



How do mexican journalists interpret and contextualize the news on organized crime that they publish? the amplified subjectivity

¿Cómo interpretan y contextualizan los periodistas mexicanos en las notas que publican sobre crimen organizado? La subjetividad ampliada.

Elba Díaz-Cerveró

Panamerican University. School of Communication. Álvaro del Portillo. Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico.

eldiazc@up.edu.mx



Daniel Barredo-Ibáñez

University of Málaga. Spain. Fudan University. China.

daniel.barredo@uma.es



Rubén Arnoldo González Macías

Autonomous University of Puebla. Mexico.

ruben.arnoldo@correo.buap.mx



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The notion of objectivity is the cornerstone of the liberal model of journalism. Following that scheme, one of the aims of news stories is to foster citizens' understanding of the world they live in, but this

can only be achieved through journalists' vision. In that sense, the aim of this article is to analyze the level of interpretation and contextualization that Mexican journalists deliver when they report on organized crime. **Methodology:** In doing so, this paper draws on 24 in-depth interviews with news workers who cover this beat across the country. **Results and discussion:** The findings suggest that journalists do interpret and contextualize the information. This is because they are interested in helping their audiences to better understand this highly complex phenomenon. Although most of the informants said that they separate facts from opinion, they constantly interpret the information by relying upon their amplified subjectivity; which represents the main contribution of this inquiry. **Conclusions:** The main conclusions suggest that criminals' pressure constrains reporters' freedom to interpret the information they publish. Therefore, despite journalists' efforts, the average Mexican news consumer cannot fully understand the organized crime phenomenon.

Keywords: Contextualization; Organized crime; Interpretation; Mexico; Journalism; Mexican journalists; Amplified subjectivity.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La noción de objetividad es la piedra angular del modelo liberal de periodismo profesional. Si se acepta la idea de que una de las finalidades del periodismo es ayudar a los ciudadanos a entender el mundo en el que viven, esto sólo se logra a través de la visión de los periodistas. Este trabajo tiene como objetivo analizar el grado de interpretación y contextualización que los periodistas mexicanos imprimen a sus publicaciones cuando informan sobre hechos relacionados con el crimen organizado. **Metodología:** Para ello, se han analizado 24 entrevistas en profundidad con reporteros que se dedican a este tipo de coberturas en toda la República mexicana. **Resultados y discusión:** Del análisis de los datos se establece que los periodistas sí interpretan y contextualizan para sus audiencias, y lo hacen con el interés de que éstas alcancen a entender mejor el complejo fenómeno que supone el crimen organizado. Aunque de forma mayoritaria dicen separar información y opinión, interpretan a través de ciertas licencias y detalles aportados desde lo que hemos considerado una subjetividad ampliada, lo cual supone el principal aporte de este trabajo. **Conclusiones:** Las principales conclusiones del estudio son que la presión de los criminales limita esa libertad para la interpretación y que, a pesar de los esfuerzos, los entrevistados consideran que, de manera general, un lector mexicano promedio no alcanza a entender el crimen organizado, ni a través de lo que ellos mismos publican, ni de lo que aparece en otros de los medios de México.

Palabras clave: Contextualización; Crimen organizado; Interpretación; México; Periodismo; Periodistas mexicanos; Subjetividad ampliada.

1. Introduction

According to the liberal model of professional journalism, citizens have the right to be informed about public affairs that affect their daily lives. For this reason, society delegates to journalists the task of seeking the necessary information that allows them to make rational decisions (Broersma, 2018; Waldenström et al., 2019; Márquez et al., 2019; Standaert et al., 2019; Anderson and Schudson, 2020; Hanitzsch and Örnebring, 2020). To achieve this, their work is guided by a set of principles that enable them to produce news, with objectivity being one of the key principles (Tuchman, 1972; Schudson, 1989 and 2005; Waldenström et al., 2019; Anderson and Schudson, 2020; Mellado et al., 2020).

Objectivity implies the generation of purely informative messages, grounded in facts, without any ideological bias, and in which the journalist's opinion has no place (Tuchman, 1972; Broersma, 2018). However, in everyday practice, such content generally does not fully meet these standards because news is the result of a process involving different members of editorial teams within the media organizations (Schudson, 1989 and 2005; Broersma, 2018;). At each step of production (reporting, editing, design, packaging, and presentation), individuals consciously or unconsciously inject their points of view, in other words, their own subjectivities.

"The main objective of this work is to analyze to what extent Mexican journalists interpret and contextualize when communicating events related to organized crime."

