Digital Wars: #GuacamayaLeaks and the rise of hacktivism in technopolitics

A netnography to understand the complexity of digital communication processes.

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ABSTRACT

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This master thesis explores the dynamics of information flows between the hacktivist group Guacamaya, media outlets and social media users. The study aims to understand the role of various social actors within the digital space such as media outlets, journalists, bots, and trolls, in shaping public opinion and the overall effectiveness of the group's communication activities. A netnographic methodology was employed to observe the journey and transformation of information as it travelled from the hacktivist group to journalists and eventually to social media users. Tweets were obtained purposefully, to build a media ecology with sentiments, topics and where different actors interact with the information and with each other, modifying and reinterpreting the purpose of Guacamaya. The theoretical framework draws on the concepts of technopolitics, hacktivism, information flows, the network society and gatekeeping. My findings show how the Internet is a contested territory where attention and power are disputed. They also provide evidence on the complexity of the communication process in the digital space as all interactions from all actors influence the information flow. The conclusions highlight the new media ecology environment and the multidisciplinary role of actors in the digital realm. Furthermore, they argue that hacktivism as counterpower involves more than technical skills for uncovering hidden information and demanding accountability, but also strategic reappropriation for reducing inequalities and promoting just and inclusive societies. Hopefully, this thesis contributes to understanding the potential of hacktivists groups to drive political and social change through the understanding of a new communication environment.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1990's, hacktivism has sought to call on social issues using technological activism for digital appropriation of online spaces (Lechón & Ramos, 2020). Hacktivists use advanced technological skills to contest who owns the internet, while fighting sophisticated techniques of control, surveillance, and repression (Treré, 2016). Hacktivists strive to reclaim freedom in the internet, which has become a crucial battleground for power struggles in the modern era (Castells, 1996:2004; Lechón & Ramos, 2020). However, they operate within a complex landscape where various actors exert influence and shape the power dynamics. Hence, "hacktivists are at the centre of technopolitics media activism" (Jeppesen, 2022, p. 25).

The purpose of this study is to analyse the complexity of the information flow in the digital space to understand how the main purpose of a hacktivist group might be mutating in its communication journey to mobilise online citizens through the reinterpretation of messages.

For this, the hacktivist organisation Guacamaya Roja is taken as a case study. This organisation has been exposing multiple secrets of Latin American governments and armies and as part of its communication strategy, the group has used a third party to share the information leaked to different media outlets in Latin America, which at the same time have distributed this information in social media. To see if the main message of the organisation has mutated in this process, this study uses Twitter netnography to explore how social media users interact with the information leaked by Guacamaya. This methodology will help understand:

1. How are the communication activities of Guacamaya contributing to the different flows of unification, polarisation or other among users discussing the information leaked?
2. How are the main discourses and purposes of the hacktivist organisation of Guacamaya regarding environmentalism, genocide and terricide being discussed, perceived, and reinterpreted by Twitter users?

The analysis compares the discussed topics with the organisation's stated objectives to determine if the conversation has led to social mobilisation or diffused into different discourses. The results of the following analysis contribute to explain a part of the political economy of hacktivism and technopolitics and its constant struggle to guarantee the democratisation of social media as a safe space where users can exercise their rights and obligations (Jeppesen, 2022).

2. Context

According to different media interviews, Guacamaya Roja is a group of feminist hacktivists who have been exposing multiple secrets of governments and armies in Latin American since 2022. The group has obtained hidden military archives of Chile, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico, with the purpose of exposing injustice against the Indigenous population.

Guacamaya's main critique is towards the "North American imperialism" (Guacamaya, 2022) and its military interventions, and exploitation activities that have devastated the lands of Abya Yala (name used by the Indigenous Peoples to describe the American continent). In their manifesto, shared through a site called Enlace Hacktivista, they declare that their cause is not separate from nature but an integral part of it. They condemn years of genocide, ecocide, and exploitation inflicted upon indigenous territories, cultures, and ecosystems in the continent known as "America " (Guacamaya, 2022) and they advocate for justice, demanding an end to extractivism and colonisation (Guacamaya, 2022).

The leaked information exposes evidence of surveillance by Latin American armies and governments on various "subversive groups" such as journalists, feminists, Indigenous leaders, artists, and human rights NGOs. Additionally, it shows how some investigations regarding murder, disappearances, corruption, and abuse have been obstructed or covered with false data. In the case of Mexico, the group gained access to 6 terabytes of information from the Ministry of National Defence (SEDENA), raising concerns about cybersecurity in government institutions.

According to the group, "the role of a hacker is to participate in the different forms of resistance in any territory where there is a worthy rage and a joyous desire for radical revolution" (Guacamaya, 2022). *"We are the daughters and sons of those who defended life with life itself. We are from the south, from the centre, from the north, from the Caribbean. We were, we are, and we will be in any place where the invader, the settler, the neo-coloniser the extractivist looter, violates the rights of communities and cultures, exterminating forests, rivers, and seas to accumulate what they consider wealth*" (Guacamaya, 2022), states the group in a released statement.

2.1 The Mexican case

It was September 2022 when the group published through the site Enlace Hacktivista, a manifesto that stated that countries like Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico had been

committing abuses of power and violence against their citizens. Immediately, various media outlets abroad started covering the hacking. In response to the scandal, Mexican President López Obrador accused the hacker group Guacamaya of being linked to international agencies connected to businessmen opposed to his government (AMLO, 2023).

In the case of Mexico, it was journalist Carlos Loret de Mola and his media outlet Latinus, that started covering the story and publishing several articles on the subject. This coverage was of great relevance in Mexico because of Loret's popularity as a Mexican awarded journalist and television presenter; and his leading role in Latinus, which has also gained a wide audience and great influence on the Mexican public opinion (Cortés, 2022 & Mc Phail, 2022).

When the information was distributed by Loret and Latinus, Mexican President Lopez Obrador accused Loret as well as other media outlets and journalists covering the Guacamaya Leaks case of being "paid propagandists" (López, 2022 as cited by Mc Phail, 2022) and members of the "conservative media"(López, 2022 as cited by Mc Phail, 2022) linked to the opposition and spreading false information about his government (Cortés, 2022 & Mc Phail, 2022).

And while Loret de Mola has continued defending his journalistic work, questioning the government's policies, and criticising the president for trying to silence the critical press, his credibility has been questioned on several occasions in the past. He has been accused of manipulating information and making montages in reports and news for personal gain; presenting false images in a live broadcast related to the arrest of an alleged drug leader in 2005; and even surrounded by rumours of infidelity which have put his reputation, and public image, as well as his work ethics on doubt, leading many people into mistrusting and criticising him on social media (Cortés, 2022).

3. Literature Review

The studies disclosed below in this chapter have been selected to understand the research surrounding technopolitics and hacktivism and its social impacts. However, it is important to state that they simply offer a glimpse on how the existence of a new information ecosystem has given the opportunity for the creation for a so-called oppositional public space or 'OPS' (Sierra-Caballero, 2018).

According to Lechón & Ramos (2020), the Internet as any other territory, is made up of communities, forms of government, history, rights, and specific social movements where there

is conflict, and therefore, politics is constantly produced. At the same time, just as a physical territory, the digital space has also been largely privatised and controlled, claimed to being fenced off by surveillance capitalism, governance, and monitoring borders with its own laws, which at the end have undermined its fundamental principle of freedom.

This has led to the "dispute between civil society, governments and corporations" for this space (Encuentro Chiapas, 2016 as cited by Lechón & Ramos, 2020, p. 283). In these disputes, different social movements and digital practices aim to regain control of their private date information.

Sierra-Caballero (2018) explores the internet as an arena for power contestation just as Oskar Negt's concept of Oppositional Public Space (OPS). This concept highlights the role of critical social movements and marginalised groups in influencing public discourse and political action. According to this approach, the dominant public sphere, controlled by those in power, tends to exclude the voices and perspectives of marginalised groups and minorities. In response to this exclusion, these social groups are forced to create their own spaces for public discourse and action. Therefore, these 'oppositional public spaces' represent a platform for subaltern groups to articulate their needs, demands, and visions for social change (Sierra-Caballero, 2018).

3.1 Digital appropriation as counterpower

According to Jeppesen (2022), technopolitics is all about reappropriating power through digital tools and spaces to build states of mind and notions necessary to gain power and enable collective behaviours that might end up in the urban space (Peña, 2017).

In this matter, Peña (2017) refers to technopolitics as the collective capacity to appropriate digital tools for empowerment and collective action. In his research, he analyses the transformation that technopolitical appropriation of social networks have meant in terms of mobilisation, but more importantly, how digital appropriation has contributed to strengthening the link between media activism and political action.

For instance, Morón's (2020) work helps to understand how certain groups use social media platforms to appropriate the digital space, by posting and distributing messages that expose the demands of a movement to make visible issues of gender violence and femicides in Bolivia.

In this matter, Treré et. al (2017) suggests exactly what Morón's (2020) study explains, that technopolitics includes practices such as the tactical appropriation of corporate social media

platforms (Treré et. al, 2017) used in “an effective combination with tools for internal communication to coordinate actions, build trending topics, influence the public opinion, and control the protest narrative in public spaces” (Treré, et. al, 2017, p. 412).

In this matter, Postill (2014) suggests that these group of hacktivists, or as he defines them “freedom technologists”, have performed crucial functions in almost all post-2008 protest movements across the globe reclaiming the public space, sharing slogans with protesters of other countries, hiding behind the same “Anonymous” masks (Grammatikopoulou, 2014). And while it is true that the Internet and the networks have redefined the ways of participation and activism, behind this there is a structure concerned only with the accumulation of power, in the same way it is out in the physical political plane (Peña, 2017 & Sierra-Caballero, 2018).

