbalance could be explained as a sign that participants in the diasporic space of Mexicans in the U.S. are more inclined to engage in the public affairs of their host society. This would go against the grain of many studies of digital diasporas that have emphasised homeland-oriented activities in their use of media (Tsagarousianou 2001; Robins & Aksoy, 2005). One reason could be found in the notion of cultural assimilation, somewhat akin to a recently developed typology that identifies transnational, assimilation, virtual and hybrid outcomes in relation to new immigrants' use of the Internet for civic engagement (Kim & Ball-Rokeach 2010). Despite the fact that such typology appreciates the possibility of hybrid outcomes where transnational and assimilation processes co-exist, it does so in a context of 'methodological

nationalism' (Wimmer & Glick-Schiller 2002; Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004: 1007). Such an approach stops short from taking on board the fact that in the contemporary world, diaspora formations can be permanently connected to social spaces that are criss-crossed by the realities of multiple latitudes. Paraphrasing Levitt and Schiller, we need to recognise that for people in diaspora 'incorporation in a new state and enduring transnational attachments are not binary opposites' (Levitt and Schiller 2004: 1011). They add that 'Movement and attachment is not linear or sequential but capable of rotating back and forth and changing direction over time. The median point on this gauge is not full incorporation but rather simultaneity of connection'.

A focus on the Mexican diaspora's simultaneity of connection to the public spheres of Mexico and the U.S. is a productive way of analysing the scope for their political participation, as this takes on board contemporary forms in which relationships of citizenship are developed in the context of transnational ethnic minorities. These links can no longer be seen simply as contracts between citizens and national states whereby the latter define what rights and obligations the former have. One should surely heed the argument that immigrants do not always have access to the entitlements that 'full citizens' do and that, consequently, their presence in public spheres is obscured or diminished by varying degrees of exclusion and inclusion. This is the situation if one considers the contexts of diasporas such as Pakistanis and Indians in the UK, Turkish people in Germany and Chinese people in Australia, amongst many others who frequently live in conditions of partial citizenship. Thus,

paraphrasing Sassen, in cases like the Mexican diaspora in the U.S., one is confronted with the presence of large amounts of 'political subjects not quite fully recognised as such' but who 'can nonetheless function as bearers of partial rights' (Sassen 2006: 280). However, since the institution of citizenship has historically provided only partial rights to its members, immigrants or not, it follows that when studying diasporas one will find that the links of citizenship that they develop in relationship to their nations of origin and residence will differ in nature. For the study of media and migration, this raises the challenge of investigating the extent to which those citizenship links play out in the form of ICT use, which can be articulated as forms of bi-national or multinational political participation. If, as Ruiz and his colleagues (2011) suggest, online news forums are the contemporary equivalents of the cafés that gave birth to the public sphere, the study of online news forums employed by diasporic individuals in the developed world are likely to reveal aspects of their involvement in their public spheres of reference.

Quantifying the geometry of DPSs

As previously noted, the quantification of comments of Univision.com reveals two main findings: discussions about a variety of news themes are simultaneously occurring in each of the national segments within the DPS of Mexicans in the U.S., but activity in the public sphere of the U.S. is more significant than that of Mexico's. This pattern is nuanced, however, when one eliminates the dispersion of scores found at the extremes of each block of samples by obtaining their respective

interquartile ranges (only the 50% of scores at the centre of the distribution), as shown in the third column of Table 1. So, for example, the interquartile ranges in U.S.'s news section '*Lo Ultimo*' and Mexico's '*Ultimas Noticias*' suggest that with very similar sample sizes, the average number of comments were fairly similar, with 9 and 7 per news item. In contrast, when one follows the same procedure with the news coverage about the presidential elections in the two countries, a significant difference is revealed between the 52.25 and 17.5 comments written per story in the U.S. '*Destino* 2012' and Mexico's '*Elecciones* 2012' sections. However, the possibility that the higher interquartile range of PSA in the U.S. signals that news forum commentators are more interested, and therefore more willing to participate, in that country's electoral process, should not be taken as a zero sum game. Instead of simply 'reading' more interest in the U.S. elections than in Mexico's, it would make more sense to investigate what patterns of simultaneity in the DPS tell us about the different forms of orientation that transnational comm-unities develop in regard to their countries of residence. It is possible, for example, that the political cultures of each country provide more or fewer incentives for the channelling of public opinion into their public spheres. Can the analysis of DPS activity be useful to reveal such differences? The quantitative approach to the analysis of simultaneity suggests that it can. It is also important to add that the measurement of interquartile ranges for comments in each of Univision.com's news sections provides a tool to make methodological choices, such as providing a target to focus the textual analysis of comments in a way which will support a more nuanced understanding of the DPS of