If we focus on the Mexican case, it is essential to consider that Mexico is the most dangerous country for journalism, with 161 journalists killed due to their work since the year 2000. Of these deaths, 41 have been recorded during the tenure of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and 47 during the previous government of Enrique Peña Nieto (Article 19, September 18, 2023). The inherent danger of the profession, coupled with the near 100% impunity of the masterminds behind these crimes, compels those who report to make editorial and personal security decisions that, to a large extent, determine the final outcome of the news through which they communicate

facts related to organized crime to their audiences (Díaz-Cerveró and Barredo, 2020; Díaz-Cerveró et al., 2022), and even how they organize themselves to confront the threat (González-Conde et al., 2022). Building on this widely discussed principle in the literature, this article will address the concept of extended subjectivity as a guide to understanding the work of Mexican journalists who cover and investigate organized crime. Before presenting the overall objective, the following pages will delve into the discussion between objectivity and subjectivity as ideals of journalism.

1.1. From Objectivity to Journalistic Interpretation

As mentioned in the introduction, the notion of objectivity is considered the cornerstone of the professional liberal model of journalism. Therefore, in order to foster credibility, media outlets strive to provide their audiences with neutral, factual, and balanced content (Tuchman, 1972; Standaert et al., 2019; Anderson and Schudson, 2020). Despite the impossibility of fully achieving this goal, there is a belief among journalists that if they gather and present information in a "distant, unbiased, and impersonal" manner, then they are being objective (Tuchman, 1972, p. 676).

As will be discussed in this section, achieving full objectivity is more of an aspiration than a reality, but that doesn't deter journalists from striving to approach this ideal. International academic literature has documented how the staff of news organizations constantly oscillates between the desire to meet the expected canons of their profession and the everyday obstacles to achieving it. For example, Deuze (2005) points out that there is a dominant ideology that shapes the daily work of journalists, which becomes evident when they adopt a set of values shared by their guild (such as a commitment to public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy, and ethics). However, Hearn-Branaman (2014) notes that, while the notions of socially responsible journalism and self-regulation of their work are the cornerstones of this dominant ideology, journalists acknowledge that it is not realistic to expect total compliance with such expectations. Nevertheless, despite the multiple limitations they face daily, many reporters do their best to meet this standard.

In this regard, numerous scholars (Chillón, 2019; Albarrán, 2020; Serrano and Solano, 2021, Vinuesa and Nicolás-Sans, 2023) refer to journalism as the pursuit of truth, which has gained special importance in recent research on hoaxes or fake news, such as Del Hoyo-Hurtado et al.'s (2020) study. Some authors, like Manfredi and Ufarte (2020), emphasize the concept of truth, while not dismissing objectivity. For them, truth is a quality that requires a set of professional skills and competencies, such as double-checking sources, quality in writing, and language proficiency: "Journalistic judgment distinguishes which issues are relevant, and news is articulated to explain what happens according to a certain idea of objectivity, complemented by opinion and analytical interpretation" (p.54).

On the other hand, Zamin (2019), in a work similar to this one- she based her research on in-depth interviews with Colombian journalists who covered the country's armed conflict- states that journalistic storytelling also enables interpretation and understanding of the social fabric (p. 9). She goes even further by coining the concept of 'hidden subjectivity' to refer to the testimonies and experiences of interviewees, noting that journalism insists on concealing the subjectivity of information professionals (p. 11).

If we accept the idea that one of the purposes of journalism is to help citizens understand the world in which they live, this is only achieved through the perspective of journalists. Therefore, a news story is the result of a series of filters in which raw data is shaped and transformed into a journalistic message (Márquez et al., 2019; Anderson and Schudson, 2020; Mellado et al., 2020). These filters give meaning to the entire process of planning, reporting, editing, design, and information presentation. Taking this into account, instead of being a mere firsthand account of an event, what the media disseminate is a narrative of what their staff considers relevant. In other words, rather than reflecting reality, the news presents a "constructed reality" (Schudson, 1989) because the message only includes those aspects that were previously evaluated as relevant in journalistic terms.

In this sense, Tuchman (1972) argues that news is a shared social phenomenon because, far from reflecting reality as it is, it only represents the viewpoint of a team of journalists. This is why this type of content is simultaneously an individual and organizational product. Thus, "the fact that news is constructed suggests that it is socially constructed, elaborated by the interaction of the actors in the news production process" (Schudson, 2005, p. 186). In this way, the aforementioned standards that guide journalistic work are the result of internal agreements reached by individuals with their own interests and guided by their own ideologies, and therefore, their own subjectivities.