To support this, Peña (2017) takes Castells’ theory (2004) on Network Power to state that communication and information technologies (ICTs) as a meta-communication tool have the capacity not only for the transmission of information, but also for mobilisation and organisation of civil society on one hand, and reproduction of hegemonic power on the other.

However, Sierra-Caballero (2018) takes Fuchs’ critique on Castells (2017) to say that technopolitics needs to be understood not only as the implication of technology from the social, but rather from the political, as a problem of construction and social mediation (Sierra-Caballero, 2018).

For Peña (2017) participation is a potentiality on the Internet, not a fact in itself, recognising the capacity of individuals. Communication technologies’ counterpower lies not only in the appropriation of new technologies, but rather in "recovering people’s voice and rebuilding the community and its cultures” (Rodríguez, 2008 as cited by Peña, 2017) through the objectives of resistance and social change. In this sense, Avellaneda and Velázquez (2021) analyse different approaches that have had a place in Latin American mobilisations in search for social and political change (Avellaneda & Velázquez, 2021).

3.2 Hacktivism

There are many theoretical approaches to understand digital social movements through communication technologies. One of those approaches, and the focus of this thesis, is hacktivism, the union between hacking and activism that seeks to transform the existing social order through technological activism or technopolitics (Lechón & Ramos, 2020).

According to Jeppesen (2022) “hacktivists are at the centre of technopolitics media activism, contesting who owns the internet” (p. 25) through the dispute of ownership of code, infrastructure, and voice, and defending the Internet as a space for freedom, autonomy and sovereignty (Lechón & Ramos, 2020). The hacking part is enacted through computer code that exposes information, destroys data, or disrupts operations (George & Leidner, 2019) and the activist part comes when organising agents for social justice through civil disobedience in the digital space (Vicente, 2004 as cited by Avellaneda and Velázquez, 2021).

Hacktivism started as a project to fight internet censorship and advocate for access to information on the Internet as a universal right (Avellaneda & Velázquez, 2021). However, authors such as Jeppesen (2022) claim that hacktivism today is a movement that mobilises digital technologies to secure users’ data and communication from the state and corporate surveillance to enact digital citizenship (Jeppesen, 2022).

Grammatikopoulou (2014) describes these hacking practices as “a subversive approach to ideological and cultural information and ideas, not only within the virtual space, but also in political and artistic actions in the urban matrix” (p. 203) while other scholars such as Wray (2007) would describe these as “electronic civil disobedience” (Wray, 2007).

However, there have been previous ‘pivotal moments’ as Castells (2004) would describe them, that have forged the main purpose of hacktivist groups. For Ramírez (2018), the Zapatista movement was in many aspects the first subaltern movement that began using the Internet as a weapon, and it inaugurated a new kind of war. It was at the beginning of 1994, when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was about to come into force, an army emerged from the rainforests of Chiapas, Mexico with a war declaration to the Mexican government that circulated via fax all the way from the headquarters of the local newspaper in Chiapas, to Agence France-Presse in Paris, and later to other international media. It demanded "jobs, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice, and peace." (General Command of the EZLN, 1993). It was formed by indigenous and mestizo people mainly from the Southeast of Mexico that reclaimed what was then perhaps an ideological space through the internet, fax, and alternative media communication.

It is important to point out that the development and use of internet in Mexico was still at a very early stage in the country. However, the use of electronic communications played a key role in the diffusion of their ideals. This group managed to reappropriate the OPS at hand to call for an intercontinental anti-neoliberalism gathering that did not only speak to Latin

America but to a worldwide audience. This movement, described by Castells (2004) as the first "informational guerrilla", laid ground for hacktivist organisations to use communication technologies as a weapon to mobilise large masses of people around the world.

Such Jeppesen (2022) described, hacktivists or politically motivated hackers are different from other types of hackers because “they mobilise through technologies as a site of contestation” (p. 24) and their motivations, such as the ELZN, are driven by the pursuit of social change instead of profit. And while, it is a relatively new practice regarding activism, it has proven to empower citizens and activists in their search for truth and accountability using technologies as a source of information, protest, and connectivity to form alliances (Treré, 2016).

But while hacktivism is a form of digital appropriation of the network (and of power) if we depart from Sir Francis Bacon work (1597) about “knowledge being power”, hacktivism also provides a new way to think about different forms of organisation and creation within and out from the digital spaces. For Grammatikopoulou (2014), hackers create the possibility of new things in any production of knowledge. Regardless, there is a constant struggle or aim of this movement which is to create and provide new spaces and tools to protest on the Internet, especially for those individuals that have no access to the web and/or to these contestation platforms. Or worse, to the information shared through these (Avellaneda & Velázquez, 2021). Correspondingly, Morón (2020) reflects upon the importance of creating safe spaces online so that the digital spaces allow a more diverse and inclusive militancy in digital activism.

Wray’s (2007) studies state that some unclear aspects of hacktivism still need to be explored, however difficult to tell, such as: Where is this practice headed with the constant emergence of new technologies every day? Furthermore, Wray (2007) suggests that soon, governments might impose severe regimes that successfully truncate hacktivism. Regardless, this thesis elaborates further in which practices could be improved so that these groups go beyond the dispute for power and regain the freedom they have been striving for.

3.3 The political economy of hacktivism and technopolitics

Hacktivists have long expressed their concern and discomfort with the integration of social networks, such as the use of Facebook or Twitter, in their protest practices because of their corporate character (Treré, 2016), datafying and monetising social interactions (Jeppesen, 2022).

Given the unequal distribution of power, this controversial form of civic participation is not always enough in the effective neutralisation of abusive schemes and oppression strategies (Treré, 2016). The consequences for democracy brought by the dispute of the digital space "are a growing concern for observers, scholars, and ordinary citizens alike" (Lupu, et. al, p. 160).

As mentioned before, the internet can reproduce old practices of discrimination on its various platforms (Avellaneda & Velázquez, 2021). Jeppesen (2022) and Treré (2016) agree that to ensure that a plurality of critical voices is represented and heard, hacktivists must fight increasingly sophisticated techniques of control and repression. Lechón & Ramos (2020) offered an approach to hacktivism research in Mexico from a narrative research framework from Van Dicjk's (2016) culture of connectivity. This defines the technological ecosystem as a 'walled garden' where users are locked up in a consumption territory where they cannot venture outside (Lechón & Ramos, 2020). Their work is based on the idea of extractivism to explain the process of data collection by technology companies and even compare the current technological state as "a new phase of data colonialism that combines the predatory extractive practices of historical colonialism" (Lechón & Ramos, 2020, p. 289) with the methods of kidnapping personal data without the users' real comprehended consent. These practices violate the Internet right of freedom and access, first claimed by hacktivists, and Net neutrality, which means that all internet traffic must be treated in the same way, without discrimination or interference (Lechón & Ramos, 2020). Sierra-Caballero (2018) refers to this matter as 'the economy of attention' and describes it as an intensive process of colonisation and exploitation of the digital users. Instead of connecting the world by empowering everyone, the dispute for the digital media technologies could ultimately lead to the end of free speech around the world and seal the internet into a huge walled garden just as another dictatorship.

Likewise, Lupu et. al. (2020) explained that the notion that social media are a largely democratising force that is going to help citizens around the world hold their political leaders accountable seems unusual considering that social media, specifically, when used in the technopolitical field, offers a "platform for viral misinformation, hate speech, and the stoking of violent emotions and divisive politics" (p. 161) The dispute for the digital space has been focused on bombarding 'virtual adversaries' within the same territory with false information and provocative messages that impact people's political attitudes, reinforcing and radicalising opinions, beliefs, and values (Lupu et. al, 2020).

Technopolitics as a resistance or counterpower, or even as a political strategy, whether true or false, good intentioned or not, is often designed to evoke negative emotions like anger or fear towards something or someone. These emotions breed doubt and distrust in the information distributed online, which in a way might be good, but backfiring for digital activists as well as users become more apathetic (Lupu et. al, 2020).

Therefore, hacktivism touches on the issue of dispossession and fights to regain control of these spaces. According to hacktivists' interviews by Lechón & Ramos (2020), freedom will arrive when social networks and internet platforms can return the data to the users, "when the fenced gardens fall" (Lechón & Ramos, 2020), or as one of the utopian slogans with which hackers championed their political and social struggle: 'Internet will set us free' (Avellaneda & Velázquez, 2021). Just "as in every government, every democracy, it should be everyone's responsibility" (Lechón & Ramos, 2020, p. 280).

Ramírez (2018) concluded that the use of the Internet is an important asset, but it must be used along with traditional strategies like marches, pickets, and some other old-fashioned ways of doing activism. This, through a comparative study of communication technologies' use between the 43 Ayotzinapa movement in Mexico in 2014 and the Zapatista movement in 1994. Ramírez (2018) suggests that while technology helps to organise and gain momentum, "a strong online reaction does not necessary translate into massive and huge street protests that could undermine a government" (Ramírez, 2018, p. 9). All movements must convert 'likes' and 'replies' into a more substantial support for the cause, and deal with obstacles in a fenced battlefield. Hence, hacktivists groups must become more conscious that effective reappropriation embraces both traditional and innovative elements.