Mexicans in the U.S. Indeed, the items that register a recurrence of comments equivalent to the interquartile ranges map out what amounts to social landscapes that could well constitute actual settings for civic participation. Are the themes, actors, activities, and other phenomena implicit in the stories that trigger significant DPS activity a reflection of those contexts where individuals are likely to engage in real life? Environments like Univision.com enable the capture and analysis of an array of information about its users, such as locations, gender, age, and language, all of which can be applied in relation to frequency of participation, preferred themes, tone of interaction and so on, which are essential to inform our understanding of agency in symbolic environments. Most importantly, by providing the tools for interaction with these users, spaces like Univision.com constitute a potent mechanism through which researchers could approach potential informants, thereby supporting empirically-grounded insights in relation to news forum participants' backgrounds and attitudes and further differentiating communicative processes within diasporic public spheres.

Sections	Range*	Interquartile Range*	Mode	Median	Mean (Average)*	News Items*	Total comments	FB recs.	Twitter
LO (USA)	1 - 299	9	1	4	15.85	146	2315	5611	1719
D (USA)	1 - 222	52.25	3	43.5	51.63	82	4234	1425	1064
LA (USA)	1 - 158	13	1	6	13.32	158	1026	2115	669
LO (MX)	1 - 51	7	1	1	7.27	137	997	4463	1492
EL (MX)	1 - 600	17.5	1	9	28.50	83	2366	3987	1207
V (MX)	1 - 26	12	N/A	4	9	5	45	79	46

Table 1: Frequency analysis of Diasporic Public Sphere activity
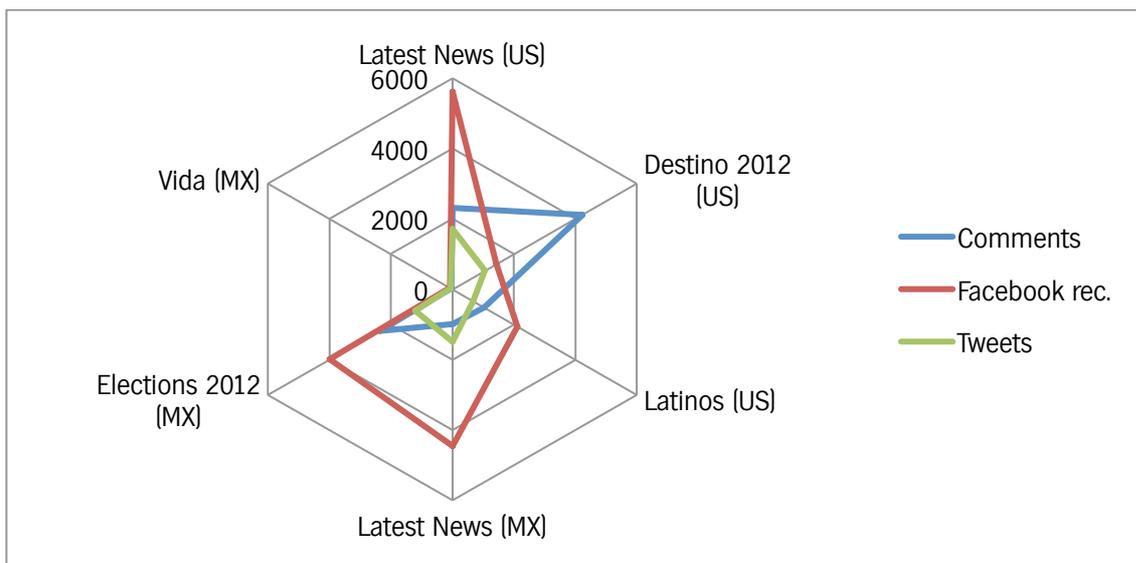

Figure 1: Geometry of Univision.com's Diasporic Public Sphere

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This article was first published in *JOMEC Journal*

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ISSN: ISSN 2049-2340