For this reason, in addition to its informative mission, journalism has the capacity (and the duty) to interpret events and place them in context: to understand them as a result of previous events and processes and to attempt to determine their significance and potential impact (Hernández and Calzadilla, 2021). For some scholars, journalism is, in itself, a method of interpreting reality. This is the view put forth by Gomis (1987), who believes that the reality referred to in journalistic interpretation is social reality: "The journalist does not seek to interpret what happens in the intimacy of consciences or in the depths of the unconscious. It is human social reality, insofar as it produces facts, that aspires to be interpreted" (p. 36). Romero (cited in Delgadillo-Grajeda and Arellano, 2019) agrees with Gomis that journalism is a method of interpreting social reality and adds that it can abstract phenomena from this reality "through its investigation, providing them with context and understanding them in the depth of their structure" (p. 17).

Rodrigo-Alsina and Cerqueira (2019) point to the idea that journalism relies on the interest and trust of its audience: "A comprehensible narrative must be offered, in which it is possible to observe the truth based on personal testimony, documents, or the account of reliable sources, but also with an interpretation of data and facts" (p. 229). For other experts, like Shapiro (2010), journalistic interpretation is one of the five fundamental principles on which journalistic quality depends, alongside discovery in information gathering, examination and scrutiny, storytelling style, and attractive presentation. The concept of interpretation linked to journalistic quality is also taken up by Gelado et al. (2019); in fact, these authors connect the quality of interpretations to the accuracy of the reporter's testimony. Journalistic interpretation is based on two basic axes: the autonomy that the journalist has to perform their work and the depth they bring to the communication of facts. Taking this into account, the selection of topics, their focus, and the interpretative work associated with journalistic practice are limited by the pressures that underlie relationships, institutions, and the influence of other economic actors (Odriozola-Chéné et al., 2019; Díaz-Cerveró et al., 2022).

The quintessential journalistic interpretative genre is the chronicle, and in it, the journalist contributes a significant dose of subjectivity (Cantavella and Serrano, 2004), although it always has a reference to the interpretation of a real event, combining narration and interpretation, as the subjective way in which events are recounted (González-Macías et al., 2022, p. 37). The chronicle is part of the so-called narrative journalism, which aims to present information in a more aesthetic and reader-friendly manner (Harbers and Broersma, 2014). As a hybrid genre, its evaluation is problematic because it must meet the challenge of respecting the truth of the facts and, at the same time, presenting writing close to literary discourse. This type of journalistic practice implies the open acceptance of subjectivity, understood as the personal involvement of the reporter when writing their story, which becomes evident through expressions of affection, judgments, or evaluations of people or objects (Hsieh, 2008; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012). In this sense, narrative journalism seeks to find the middle ground between informing and evoking various emotions in the reader. In other words, as Chillón

(2007) puts it, the relationship between the journalist's perspective and the filtered reality shapes a type of subjectivity, which can be called "expanded subjectivity" (p.111), summarizing the conditions of the reporter within the medium and the social environment, their personal and professional experience, as well as the imaginations of the users to whom they communicate. In reality, the concept of expanded subjectivity is not new, and although it is not a term used widely, it has been approached from various fields, justifying its different applications. From philosophy, Adorno (1984, p. 145) pointed out 40 years ago that for Hegel, the reconciliation between identity and positivity had to be achieved through the inclusion of everything different and objective in an expanded subjectivity elevated to Absolute Spirit. Massini-Correas (1997, p. 217) also refers to the relationship between objectivity and expanded subjectivity, in this case in Rawls' philosophy, and suggests that this philosopher's notion of ethical objectivity ultimately ends up being reduced to mere expanded subjectivity, to a mere agreement between subjectivities without any grounding in real entities, the only ones capable of providing true objectivity to ethical elaborations.

The concept of expanded subjectivity has also been coined in psychology. Rojas (2002, p. 72), citing Loewald (1988), states that reality shocks the subject, and this shock leads them to perceive the state of communion in which they participate in their environment, placing them in an expanded subjectivity. From an educational perspective, Montero and Gewerc (2018), citing Sadin (2017), proposed the emergence of a new capacity to interpret the environment: "expanded subjectivity" (p. 4), which refers to how algorithmic systems make decisions based on information and available data. This expansion of reasoning, based on the same technological possibilities, determines new ways of perceiving reality and generating responses to it. In the field of journalism, which is the focus of this discussion, Chillón (2007) relates this expanded subjectivity to intersubjectivity to suggest that to arrive at the concept of informative truth, consensus must be reached among different intersubjectivities to reach, in line with Kant's ideas, a public truth (p. 11).