3.4 The techno-optimistic view

We have already stated that the Internet is a powerful tool for solidarity and co/involvement (Sierra-Caballero, 2018) that comes with certain (but powerful) disadvantages. However, some studies such as Lupu, et. al. (2020) or Morón (2020) suggest that politics are playing out on social media platforms and communication technologies as never before. Governments rely on these platforms to put out their messages and energise supporters, but also a huge number of citizens are turning to social media channels as a bridge, as a tool and as a source of political engagement (Lupu, et. al, 2020).

For instance, Avellaneda and Velázquez (2021) offer a glimpse of the hacktivism and hackfeminism work from Soria Guzmán et al. (2016) which focuses on the irruption of codes to promote safe digital spaces and the premise of 'free internet'. The conclusion is that hacktivism is not only about digitally appropriating information to offer access to all, but to use the spaces of the Internet, despite being controlled, to generate collective action (Avellaneda and Velázquez, 2021). Hackfeminism refers to a combination between hacking practices and feminist activism using new technology communications, DIY (Do It Yourself) culture, and open-source principles for political participation and freedom of expression (Soria Guzmán et al. 2016). Similarly, Morón (2020) analysed the connectivity and technopolitical process that built the "Ni Una Menos Bolivia" movement on Facebook in the beginning of 2016, with the sole goal of helping feminist activism respond to femicide and violence against women in the country. Morón (2020) states that the technopolitical process and connectivity that built this movement in Bolivia was vital to further understand the roles that other feminist movements in Latin America used as groundwork to bring other women together in response to gender-based violence in the region.

Considering this, it would be mistaken for hacktivism to classify networks as technologies incapable of social change only because of their capitalist nature (Peña, 2017). While it might be difficult and pose a lot of obstacles regarding freedom and reach, these technologies also offer a flexible space where people communicate and interact. Exploiting their nature could lead to a networked counterpower (Peña, 2017). Morón (2020), for instance, explains that the use of hashtags or labels within social networks allows for the development of a civic, political, social, economic discourse and engagement. Hence, social media technologies are a strategic tool that can be used as "a reaction to a public policy, as a means of collective expression of discontent, as a means of publishing unknown information, or absent from public discussion or traditional media and as a space for citizen mobilisation" (Merino, 2001 as cited by Morón, 2020, p. 62) Hence, hacktivism should consider a new stage of appropriation of social networks that leads to the creation of new platforms, or the hijacking of the old ones (Peña, 2017).

Castells (2004) talks about this opportunity as "a pivotal moment in the history of political communication: where individuals and activists, armed with their mobile phones and connected to the Internet, are able to put into operation powerful communication networks" (Castells, 2004 as mentioned by Peña, 2017, p. 64). Just as Castells (2004), Morón's (2020) observations conclude, that the role of individuals within the digital space, is born from "a

participatory logic that turns them into receivers, consumers, producers and participants in the culture of connectivity" (Morón, 2020, p. 73).

3.5 Internet is dialectic

According to Barassi (2015), when approaching the study of technology practices, it is important to consider the historical development of the internet as a "chronicle of contradictions" (p.7). This refers to while internet technologies were becoming new forms of capitalist exploitation and accumulation during the 1990's and 2000's, they were also becoming "non-hierarchical tools that challenged the globalisation of capitalism" (Barassi (2015, p. 7).

For instance, Grammatikopoulou (2014) states that technology development has caused a disproportionate optimism regarding political change through collective activism online and offline. It is this focus on the ideal of freedom online and a constantly repeated discourse regarding human rights on the internet that can lead both to transform and promote an open culture and transparent governing, while disguise corporate interests and shady political activities.

Considering the above techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic views, hacktivists in the current technopolitical scenario should consider the technoambivalent approach to digital technologies proposed by Treré (2016). This critical analysis of social and political phenomena in Mexico reveals how political parties and governments employ new methods of algorithmic repression, manufacturing consent, and monitoring citizens. But more importantly, it highlights the need for hacktivists to combat these sophisticated techniques of control and repression.

The technoambivalence approach from Treré (2016) recognises both the power of existing hegemonies and the agency of individual and collective actors. In this matter Peña (2017) states that hacktivists must understand the technological phenomenon of the Internet and networks beyond reductionism: Not falling into the idealisation of social participation nor detracting from the structural relations of power, just as Peña's (2017) conclusions, that state that social networks for activists must be understood from a dialectical way. They are subject to corporate dynamics, but also have the potential to be appropriated as counter-power generation elements (Peña, 2017).

3.6 The case of Latin America

In Latin America, there is still a large share of the population who has limited access to political information through digital media. Lupu, et. al. (2020) found that a fragile democracy in developing countries, such as Mexico, Brazil or Colombia might also play a vital role in the effects of the digital media dispute, which might also be backfiring for hacktivists. This research shows that "people are more likely to believe misinformation when they already have less trust in their political system and when political polarisation is high" (Lupu, et. al. 2020, p. 169).

To assess how social media are shaping democratic attitudes and electoral politics in Latin America, Lupu, et. al. (2020) examined national campaigns in Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador, and Mexico and discovered that greater exposure to these platforms fostered prodemocratic attitudes but increased mistrust as well. Hence, Lupu, et. al. (2020) explains that on the one hand, digital-media users are more committed to political diversity and democratic politics, but on the other, frequent exposure to false claims and often hateful discourses spread on these spaces can breed dissatisfaction and distrust not only towards political or democratic institutions, but to media, other users, and non-profit organisations, including activists.

In this sense, Treré and Barranquero (2017) propose a further dialogue between North and South to produce wider perspectives and understandings in the new practices of technological activism and socio-political change. Their suggestion is based on the connections that online activism and technopolitics have forged through cases of transnational dialogue, specifically between the Latin American progressive legacy and the new wave of Spanish municipalism. Two political movements that emerged after economic crises and social movements that aimed to create new models of local governance based on citizen participation, transparency, environmental rights and social justice through the use of social media and new technologies to engage citizens in decision-making.

Treré and Barranquero (2017) suggest that Latin American and Global South approaches to the concept of technopolitics represent "a fruitful path to keep exploring the relation between politics, social movements and information technologies" (p. 50) despite their differences with the Global North. This approach withstands technological deterministic discourses while bringing to the forefront concepts of freedom, access, development and social justice: "We believe that further dialogue needs to be established between traditions and 'schools of thought'

to advance towards a deeper understanding of the emergence of new political structures when activists and social movements appropriate technologies for political purposes" (Treré & Barranquero, 2017, p. 60).

3.7 Research gap

The previous studies examined the relationship between politics, social movements, and information technologies, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects of the digital space. They explore the opportunities social media networks offer for activism and mobilisation, aware of the challenges faced by hacktivists. Hacktivism has been defined by the concept of reappropriation (Jeppesen, 2022). However, reappropriation in the digital realm raises questions about how activists can effectively lead mobilisations and protests in virtual spaces and confined platforms. Therefore, it is first important to understand the dynamics of information and attention flows within the media ecology; to understand the concept of reappropriation in the digital world and its complexity.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how communication activities and strategies of hacktivist organisations are interpreted and reshaped by various media actors within social media. This, to understand how power dynamics are contested not only between corporate and state institutions and hacktivists, but also among users and other actors present in the digital sphere. By doing this, this study aims to shed light on considering new communication strategies for hacktivists organisations to make effective reappropriation, that can bring socio-political change and freedom in an environment governed by censorship and surveillance.

4. Theoretical Framework

This chapter elaborates on different theories regarding communication processes, gatekeeping, and the intersection of technopolitics and hacktivism. The aim is to explain the complexity of the current communication environment in which information is produced, developed, shared, and socialised into practices.

First, it is important to consider the elements of the communication process first conceptualised by Shannon and Weaver in "The Mathematical Theory of Communication" in 1998 as a basis to understand the role of each social actor within the media ecology (Diagram 1).

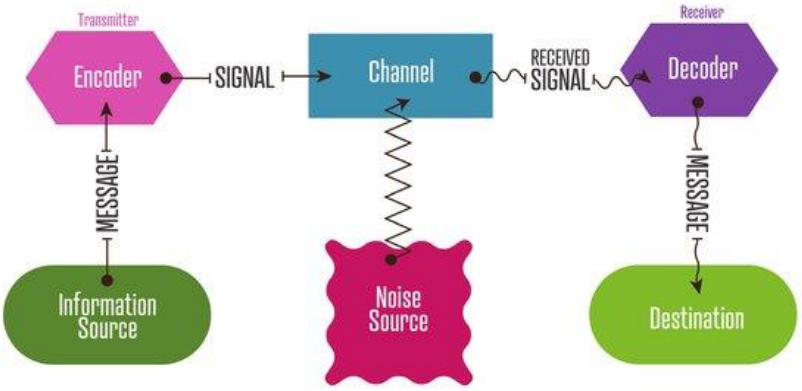

Diagram 1: Shannon and Weaver model of communication made by Mortezaei, V. (2020)

This model involves key elements in information transmission: source (origin of the message), message (information transmitted), encoder (converts message into a suitable signal), signal (transformed version of the message), channel (medium for signal transmission), decoders/receivers (interpret and redistribute the message), and destination (endpoint where the received signal is decoded). The destination is the intended recipient, concluding the communication process for effective understanding (Shannon & Weaver, 1998).

It is important to understand that communication is an historical, evolving, and ongoing process (Sartoretto, 2015). Digital tools have now changed the ecology of the public sphere and have profoundly reshaped the architecture of connectivity. The communication process today is ‘a much more complex enterprise where the construction of reality is effected through communication (Sartoretto, 2015).