In any case, the goal of this work is not to analyze the chronicles that the interviewed journalists have published about organized crime but to assess, through their testimony, to what extent they interpret the news in the articles they publish in their daily work to inform about the phenomenon, regardless of the genre in which those journalistic pieces are framed. In a previous work (Díaz-Cerveró et al., 2017), in which we studied the content through which the Mexican press reported on the escape of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, we determined that only 2.44% of the 779 pieces published by the country's four most significant newspapers were chronicles (p. 789). The same work and others (Reyna, 2019) agree in establishing that news reports and statement reports are the preferred text types used by Mexican journalists to inform about organized crime.

2. Objectives

This study originates from a strong belief that a phenomenon as complex as this one needs to be interpreted and contextualized by those who report on it. With this in mind, the main objective of this work is to analyze to what extent Mexican journalists interpret and contextualize when communicating events related to organized crime. To achieve this, the research questions posed in this qualitative study are as follows: To what extent do Mexican journalists interpret and contextualize news about organized crime, and is this interpretation aimed at enhancing the understanding of the phenomenon by users/readers? If not, what is its purpose?

In order to address these questions, the text is organized as follows: The first section presents a discussion of the academic literature on the concepts of objectivity, subjectivity, and journalistic interpretation. Subsequently, the methodology used in the study is described in detail, followed by the presentation of the results. Finally, the document concludes with a discussion of the findings in light of the concept of expanded subjectivity.

3. Methodology

This is a non-experimental, descriptive study with a cross-sectional approach. The chosen method is a qualitative technique, specifically structured interviews (Taylor et al., 2015). The first step in operationalizing this method was the construction of a script based on what was anticipated from the results and conclusions of previous literature. Subsequently, a draft of the script was validated by a group of academic experts to refine the questions

that became part of the final instrument. Data collection took place between 2018 and 2019, involving on-site visits to the place of residence of each of the interviewed journalists.

In particular, nine out of the 24 interviews were conducted in the newsrooms of journalists working in Mexico City, and of the remaining 15, four took place in the same city because the journalists were under threat in their states and, therefore, relocated to the capital under the Journalist Protection Mechanism. Of the remaining 11 interviews, one was held in Baja California, two in Sinaloa (one in Mochis and another in Culiacán), one in Jalisco, two in Michoacán (both in Morelia), two in Guerrero (one in Chilpancingo and another in Acapulco), one in Cuernavaca, and two in Xalapa, Veracruz.

Each of the interviews lasted between one and four hours, during which a wide range of topics was discussed, from the pressures faced by journalists to their self-critique of their own work, as well as the degree of interpretation they bring to the events they attempt to explain, which often involve great complexity. This paper will focus on this aspect.

All interviews followed the same structured script and the same question order, as recommended by Valles (2007). In total, the instrument consisted of 10 sections. For this study, we are only including the results of questions related to the topics to which journalists assign the highest and lowest importance in their medium regarding organized crime, the type of representation they provide of these events and their protagonists, and the interpretation of the events themselves. Within this last section, they were asked if they clearly distinguish between information and opinion, if they impart their point of view or a certain interpretation oriented towards better understanding of the events, and whether they believe that, through what they publish- both themselves and the media they work for- readers are well-informed about organized crime. Specifically, the questions aimed at determining the degree of interpretation that journalists bring to their stories were as follows:

Table 1. Categories and questions included within the instrument.

Category	Questions
RECURRING SUBTOPICS	<p>Question 1: What makes an issue related to organized crime become recurrent? Can you provide an example of a recurrent issue in your newspaper?</p> <p>Question 2: What causes an issue to be silenced? Can you provide an example of an issue that has been silenced by your newspaper?</p>
REPRESENTATION OF EVENTS	<p>Question 1: What is the preferred way to refer to criminals? (aliases or nicknames, full names...)</p> <p>Question 2: Have you ever felt that you contributed to the mythification of a drug trafficker, or treated them with sympathy or familiarity?</p>
INTERPRETATION OF EVENTS	<p>Question 1: In your newspaper, is information clearly differentiated from opinion on topics related to organized crime?</p> <p>Question 2: Do you incorporate your point of view or a certain interpretation into the events you report on?</p> <p>Question 3: Do you believe that an average reader can comprehend the actual extent of organized crime in Mexico based on what you publish?</p>

Source: Author's own work.

3.1. Sample Profile

As we mentioned in previous lines, a total of 24 journalists participated in this study. All of them work directly in areas responsible for covering the violence caused by organized crime in Mexico. Each of the interviewees was assigned a code to ensure their anonymity. The profile of each of the interviewees is as follows:

Table 2. *Sample Profile.*

Code	Position	Type of Media	Gender	International, national, or local/regional nature of the media	Years of Experience
E1	Editor/Section Chief	Weekly publication	Male	National	53
E2	Editor/Section Chief	Weekly publication	Male	National	18
E3	Editor/Section Chief	Printed/digital newspaper	Male	National	28
E4	Reporter	Weekly publication	Male	National*	20
E5	Reporter	Printed/digital newspaper	Male	Local/regional/ Local/regional	41
E6	Editor/Section Chief	Digital Newspaper	Male	Local/regional	21
E7	Reporter	News Agency	Male	International	21
E8	Reporter	Weekly publication/ Digital newspaper/ Printed/digital newspaper	Female	National*/ Local/regional/ Local/regional	21
E9	Reporter	Digital Newspaper	Female	Local/regional	9
E10	Editor/Section Chief	Weekly Publication	Male	Local/regional	31
E11	Editor/Section Chief	Digital Newspaper	Male	Local/regional	15
E12	Reporter	Printed/digital newspaper	Female	National	45
E13	Editor/Section Chief	Printed/digital newspaper	Male	National	23
E14	Reporter	Digital Newspaper	Male	Local/regional	8
E15	Editor/Section Chief	Weekly Publication	Female	Local/regional	33
E16	Reporter	Printed/digital newspaper	Male	National	18
E17	Reporter	Printed/digital newspaper	Male	National	30
E18	Reporter	Radio	Female	Local/regional	28
E19	Reporter	Printed/digital newspaper	Male	National	15
E20	Editor/Section Chief	News Agency	Male	International	29
E21	Reporter	Weekly Publication	Male	Local/ regional	40
E22	Reporter	News Agency	Male	National	23

E23	Reporter	Printed/digital newspaper	Male	National	31
E24	Reporter	Printed/digital newspaper	Woman	National	34

Source: Author's own work.

*Although the scope of the publication is national, they are the reporters who act as correspondents from their state.

3.2. Data analysis technique

After conducting the interviews, we generated their respective transcriptions through the coding of results into patterns and categories, as explained in Taylor et al. (2015). To do this, we identified indicators in each of the questions, comparing them to find trends that allow us to organize the explanation of the data. Next, we prepared a general framework to describe the categories related to the concepts. Finally, we proceeded with the explanation of the data based on this general framework. This explanation is presented in the following pages along two axes that help answer the research questions. First, the interpretation in the notes on organized crime, and second, we present the impact of the interpretation of these types of notes through the so-called 'expanded subjectivity,' which is one of the findings of this study.

Since this is not a quantitative study, we have not included percentages or statistics for broad patterns. However, to provide nuance to minority opinions, we have included, in parentheses, the number of interviewees who align with a particular definition. When introducing a direct opinion from the interviewees, we identify it within brackets with their corresponding code (ranging from E1 to E24). We do not reveal the names of the journalists associated with their opinions for personal security reasons, and because some opinions may contain sensitive information about their work environments.

4. Results

4.1. The interpretation in the notes on organized crime

Already in a previous work, the existing link between notes on organized crime and, in general, news about Mexican public life was mentioned (Díaz-Cerveró and Barredo, 2020). Thus, when discussing organized crime, the interviewed journalists coincide in highlighting, as recurring subtopics of editorial interest, all those related to violent events: massacres, murders, disappearances, extortion, and, in general, any event involving some degree of victimization and, consequently, emotional empathy from readers or viewers, who tend to align with those who suffer from the actions.

On this point, notes on insecurity are also highlighted: the legal protections sought by criminals, threats to governments, and human trafficking. Additionally, the interviewed professionals maintain that notes on state corruption are also appealing: the relationships between politicians and criminals, institutions colluding with drug trafficking, and organized crime in general. They also emphasize as attractive subtopics the details about the lives of criminals, such as references to their personal lives (their lovers, social circles), the

Figure 1: Subtopics of greater editorial interest associated with organized crime in Mexico.



Source: Author's own work.

wealth they've acquired, and profiles derived from that wealth. Generally, journalists focus on violence as the primary effect of organized crime, but due to limitations like time and financial resources, they do not investigate in-depth reports, such as those addressing public health consequences, for instance, in a cross-border context between Mexico and the United States.

Conversely, among the less interesting topics according to the perceptions of those consulted are those related to economic and public health issues, political gossip, matters affecting human dignity, tourism, or profiles of some of the individuals involved. Local and less significant topics are often excluded, along with references to the families of the criminals. Some minority opinions indicate a lack of editorial interest in "official sources" [E9]; in the perspective of the criminals [E13], who sometimes issue statements through intermediaries; in poverty [E22]; or in "femicide, as it is too much" [E18].