4.1 The Network Society

The post-modern era has been subject to an explosion of horizontal networks of communication that have allowed people to communicate with each other without going through channels independent from social institutions such as media business and governments. According to Manuel Castells' Network Society (1996:2004), these networks enable individuals and groups to communicate and exchange information globally and simultaneously, transcending geographical boundaries.

In this context, communication becomes more decentralised and multidirectional, with users actively participating in creating and sharing messages (Castells, 2004). Activist organisations and social movements both online and offline can now take advantage of these technologies

and the benefits offered by the Internet to achieve their goals and challenge power groups (Sartoretto, 2015; Lindgren, 2013)

These new communication technologies provide the possibility of accessing greater quantities of information, and the transformation of economic and social relations (Castells, 2004). This explains why social media platforms are considered key channels for the dissemination of information and the formation of public opinion. Better known as ICTs, they have also given rise to self-generated content, which refers to the ability of individuals to create and disseminate their own content, to anyone at any given moment. Therefore, the network society is "a social structure" interconnected by nodes, operating, processing, and distributing information through social digital networks" (Castells, 2004, p. 7). This view states that technology might be necessary for the emergence of a new form of social organisation based on networking, amidst not sufficient for social change.

4.2 Information Flows

The theory of information flows suggests that online networks can connect people globally and increase social participation (Castells, 2004). Hence, new media environments are made of flows and interconnected nodes of communication, that vary in speed and intensity, creating a dense and chaotic communication space. As technology advances, media environments become more complex and interconnected (Krotz, 2007, as mentioned by Sartoretto, 2015).

Tufekci (2017) explains these flows as a city, where the network has an architecture of itself, and all traffic signs, roads or passersby affects how we navigate these structures, including those places that need remodelling or that do not offer easy access to users (Diagram 2).

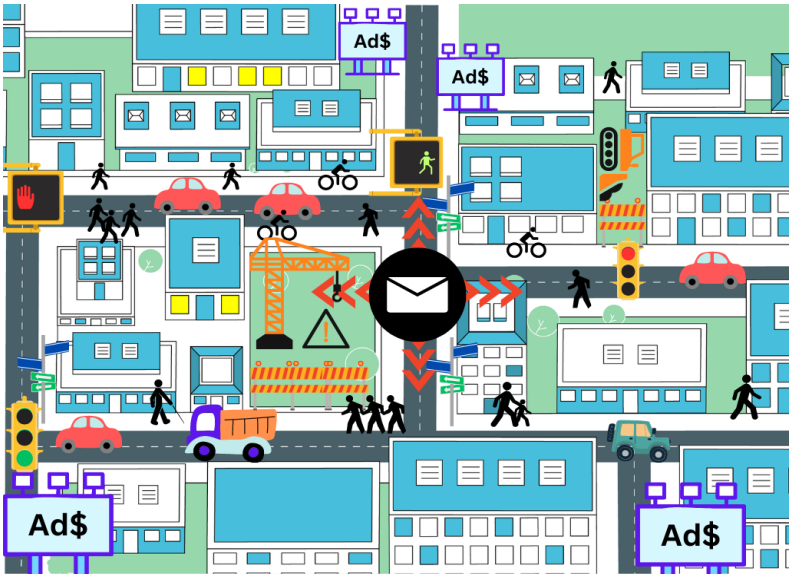

Diagram 2: The network is a structure where all actors are involved in how a message is distributed and interpreted. Modified by Viviana Levet with vector from:

The complexity of the system is not exclusive from the digital age. The Internet did not magically create non-hierarchical, horizontal interconnected networks. Each of these communicational functionalities can "enable, facilitate, complicate, and/or modify communication processes" (Sartoretto, 2015, p. 68) playing a key role in how social interaction arises. This chaotic structure is an extension of many social existing structures which in many cases are unequal (Lindgren, 2013).

Historian Melvin Kranzberg first law of technology established that "Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral" (Kranzberg as cited by Tufekci, 2017, p. 124). Within the same chaotic world of the digitally networked public spheres where ordinary citizens can generate and spread content, new forms of power based on the control of information flows have also emerged.

4.3 Cyber arenas: The battle for attention and control

To this day, some dynamics of power in the new media world remain unchanged. Media, politicians, corporations, and other powerful figures are still forces that manipulate our perceptions of political matters both in cyberspace and real-world settings (Maratea, 2014). And while digital communication processes and practices can help challenge these hegemonic groups in society (Sartoretto, 2015), simply having an online presence does not translate to political nor social change (Maratea, 2014).

This tension between elite groups, media and activists over the internet is not new nor exclusive of the networked sphere (Sartoretto, 2015). Historically, very powerful elite groups have been

in control of the public flow of information in society, while individuals have been passive consumers of information presented by mainstream media agencies (Maratea, 2014). The same players playing in a different board, where social reality is in a perpetual state of negotiation (Tufekci, 2017 & Maratea, 2014) and that operate on one key resource: Attention.

Therefore, the internet has become a contested territory where digital wars take place between different stakeholders. Users, regardless of their intentions to promote social change or participate in social movements, will inevitably find themselves in competition with others who are seeking to control or influence information flows.

In the case of social media, platforms operate under a variety of business interests and conditions. These platforms have explicit policies about the type of content that is allowed or forbidden, (Tufekci, 2017), and are mostly driven by financial concerns controlled by a small number of companies financed by advertising and interests that in most cases do not align with the activists' values. At the same time, these channels have become too politically relevant and influential to be easily ignored (or prohibited) (Tufekci, 2017). Today, it is much harder for a government to shut down Internet access or ban social media, without driving attention to those who are being censored. In the end, "repression is a potent tool for getting attention" (Tufekci, 2017, p. 231). In repressive regimes, the act of tweeting can require immense courage, whereas participating in street protests may pose fewer challenges in "more advanced democracies" (Tufekci, 2017, p. xxvi).

The power of these social media platforms relies on 'weak ties' which refer to the connections or relationships formed on social media that are often established with acquaintances, distant friends, or individuals with whom one has limited offline contact (Tufekci, 2017). These ties are more likely to be the bridges between disparate groups; becoming key in spreading information, mobilising collective action, and facilitating the flow of information across diverse networks and users by reaching a wider audience beyond closed social circles. This has an important implication for politics in the era of digital connectivity because it implies that through social media, individuals can access and share political information with communities they might not have direct contact with.

*"*The revolution in technology has created a new geography of power relations (CAE 1994, as cited by Jordan & Taylor, 2005, p. 2). As global society becomes more dependent, socially, politically, and economically on digital technologies, the power and desire of those who can disrupt and manipulate information flows also increases (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). This desire

has become evident in virtual spaces, both in actions to control cyberspace and actions to affect offline life through the actions made through the digital space. Individuals and social movements must submerge in the electronic space if there is to see a counterpower within it (p. 2).

4.3.1 Trolls and bots

Online media platforms are also susceptible to various actors who do not belong to any powerful elite groups but who can significantly influence and alter the flow of information within the digital realm. These actors can take different forms, such as informal spokespersons with a significant number of followers, that engage in targeted harassment campaigns against political causes (Tufekci, 2017). Users who deliberately make provocative comments to incite violent dialogues, better known as trolls. According to Tufekci (2017), these often are “just bored individuals” (p. 179) who derive pleasure from provoking activists or journalists, while others are government-sponsored individuals paid to shape the information accordingly. Their purpose is not to engage in constructive dialogue but solely to upset people. Meanwhile, ‘bots’ defined by Michael L. Mauldin in the early 1990s, are automated accounts programmed to spread information, manipulate online discussions, distort public opinion, and/or create false illusions of support or resistance in the digital space while interacting with real users in naturally human ways (Tufekci, 2017).

4.4 Technopolitics: The politicisation of digital media or the digitalisation of politics?

“The internet is no longer simply a tool; it has become an inseparable part of economic, social, and cultural processes" (Lindgren, 2013, p. 67) as well as the political ones. The cultural practices and behaviours that have emerged around digital technologies, such as the use of social media, has not only transformed how people communicate and share information, but has allowed users to manage political change. Therefore, it is crucial to “place communicative processes and media practices within a political landscape” (Sartoretto, 2015, p. 74). In this landscape, communication technologies are not just tools that shape our society and play a key role in political processes, but also ‘cultural forms’ through which we engage in media practices and start political discussions (Williams 1980, as mentioned by Sartoretto, 2015).

Politics have always been influenced by the way people communicate with each other. Today, all political processes are undergoing a transformation in which the space where we exchange ideas and opinions shapes our political beliefs and actions. However, it's important to note that

what is said in this space does not automatically determine what people think or do. Research shows that individuals interpret messages in their own unique ways, highlighting the interactive nature of communication (Castells, 2004).

In the digital age, people engage in the digitalisation of politics by using digital media to access political information, organise activities, and express their opinions. Simultaneously, digital media has become a space for political conflict and debate, known as the politicisation of digital media. Technopolitics examines how digital media shapes politics and how politics, in turn, influence communication on digital platforms (Lindgren, 2013).

4.5 Hacktivism: Activism gone electronic.

Hacktivism, as explained by Jordan and Taylor (2004), refers to the rise of self-driven political activism in the digital realm. It involves blending grassroots political protest with computer hacking, resulting in a new form of civil electronic disobedience in virtual spaces (Wray, 2007). Civil electronic disobedience refers to nonviolent resistance acts or protests in the digital realm using digital tools to challenge established systems, or authorities in pursuit of social or political change (Wray, 2007). Meanwhile, direct action politics refers to a form of political activism where individuals or groups take immediate and often confrontational actions to address social or political issues, instead of relying on traditional channels. This fusion of technology and direct political action aims to reshape traditional modes of activism, extending their reach and impact beyond physical boundaries.