To represent the events, we have found a disparity of criteria that allude, on the one hand, to the absence of a common protocol among Mexican journalists, which we have already addressed in a complementary work (Díaz-Cerveró and Barredo, 2020). Therefore, it is the media outlets that, based on their code of ethics and often unwritten rules, suggest how to cover these types of stories. On the other hand, after analyzing the 24 interviews conducted with Mexican journalists from across the country, we can determine that interpretation is something that is an integral part of the daily work of journalists if we understand it as contextualizing the events they report on.

Interpretation involves a personalization of the treatment, which we will delve into further, and which we will refer to as "expanded subjectivity," following the framework presented by Chillón (2007, p. 111). This subjectivity is a resource that stems from the journalist's experience, the profile of the media's readers, and, above all, the freedom of each journalist to convey the facts. While some journalists acknowledge and explain the Mexican Criminal Justice Law, which prohibits revealing the surnames of criminals, except in cases of very famous criminals, there is a variety of ways in which the interviewed journalists refer to drug traffickers in their coverage.

For example, journalists often refer to criminals by their first name, last name, and alias (9); with the full name (4), as long as the criminals have a public profile and are, therefore, recognizable to the majority; with the first name and alias (3); as most recognizable (3), and even with a photograph to make it more visible; with initials (1), or just with the alias (1). In one case, we found a definitive opinion on this matter, according to which the journalist refers to the criminal in their medium "in accordance with the norm" [E11]. There are also more romantic references, as one journalist admitted to addressing them as "gunmen" [E5].

Both the subtopics associated with organized crime coverage and the way in which these events are personalized and referred to can project a mythification of the criminals and criminality, as seen in some cultural expressions in Mexico. Although not intentional, half of the journalists believe they contribute to unintentionally mythologizing criminals: "Yes, unintentionally. You can't ignore that they provide jobs, and people like them" [E6]. In this regard, drug trafficking has also brought about a narco-culture that has deeply rooted itself in Mexicans, including journalists. Therefore, although it often happens unconsciously, journalists admit to treating criminals with familiarity and even exalting them, which likely makes the message more engaging or appealing to audiences. This increasingly aligns the language used by news media with that of fictional series like those on Netflix.

On the other hand, the other half of the interviewed journalists (12) express that they try not to mythify the informants, being aware of the roles assigned to them: "No, because in my internal forum, I am clear that they are bad" [E3]. In this non-mythification approach, the key lies in the relationship with subtopics associated with the harmful effects of drug cartels in Mexico.

4.2. Expanded subjectivity. The impact of the interpretation of these types of notes

Unlike other types of coverage, in the case of organized crime, Mexican reporters acknowledge that they often have certain liberties, especially to provide texts with a greater compositional interpretation. The interviewed journalists confirm the clear separation between opinion and information; opinion is not as relevant to them, perhaps because they are all journalists who have only occasionally written opinion columns. But what is truly important for these coverages is information filtered through interpretation. Thus, in these coverages, a characteristic attribute stands out, which, following what was explained in the theoretical part, we will refer to as "expanded subjectivity," a concept that has been explained in philosophy (Adorno, 1984; Massini-Correas, 1997), psychology (Rojas, 2002), education (Montero and Gewerc, 2018), and journalism (Chillón, 2007).

In the case of the interviewed journalists, expanded subjectivity can be defined based on their own responses: "More than an interpretation, what I do from my point of view is, what can you provide to the reader to help them understand the facts" [E17].

In this way, expanded subjectivity grants the journalist the freedom to introduce an adjective or an alias to address the criminal, introduce and/or expand on the context related to the event, use rhetorical figures to provide a more didactic explanation, eliminate any stigma regarding the victim, eliminate the name of the victim or the context in which the event occurred, play with the lead of the content to intensify or de-dramatize the focus, and so on. For example: "A journalist writes based on what they see. You can manipulate information easily. That's why I say that when there's data, especially about deaths, they tell me, 'Be specific. How many are there, the names. Now just the name, not the last name. If they see that I'm trying to editorialize, they ask me how it was. 'Oh, it was the police who stormed in, and they came and beat the farmers,' and I will explain and provide the source. Objectivity depends on your perception of the event. Sometimes you're just looking straight ahead and you miss a small part" [E19]. This intersubjective phenomenon, as Chillón (2007) would describe it, also invites the introduction of the receivers' point of view, as one of the interviewees explains: "I always write about what I see and the events that happen and what people are saying. I have never given my opinion in the story" [E22]. Organized crime, more than isolated coverage associated with a violent event, shapes an imagery, a culture shared by journalists and their readers.

The expanded subjectivity, therefore, determines whether journalists adhere to objectivity as a strategic resource, which is the neutralization of coverage, or if they seek a balanced discourse to protect their physical integrity. The degree of expanded subjectivity depends on the profile of the media in which the journalists work; in a news agency, for example, it is less common than in a print or digital medium. However, the expanded subjectivity involves a differentiated treatment due to the risks associated with this news, which ultimately allows them to add more color to their stories than in other types of content: "Well, I try to be like, to keep the most distance from the text, to prioritize the voices of the interviewees or sources or whatever, but in this type of coverage, it's very complicated to completely remove yourself, right? Obviously, you provide an introduction, I mean, there's no pure objectivity, right?" [E17].

According to the interviews conducted, another common mechanism to facilitate interpretation is the serialization of coverage, which means segmenting descriptions into various approaches. In this way, the complexity of multi-causal and multi-protagonistic events is reconstructed note by note. Serialization helps readers understand treatments that, in addition to the specific violent event, often come with a previous context. The context aids in documenting the event and researching content that often originates from bulletins reported by the police or judicial authorities.

Serialization can take two forms, depending on the timing of the coverage and the interests of the target audiences. It can be continuous when events generate broad public interest based on the current situation and national interest. It can also be sporadic, to follow up on a specific topic over time.

"Expanded subjectivity, one of the main findings of this work, depends on experience, prior training, or the internal standards of the media."

Although organized crime generates significant viralization or interest from users, approximately half of the interviewed journalists claim that readers do not understand these topics related to it due to the lack of coverage of "harmful effects" [E3] or the lack of in-depth coverage of "the roots" of the phenomenon [E10]. Almost the other half of the journalists lean towards readers' understanding of the events: "Yes. It is necessary to talk about how in drug trafficking, there is not only violence. There is a culture worthy of analysis, such as their family relationships and their mobilization capacity" [E6]. Journalists seek to provide context in their stories, although sometimes it is not enough for readers and users to fully comprehend the complexity of organized crime. The interviewees themselves also acknowledge that it is impossible for them to know everything, either due to the danger involved, resource constraints, or the mystique and 'anonymity' that criminal groups possess.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Journalists covering organized crime in Mexico, as seen in the preceding pages, have greater leeway for interpretation compared to other types of journalists due to the complexity of the subject and the need for interpretation to enable their audiences to understand it. At the same time, it is essential to highlight that when interpreting, journalists can bear a high cost. In many cases, their own lives are at stake. Therefore, many of the decisions that are part of the process of developing and publishing a piece depend intimately on individual aspects of each journalist, thanks to the expanded subjectivity conferred by both the media and accepted by their audiences.

Expanded subjectivity, one of the main findings of this work, depends on experience, prior training, or the internal standards of the media. This capacity enables professionals to interpret these sensitive contents, in line with what happens in seemingly unrelated fields such as computing and computational ability (Montero and Gewerc, 2018). Expanded subjectivity is evident in basic aspects such as the orientation given to these contents, the treatment of the criminal, and the treatment of the violent event. However, this expanded subjectivity also depends on the imaginary of the readers or viewers (Chillón, 2007), based on the organized ideas within a Mexican state or social group regarding various criminal organizations. Thus, the subtopics and protagonists associated with organized crime are controversial, to the extent that these criminals can achieve high social prestige, something that can lead to the idealization of their lifestyle, which is the exact opposite of what is intended to be denounced.

In another study, we had highlighted hyperobjectivity as a fundamental narrative resource through which a meticulous reconstruction of the event is carried out to protect against potential threats (Díaz-Cerveró et al., 2022). Driven by fear and the pressures they face, as well as a desire for thoroughness, some journalists focus on providing hard data and precise descriptions. Many journalists strictly stick to the facts to avoid making assessments that could get them into trouble.

However, the flip side of the narrative coin is expanded subjectivity, which grants journalists greater compositional freedom to refer to criminal protagonists, describe the context of the event, include background information, serialize or segment coverage, and decide whether to include or omit certain details that either enhance or reduce the dramatic intensity. Expanded subjectivity does not involve using fictional or artistic resources. On the contrary, it's more about introducing the journalist's perspective to guide or redirect the focus of the information, keeping in mind that the publication of these contents makes them potential targets of threats.

As presented in the preceding pages, Mexican journalists aim to interpret information, but that interpretation can be limited in some cases, especially in areas with a stronger presence of criminal groups. For example, it is easier for a journalist working from Mexico City to interpret what happens in Tamaulipas than for one working from the state itself.

All the interviewees separate information from opinion in their stories, but they provide context to ensure that readers or users can fully understand the events they report. Nonetheless, there is a widespread perception

among the interviewees that it is difficult for a Mexican citizen to fully comprehend organized crime based on what they publish, as it is with what is published in all Mexican media in general.