Initially, hacking was designed for the reappropriation of technology's potential within subcultures that challenged mainstream norms and values (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). The term derived from the word 'hack', initially associated with negative connotations regarding illegal computer break-ins. The early hacktivist was a hacker who wanted to promote free access to computers and information to improve democratic practices among society. The first hacktivists were radical guerrilla hackers who sought to bring computing power to the people (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). For them, "information technology was an instrument of democratic politics" (Roszak 1986: 138 as cited by Jordan & Taylor, 2004, p. 13) Today, hacktivists are described as activists navigating the digital realm and using their technological skills to influence and shape both the online and offline world" (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). They work within cyberspace to extend their influence beyond the digital sphere and make an impact in real-life situations (Jordan & Taylor, 2004).

There are different types of hacktivism according to different authors. This research focuses on Jordan and Taylor´s (2004) 'mass action hacktivism', because it is mostly related to the anti-globalisation movement and because it helps understand how online protests consider the imperfection of technologies to push for social change.

Mass action hacktivism combines traditional social movement protest techniques with the intangible realm of information to create a unique form of technopolitics. However, cyberspace does not operate under the same social and cultural rules as the offline world. Bringing civil disobedience into the digital realm involves finding a balance between the tangible nature of traditional protests and the intangible nature of the Internet (Jordan & Taylor, 2004; Wray, 2007). There are difficulties in making this type of protest work effectively in the digital world and achieving the desired impact in the offline one, like social or political change. In cyberspace, where physical presence and influence are lacking, individuals need to find ways to embody their actions to make an impact online.

"A perfect social media platform without users is worthless for activism" (Tufekci, 2017, p. 21), and the perfect social media platform with users, simply does not exist. Mass action hacktivism suggests then that hacktivists intentionally use these imperfect technologies to challenge the status quo and bring about political change, as "technology's limitations can be a catalyst for meaningful social change" (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, p. 89)

Technology and the principles of hacktivism have a shared purpose: to challenge established power structures and promote transparency by uncovering hidden truths and holding powerful entities accountable for their actions. This is why hacktivism has earned several supporters that claim that the release of classified materials is free speech (Maratea, 2014). For instance, several civil rights advocates and watchdog groups that see hacktivism as a platform to defend Internet's freedom or techno-optimists who consider hacktivism as an important guardian of free speech and social justice (Maratea, 2014). Nonetheless, even with the power of online technology, the effectiveness of political activism still relies on people paying attention and valuing the message and the person delivering it. If no one listens or takes the claims seriously, information becomes insignificant.

4.6 Gatekeeping and media logic

Since the beginning of time, media have enabled, complicated, and modified communication and its environment as they are situated in between individuals, groups, and institutions in the

communicative process (Sartoretto, 2015). Therefore, media outlets and journalists are a powerful force in shaping popular perceptions about social issues as they function as a cultural filter: They determine what is culturally relevant for the rest of society and what is not (Maratea, 2014). Regardless of how much authority we think we have when choosing the content that we consume in cyberspace, media ultimately moulds our perspectives of reality because it makes us aware of issues and disregard others (Maratea, 2014).

This process by which information is filtered and controlled by those in power is defined as "gatekeeping" (Maratea, 2014). When news is created, it goes through a series of steps before it reaches the audience. These steps involve different people and processes that can shape and influence the information. Journalists invariably decide which claims, issues, and events are more newsworthy than others, and the decisions made on what stories to report serves to control the flow of information (Maratea, 2014). The way in which journalists frame matters strongly influences our individual and collective responses and opinions (Maratea, 2014). All the issues and claims ignored and disregarded as non-important by the media, will tend to be just as ignored or perceived as not important by the public as well. Media often operates with a framework of mainstream views.

News workers also shape claims when they highlight a political or social issue and align narratives with our moral values, not only to resonate with like-minded individuals but to spark criticism among those who disagree. The way in which “news tends to be framed as public drama” (Maratea, 2014, p. 99), is called media logic. Many journalists focus on stories that involve “conflict, outrage, and novelty” (Maratea, 2014, p. 23) precisely to get the public's attention.

The rise of the internet and new communication technologies has only exacerbated this media logic of prioritising sensationalism over meaningful content, which ends up influencing our perception of reality, “even if the information presented lacks depth or accuracy” (Altheide, 2022, as mentioned by Maratea in p. 101). Nonetheless, this media logic can also help collaborations between journalists and activist groups to be very effective and a powerful source of political strength. In most cases, claims-makers and activist organisations provide media outlets with dramatic storylines and visuals that help news media outlets direct public attention. In this way, journalists can verify facts and dig through a substantial number of documents, ensuring that the most politically significant information is shared with the public. The media needs stories, preferring the dramatic; while to be heard, “activists and movements

need publicity for recruitment, support, and political pressure" (Gitlin, 1980 as mentioned by Maratea in p. 41). Hence, media sponsorship can contribute to the success of a movement.

But just as social media platforms evolve, so do gatekeeping dynamics. Platforms like Twitter are now implementing algorithms and filters that can be now influenced by corporations and powerful individuals, affecting the flow of information (Tufekci, 2017). This algorithmic filtering or governance can produce complex effects such as more social polarisation. Thus, activists online will have to contend with these new rules and systems imposed by platforms (Tufekci, 2017).

As a result, the digital sphere has become fragmented, confusing, and divided, leading to an environment where different opinions clash and dissenting voices face hostility. This fragmentation undermines meaningful political discourse, making it difficult to engage in constructive discussions and find common ground to make decisions.

4.6.1 Truthiness

The role of journalism is supposed to serve, but as all human practices, it will always be imperfect in practice (Tufekci, 2017). Stephen Colbert invented the word 'truthiness' in 2005 to describe the "truth that comes from the gut" without consideration of facts, logic, and intellectual scrutiny (Meyer, 2009 as mentioned by Maratea, 2014 in p. 19).

Today, modern news coverage allows news workers to "interject themselves into storylines by taking moral and ideological stands on how we should interpret issues of social and political importance" (Altheide 1992 as cited by Maratea, 2014, p. 17). This kind of reporting places the journalist as the central figure in their own narrative while blending facts and opinions. Journalist Hunter S. Thompson called these types of journalists 'gonzo' back in the 1970s (Maratea, 2014). Rather than critically assess the claims made by political figures, gonzo journalists engage with their analysis on a personal level and impress their own personal political views upon audiences instead of remaining objective (Maratea, 2014). They "present political issues as a form of entertainment, while positioning themselves as moral crusaders who dictate what we should believe and whose ideas we should support" (Altheide, 1992 as cited by Maratea, 2014 in p. 18).

Thus, in the online world, credibility is not determined by the source, platform, or content itself, but rather by how it is perceived by the individual receiving the information (Maratea, 2014 & Tufekci, 2017). Traditional journalism continues to exert influence in the networked spheres,

while fostering “an environment of mistrust in all information shared through intermediaries in the digital space” (Tufekci, 2017, p. 40). Reality ends up then taking shape when journalists elect to disregard certain claims and circulate others that invoke preferred cultural values, beliefs, and norms. Gatekeeping practices have contributed to the declining of trust in traditional media, making the digital sphere even more vulnerable to disinformation campaigns.

Additionally, the existing atmosphere of distrust makes it challenging for people to navigate through information and discern what is true and what is a hoax. There is so much content competing for attention, that it is hard to tell what is true and verified, from what is speculation or false, regardless of if it is due to an honest mistake or deliberate willing for misinformation. Users tend to lean towards sources that ideologically match with their beliefs and become sceptical of everything they see online to protect themselves from an overwhelming amount of information (Tufekci, 2017). To determine which news is truly significant and separate it from trivial matters demands keeping up with and evaluating an overwhelming amount of information daily (Tufekci, 2017).

Together, these concepts shed light on the complex dynamics, power relations, and socio-political implications that shape information flows and the practice of hacktivism in the digital realm.

5. Methodology

At the beginning of this chapter, the methodology of netnography and its implications for the research and the researcher are briefly explained. Further, main concepts surrounding this methodology such as consociality, audience and topical cluster networks will be disclosed for better understanding of the analysis.

This research employs a netnography as proposed by Kozinets (2015) with a combination of social monitoring and listening tools to examine the discussions generated on Twitter regarding the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks. These discussions will naturally lead to the categorisation or coding of topics contained in the collected data. A second stage with a network analysis will take place to map the information flow in Twitter regarding the same topic to see how the communication ecology was built before, during and after the hashtag appeared.

Consociality as Kozinets (2015) describes it is “a conceptualised reference to what is held in common by members rather than in oppositional categories between insiders and outsiders” (Amit & Rapport, 2002 as mentioned by Kozinets, 2015 p.11). In simpler words “consociality is about what we share” (p.11) that could be in many cases, cultural, social, and economic factors such as identities, race, religion, ethnicity, or gender. Applied to online space, this notion applies simply because one registers as a member of a social media platform and then posts into an online group or community. However, this does not mean the user becomes a member of the community.

For Kozinets (2015) audiences can connect with each other even though their opinions are different form the others, as well as the topic remains the same. Another important source of connection in sharing of interests. If two people don't know each other, but they both use the same hashtag, they share something even if their opinions are very polarised from each other.