In this regard, the interviewees call for more resources to reach more areas affected by organized crime, as well as greater security that would allow them to carry out their work with more freedom, so that they can focus on being rigorous and interpreting in detail and comprehensively what is happening so that Mexican citizens—and those from other parts of the world in the case of those working for international media—can understand everything related to the complex phenomenon of organized crime.

Some journalists even acknowledge and convey to the public the power that criminals have as state usurpers and their functions in certain territories of Mexico, spreading the idea that what prevails in the country is what we could call a narco-state or narco-government. Often, criminals, not the government, provide employment and welfare to the populations from which they originate or where they operate with their illegal activities. Despite its limitations, this work has potential interest. From our perspective, future publications could contextualize findings like expanded subjectivity with other journalistic phenomena or topics. It would also be relevant to include more voices among those interviewed and possibly conduct the study with a longitudinal focus to observe differences in perceptions over future presidential terms.

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Contributions of the authors:

Conceptualization: Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel, and González Macías, Rubén Arnoldo. **Methodology:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba. Software: Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel. **Validation:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel, and González Macías, Rubén Arnoldo. **Formal analysis:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, and Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel. **Data curation:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, and Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel. **Writing - Original Draft Preparation:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, and Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel. **Writing - Review and Editing:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel, and González Macías, Rubén Arnoldo. **Visualization:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, and Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel. **Supervision:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel, and González Macías, Rubén Arnoldo. **Project administration:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba. **All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript:** Díaz-Cerveró, Elba, Barredo Ibáñez, Daniel, and González Macías, Rubén Arnoldo.

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AUTHORS:

Elba Díaz-Cerveró

Panamerican University. School of Communication. Álvaro del Portillo. Zapopan, Jalisco, Mexico.

Elba Díaz Cerveró holds a Ph.D. in Journalism from the Universidad San Pablo-CEU in Madrid, and since 2013, she has worked as a research professor at the University Panamericana Campus Guadalajara in Mexico, where she also serves as the Research Director in Communication. Her primary research focus lies in journalistic coverage of violence, organized crime, and their effects. She has coordinated four books and authored three of her own. Additionally, she has published 20 indexed articles and an equal number of book chapters and has presented over 20 papers and lectures at international conferences. She is also a member of the National

System of Researchers (SNI Level II) of the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT) in Mexico.
eldiazc@up.edu.mx

H-index: 8

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0238-1498>

Scopus ID: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=57194387853>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com.mx/citations?user=BdKjEiMAAAAJ&hl=es>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Elba-Diaz-Cervero>

Academia.edu: <https://independent.academia.edu/ElbaDiazdeCervero>

Daniel Barredo Ibáñez

University of Malaga, Spain. Fudan University, China.

He is a Researcher at the Department of Journalism of the University of Malaga, Spain, and also a Visiting Researcher at the Fudan Development Institute, Fudan University, China. He holds a Ph.D. in Journalism from the University of Malaga, a master's degree and an expert in Communication, and bachelor's degrees in Hispanic Philology and Audiovisual Communication from the University of Granada. He currently directs the projects "App-Andalus," with reference number EMC21_00240, funded by the General Secretariat for Research and Innovation of the Andalusian Government (Spain), thanks to the Emergia Program; and "Suicide Risk and Media and Social Media Consumption," funded by the Social Observatory of the "La Caixa" Foundation.

daniel.barredo@uma.es

H-index: 21

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2259-0756>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=hJdDKdMAAAAJ&hl=en>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Daniel-Barredo-Ibanez>

Academia.edu: <https://uma.academia.edu/DanielBarredolbáñez>

Rubén Arnoldo González Macías

Autonomous University of Puebla, Mexico.

He is a journalist and academic. He holds a Ph.D. in Communication Studies from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. He has served as a reporter, editor, and Chief of Research at La Voz de Michoacán newspaper in Morelia, Mexico. Currently, he is a Full Professor-Researcher at the Institute of Government and Strategic Development Sciences at the Benemérita Autonomous University of Puebla, Mexico, where he also coordinates the Center for Political Communication Studies. He holds the "Perfil Deseable PRODEP" and is a National Researcher at Conacyt Level I. He was honored as the holder of the Mexico 2022 Chair at Temple University in Philadelphia, USA, where he was a visiting professor during the fall semester of that year. His expertise lies in journalism studies (professionalization, violence against the press, and journalist-source relationships) and media systems in emerging democracies.

ruben.arnoldo@correo.buap.mx

H-index: 13

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6758-5328>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ruben-Gonzalez-23>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=LQxDi30AAAAJ&hl=es>

Academia.edu: <https://buap-mx.academia.edu/RubenArnoldoGonzalezMacias>