5.1 Netnography

A netnography, as defined by its pioneer Robert V Kozinets (2015) is a “set of related data collection online, ethical and representational analysis that tries to explain a social phenomenon through the observation of online social interaction and/or content” (Kozinets, 2015, p.53)

Netnographic research also allows the possibility of “using different computational methods for data collection, analysis, word recognition, coding and visualisation” (p. 79) to explain online sentiment, behaviour or even mobilisation in digital platforms or forums.

According to Kozinets (2015), a netnography consists of the researcher observing a phenomenon from an outside position, which progressively moves inwards through interactions, closer observations and analysis of replies, responses, and interactions between online users (p. 85). In the case of this study, this progression will be taken from a passive role, through mere observation of the online interactions.

This study also considers that social media is a complex and diverse space in which information ranges from the social to the informational interaction while offering genuine feelings, concerns, causes, perspectives and meanings regarding a social issue or topic. However, this research is also aware that this landscape also targets “idiosyncratic needs” (p.17) that encourage users into participating and interacting in a certain way. For instance, in the specific case of Twitter, scholars such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe a non-linear,

interconnected, and dynamic system of relationships, in which nodes are connected by multiple and constantly evolving pathways which similarly behave either in a ‘synaptic behaviour’, referring to the multiple connections made by neurons in the human brain or 'rhizomes'. This approach helps us consider the complexity of relationships that exist between users, content, and broader social and cultural contexts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

5.2 Data collection

To better understand how the leaked information was shared and communicated, this chapter presents and describes the data collected for analysis. It also explains the reasons behind the data selection, including the timing and purpose of the choices made. Information on the specific channels and receivers that were chosen to capture as many relevant variables as possible, is also provided. The chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the research quality and the reliability of the obtained material, acknowledging any potential biases that could have influenced the results.

For the collection of data, a process of searching, reading, and observing Twitter interactions was performed. Messages published on Twitter during September and October 2022 were documented using image captures or screenshots. This was done to preserve the evidence of the tweets and prevent their deletion from the platform. The collected data aimed to explore how the flow of information evolved from the hacktivist organisation Guacamaya to media outlets, journalists, and eventually to the receivers. It also facilitated an examination of the relationships between users, hacktivist groups, media outlets, and the technopolitical dynamics within Twitter.

This analysis employed an inductive approach, which means that the coding and categorisation of the content was not predetermined, but instead developed during the analysis. This allowed the researcher to purposefully sample and select material that could answer the research questions. Additionally, it helped to narrow the scope of the search and define a criterion that excluding posts that did not contribute to the study, such as those containing swearwords or advertisements misusing the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks for promotional purposes. This approach also helped the researcher’s bias to minimise their initial bias and maintain a more objective perspective throughout the study while exploring specific topics and sentiments.

The initial focus of the study was to trace the original and first tweet that included the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks in September 2022. This tracking served as a starting point for investigating

the subsequent responses generated after the hashtag emerged. However, this approach also led to an inductive exploration of findings as the study progressed. Furthermore, the study provided a comprehensive overview of the overall number of discussions that arose since the hacktivist group leaked the information to the Mexican media outlet 'Latinus'. This broader perspective aimed to present a complete picture of the discussions surrounding the hashtag.

The data for this study was collected using two primary social media tools, Brandwatch and Twitter Advanced Search. Brandwatch was employed to gain a general overview of the discussions and topics that emerged after the leak of information by the hacktivist group Guacamaya to the Mexican media outlet 'Latinus'. It enabled the tracking of all the tweets containing the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks, providing a starting point to explore the responses generated since the hashtag's outbreak. The use of this social media listening tool facilitated the retrieval of historical data related to the number of tweets, approximate reach, engagement, and overall sentiment.

Later, an advanced search on Twitter Analytics tools was conducted to identify the first tweets and discussions concerning the leaked information. This allowed for a more focused examination of the responses and provided insights into the early stages of the hashtag's dissemination on Twitter.

The use of Twitter Analytics implicated a more selective and purposeful search through the use of keywords, dates, names and hashtags related to the leak (and which were provided by the first tool as well) such as “Guacamaya”, “hacktivist”, “hackers”, “army”, “hacking”, SEDENA, Loret #Guacamayazo, #SpyingArmy, #SedenaLeaks *(in Spanish “Guacamaya”, “hacktvista”, “hackers”, “ejército”, “hackeo”, “SEDENA”, “Loret”, #Guacamayazo, #EjércitoEspía, #SedenaLeaks).* It provided a much closer look into the data and allowed for a cautious more thorough selection.

Kozinets (2015) suggests that as a social media platform, Twitter provides a great amount of data that can be used to analyse user behaviour, communication patterns, and cultural trends. However, he also notes some limitations of the platform for netnographic studies as findings may not be representative of the larger population and that the public nature of Twitter conversations may lead to censorship or incomplete information, as users may be reluctant to share sensitive or personal information in a public forum or even encouraged by anonymity to share posts that do not reflect reality but promote hate speech and violence.

So, while Twitter netnography can be a valuable tool for studying online cultures and communities just as Kozinets (2015) suggests, this study is aware of the platform's limitations and potential biases, just as in other ethnographic studies regarding human behaviours.

Finally, the context provided to analyse this case reflects the tensions and challenges of media freedom, political accountability, and democratic governance in Mexico. None of the data selected was made to support nor disregard any of the parties involved, but to highlight the need for a critical perspective that raises questions about the role of journalists, media owners, digital users and even hacktivist organisations in shaping public opinion and influencing political outcomes.

5.3 Empirical Material

In a first stage, 182 tweets were selected among different Twitter users, both media, journalists, and individuals between the period of 30 September and 30 October 2022. This scope was also limited to Spanish tweets focused on the Mexican case specifically. And while the first focus was on tracking the original and first tweet containing the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks in September 2022, other factors such as keywords and main users, were considered along with the observation, which resulted in a wider selection of tweets.

In total, 39 tweets were chosen and categorised based on individual actors involved. Some overlap in this selection:

- 2 tweets are original tweets by media outlet Latinus (@latinus_us) identified as the first original posts using the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks following the leak. These tweets served as the catalyst for a following search.
- 5 tweets are original tweets from different users (@drok3r, @AlbertoEscorcia, @hiramcoop, @anonopshispano, @isagvh) selected as they sparked a discussion thread consisting of several tweets. Some of these enumerated the scandals that emerged after the information leak, while others provided analysis on cybersecurity and the flow of information in the digital sphere.
- 2 tweets from media outlet El Universal (@El_Universal_Mx), one of the biggest and most influential newspapers in Mexico, conservative oriented.
- 30 responses to the first original tweets from @CarlosLoret and @latinus_us to analyse (1) how the aim of the hacktivist organisation, and its flow through media outlets and

journalists contributes to the reinterpretation of the original information, and (2) to reveal concerns, and sentiments from Mexican society regarding the information leaked.

In addition, 7 fake accounts created anonymously, and which allegedly posted as the hacktivist organisation Guacamaya Roja were selected for the analysis. While they are part of a different category in between original tweets and user accounts, they endorsed and amplified on the information, provided different information and contributed to the media ecology formation regarding the #GuacamayaLeaks discussion.

5.4 Data analysis and mapping

In the realm of social media, there are various ways to understand and conceptualise the media landscape (Kozinets, 2015). The primary focus on this research was on the topics to analyse how individuals engage with the content and reinterpret information, while sharing it with other users.

Kozinets (2015) explained that "audiences are more than a network, and that these are more like information distributors, conduits and intermediaries who spark the discussions between their immediate network from a piece of news shared" (p. 39). Therefore, this study considers that mapping on the evolution of certain topics could help us understand the relevance of some topics over others.

The process used to analyse the data collected from Twitter started with a thorough reading and searching of posts, as well as with the identification of each user as stakeholder in the media ecology, the topics addressed and the overall sentiment of the post.

Afterwards, a task of coding was performed to categorise identified patterns and themes, to build a communication ecology map, that provides insight on how the information flow behave and mutated throughout the different communication stages: From the hacktivist organisation manifesto in Enlace Hacktivista site, to the media outlet Latinus and journalist Loret, to final digital receivers that interacted with the information through reinterpretations, discussions, and, finally, the creation of a hashtag to englobe it all. This mapping also helps understand the communication ecology between the hacktivist group, the media outlets, and the social media users, and how discourses mutated through this ecology.

5.4.1 Comparison analysis

To understand how the information fluctuated between each of the communication stakeholders, this study compares the information at different communication stages, to spot similarities and differences in the discourses, aims and concerns from hacktivists, media outlets and journalists, and finally Twitter users. This comparison includes Guacamaya Roja's hacking manifesto, research on interviews given by its hacktivists to media outlets, media coverage on the information leaked, background notes on the Mexican context regarding the tensions between the Mexican government and the media, information regarding the active users discussing the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks and overall sentiment of the same users and public opinion.

5.5. Ethical considerations and limitations

Kozinets (2015) claims that it is important to understand netnography as an approach to guide a further and deeper analysis rather than a set method with a toolkit of practices. This study departs from the acknowledgment that there are many limitations that urge for a non-generalisation of its conclusions. Such limitations are time, sampling quantity and potential personal biases, as well as in the data collection from Twitter, which could be omitting important information due to the limitations of netnographic methods.

Communication technologies and social media platforms have created opportunities for social sciences' researchers to access and analyse available data that is publicly disclosed to study a range of topics and issues. In Twitter, personal data are publicly accessible, and not only do they contain on several occasions the name and the location of the user, but other information regarding their professional practices, their age, gender and, of course, their opinions and interests in what they post (Kaphle, et. al., 2022). However, this abundance of public data has also led to ethical dilemmas for social sciences researchers, more often regarding the breach of privacy, of which the researcher of this study is completely aware. For that, important considerations and clarifications will be disclosed in this chapter, with the aim of providing an insight into why this analysis was performed the way it was.

One of the biggest grey areas this study was concerned with was whether social media data should be considered public or confidential data. However, according to the Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0 of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR, 2020), social media users agree to a set of terms and conditions for each social media platform if they want to

participate in it as members. Within these, there are special clauses about how a user's data may be accessed by researchers (Kaphle, et. al., 2022). Twitter makes clear to its users what will happen to their data, including that it may be used for research when signing up to use its services (Twitter, n.d. & Kaphle, et. al., 2022).

This study acknowledges the legal terms set forth by both AoIR (2020) and Twitter. Users understand that when they set their configuration as public, their posted content, links, and disclosed information may be viewed and used for research, in accordance with the agreement between users and Twitter. However, Twitter's terms of service for third-party developers, including researchers, also emphasize the importance of respecting users' control and privacy. It requires to avoid exposing the user's identity unnecessarily and the deletion of any content reported as deleted, expired, or changed from public to private (Twitter, n.d.).

This study also encourages readers on not judging ill the opinions disclosed from the users selected for this analysis The tweets selected provide a perspective on how information flows among different stakeholders in a networked communication process. They do not serve as evidence of permanent behaviour or opinion.

Besides the consultation of the ethical guidelines for social media research (AoIR, 2020) as well as Twitter's privacy legal terms of use, this study acknowledges that there is still a debate on how social media research should proceed when it comes to privacy as the distinction between public and private can be easily made in physical space, but becomes a blurred line when it comes to the network sphere and presents an ethical challenge for researchers (Kaphle, et. al., 2022).

Also, factors that might undermine this study's conclusions in the future such as gatekeeping practices, censorship, as well as the possibility that participants have not fully read or understood the privacy terms and conditions of Twitter, or the deletion of the posts selected for the analysis, have been considered as a possible vulnerability of this study's validity.

This study's qualitative nature inevitably involves the researcher's perspective on the coding, analysis, and conclusions. But while the data collected was purposefully selected to find certain topics, and the categorisation of these topics might be influenced by the researcher's cultural background and values, this study was conducted following a specific methodology of online meticulous observation. The arguments that support this analysis, its findings, and the

discussions around it, were guided by a vast theoretical framework from many authors, social researchers, and experts on the field of technopolitics and online activism.

6. Findings

During the study, it was possible to observe how several key media actors interacted publicly, directly or indirectly with the information, through different hashtags, mentioning different topics, mentioning other users and media outlets through swooping (the use of @), direct mentions, individual tweets and direct responses to media outlets, journalists and other users. These posts, without considering the private accounts, tweets and messages that live within the same media ecology and thrive in the same information flow.

Among the public posts found and selected to be analysed for this study, it is possible to find traditional news media outlets, journalists, individual users, hacktivists organisations besides Guacamaya Roja, trolls, and references to previous events that speak of hacktivism, freedom of speech, censorship, and media gatekeeping.

Each of these actors had a distinct role to play in shaping the conversation around the leaked information; in contributing to the reinterpretation of the purposes of Guacamaya; and modifying the information flow between actors.

6.1 Timeline and social actors

A map with a summary and description of the social actors involved was included for an easier follow up of the netnography (Table 1). Additionally, a roadmap simulating a timeline that shows the different stages of the observations and the selection of tweets (blue), as well as the findings that were made along these (red) is also included (Diagram 3).

Social Actors	Name / Username	Actions
Hacktivists	Guacamaya Roja / no social media	Hacked into the Mexican Ministry of Defence (SEDENA) and obtained 6 TB of emails and hidden information that revealed corruption and abuse of the military in Mexico.
Journalists	Carlos Loret de Mola / @CarlosLoret	The first journalist to share the information of the hack in social media through his news media outlet Latinus.

Media outlets	Latinus / @latinus_us	The first media outlet to contact Guacamaya to obtain access to the hacked information.
Website	Enlace Hacktivista / no social media	Website which through Guacamaya shared all its information and their purposes.
Others	@anonopshispano, @El_Universal_Mx, @MarkoCortes, @isagvh, @DeniseDresserG, @AristeguiOnline.	Other journalists, media outlets, organisations that provided a coverage of the hack and Guacamaya, that helped spread the information through social media
Important twitter users	@drok3r	User with cybersecurity and technical skills who spread the information regarding the hacktivist group before Loret de Mola and Latinus in a thread of 26 tweet.
Fake accounts	@GuacamayaHack, @GuacamayanLeaks, @guacamayaleak, @LeaksGuacamaya, @leaks_guacamaya	These accounts claimed to be the hacktivist group. Some spread the information first published by Latinus, others redirected to other sites with different purposes, and some others just posted information against the Mexican government even if not related to the hack.

Table 1: Summary of the social actors described in the findings.

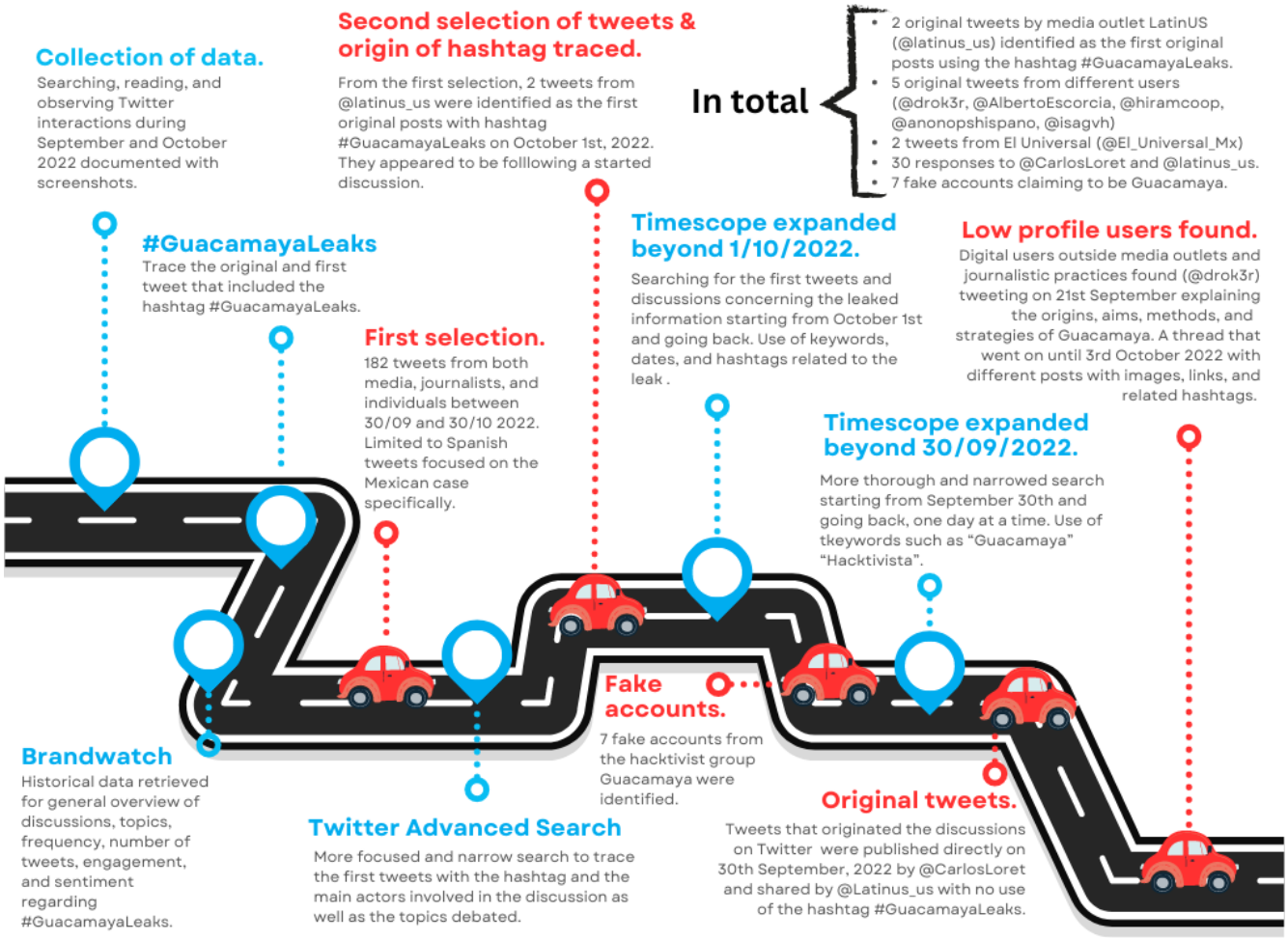

Diagram 3: Timeline of the netnographic process along with the discoveries made throughout the purposeful sample of tweets.

6.2 Brandwatch: A general overview

During a first approach, this study was focused on finding a general overlook of the keywords that surrounded the discussion and use it as a guide for a more advanced and narrower search that could lead the research into a wider discussion of threads and forums.

According to the social media listening tool Brandwatch, #GuacamayaLeaks had an average reach of more than 10 million users on Twitter only, with its biggest peak, reaching more than 30 million people on 9th October due to several revelations regarding Mexico's government and army. Brandwatch provided a world cloud that helped identify keywords and related hashtags, to track the discussion around the hashtag, and that were strictly related to the Mexican Case (Figure 1).

Figure 1: #GuacamayaLeaks reach provided by Brandwatch

Most of the keywords are related to the documents leaked by Guacamaya ("hackeo" [hack], "espionaje" [espionage], "revelan" [reveal] , "escándalo" [scandal, "seguridad" [security], "documentos" [documents], "información" [information], "corruption" [corruption]); the Mexican army abuses ("espía" [spy], "SEDENA" [Secretary of National Defence], "Fuerzas Armadas" [Armed Forces]; the name of the organisation behind the leak ("Guacamaya", "Grupo Guacamaya" [Guacamaya group]) and finally the media warfare between the Mexican President López Obrador ("AMLO", "presidente", "López", "López Obrador") and journalist Carlos Loret de Mola and his media outlet Latinus ("Loret", "Latinus") (Figure 2).

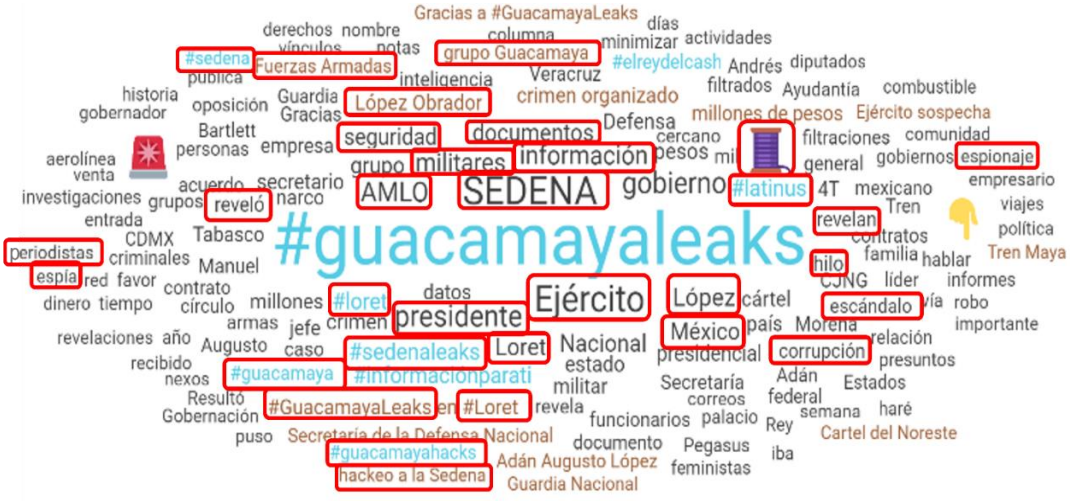

Figure 2: Keywords related to #GuacamayaLeaks provided by Brandwatch

Additionally, the related hashtags (#SedenaLeaks, #hackeo, "GuacamayaHacks", #Guacamayazo, "#EjércitoEspía, #Ejército", #LordGuacamaya") as well as the emojis of the

thread [🧵] and the parrot [🦜], allowed me to identify the most heated, commented, deep and extensive discussions on Twitter, while trying to avoid trolls, or tweets using the hashtag as a social media strategy for publicity purposes (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Related hashtags in the #GuacamayaLeaks discussion provided by Brandwatch

6.3 Twitter Advanced Search: The chicken or the egg dilemma

Once the keywords and the related hashtags were determined, the second stage focused on finding the origin of the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks on Twitter through Twitter Advanced Search. The challenge was to go back in time to try to discover how the discussion sparked on Twitter and which were the users responsible for its outbreak and distribution.

The search found that the first tweet containing the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks was made by the media outlet Latinus (@latinus_us) on 1st October 2022 (Figures 4 & 5).

Figure 4: Second original tweet found using #GuacamayaLeaks

In English:

"Adán Augusto minimises the hack to the National Ministry of Defence [SEDENA]: 'What has transcended does not affect the Federal Executive Power." *#GuacamayaLeaks #Latinus #InformaciónParaTi* [InformationForYou]

(Latinus, 2022)

Figure 5: First original tweet found using #GuacamayaLeaks

In English:

"*#GuacamayaLeaks*. The Army warns the National Fond of Tourism [Fonatur] that sections of the Mayan Train will not be finished by 2023 due to bureaucratic obstacles". *#Latinus #InformaciónParaTi* [InformationForYou]

(Latinus, 2022)

However, it is possible to observe that while these posts do contain the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks, they do not mention the hacktivist group Guacamaya as responsible for the leak, nor its aim, identity, purpose, or origins. In fact, these posts appear to continue a conversation regarding the leaked documents, in a much more specific way, mentioning specific names and events. But they do not appear to be sparking the conversation. They are the result of a discussion that had already started before, and that the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks was being used to indicate the topic that the posts were about[1].

This discovery led me to a further and narrower search into the media outlet Latinus previous tweets, with the use of the Twitter Advanced Search tool and the keywords previously mentioned. Soon I found that the tweets that opened the discussion regarding the documents leaked by Guacamaya were published directly on 30th September 2022 by journalist Carlos

[1] Considering that the hacktivist organisation Guacamaya Roja had leaked previous documents from other Latin American governments, this study pondered the possibility that the hashtag was only transferred to Mexico from former scandals in Peru, Chile, or Colombia. However, using the same terms and tools to determine if this was possible, the twitter search turned out to be empty.

Loret de Mola (@CarlosLoret) and then shared by Latinus (@latinus_us) (Figures 6, 7, 8 & 9). None of these original tweets contained the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks.

Figure 6: First tweet regarding the leaked documents.

In English:

"The biggest hack in Mexico. Thousands of confidential documents from the Mexican Army sent to *@latinus_us*. They reveal how the president hid hospitalisations and serious medical diagnoses. They expose secrets of the Culiacanazo. And much more. *#Loret*

(Loret de Mola, 2022)

Figure 7: Third tweet regarding the leaked documents.

In English:

"The 'Guacamaya' hackers claim responsibility for the attack to the [SEDENA]: They seek to demonstrate the excessive power of the military and its corruption. #Latinus *#InformaciónParaTi* [InformationForYou]

(Latinus, 2022)

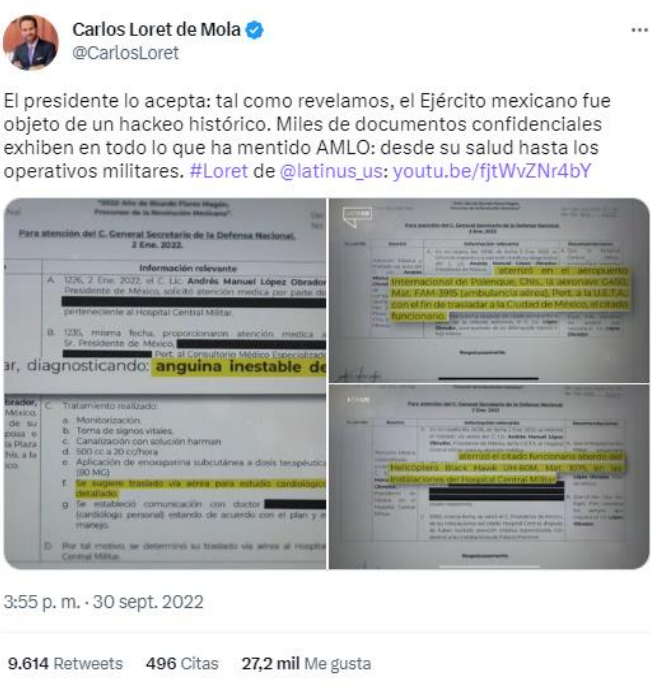

Figure 8: Second tweet regarding the leaked documents.

In English:

"The president accepts it: Just as we revealed, the Mexican Army was the object of a historic hack. Thousands of confidential documents that exhibit everything that AMLO has lied: from his health to military operations." *#Loret* from *@latinus_us* (…)

(Loret de Mola, 2022)

Figure 9: Fourth tweet regarding the leaked documents.

In English:

"AMLO confirms the hacking and confidential information theft suffered by the Mexican Ministry of Defence [SEDENA]: 'The data is true, I have several illnesses,' he says about his health. #Latinus *#InformaciónParaTi* [InformationForYou]

(Latinus, 2022)

This finding opened the possibility that other users (1) either used the hashtag before Loret de Mola or Latinus or (2) sparked the discussions regarding the leaked documents without the use of the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks, but the use of keywords.

Therefore, a more thorough and narrowed search was performed, starting from September 30th, and going back, one day at a time, with the use of keywords such as “Guacamaya”, “Hacktivista”, “SEDENA”, and other hashtags related such as #SedenaLeaks, #EjércitoEspía, #Guacamaya, and #Hackeo.

Effectively, this research found other digital users outside media outlets and journalistic practices, mentioning the hashtag on 30th September and (2) a public thread of 26 tweets from a single user (@drok3r) explaining the origins, the aims, the cybersecurity methods, the communication strategies, and even the relation to the media outlet Latinus and Mexican journalist Carlos Loret, from the hacktivist organisation Guacamaya (Figure 10). This thread started from 21st September and went on until 3rd October 2022 with different posts with images, links, related hashtags (#Guacamayas, #Mexico, #Peru, #Chile, #Colombia, #ElSalvador, #FuerzasRepresivas, #Dataleak, #hackeo, #loretdemola, #sedenaleaks) and mentions.

It was by reading the 26 tweets and going into the links and the Twitter account of the user that I could determine that this specific user had specific skills and knowledge regarding cybersecurity and web intelligence (Figure 10 & 11). The user also shared links and credentials to the public to access the filtered emails, he explains that not all of them are possible to obtain though (Figure 12).

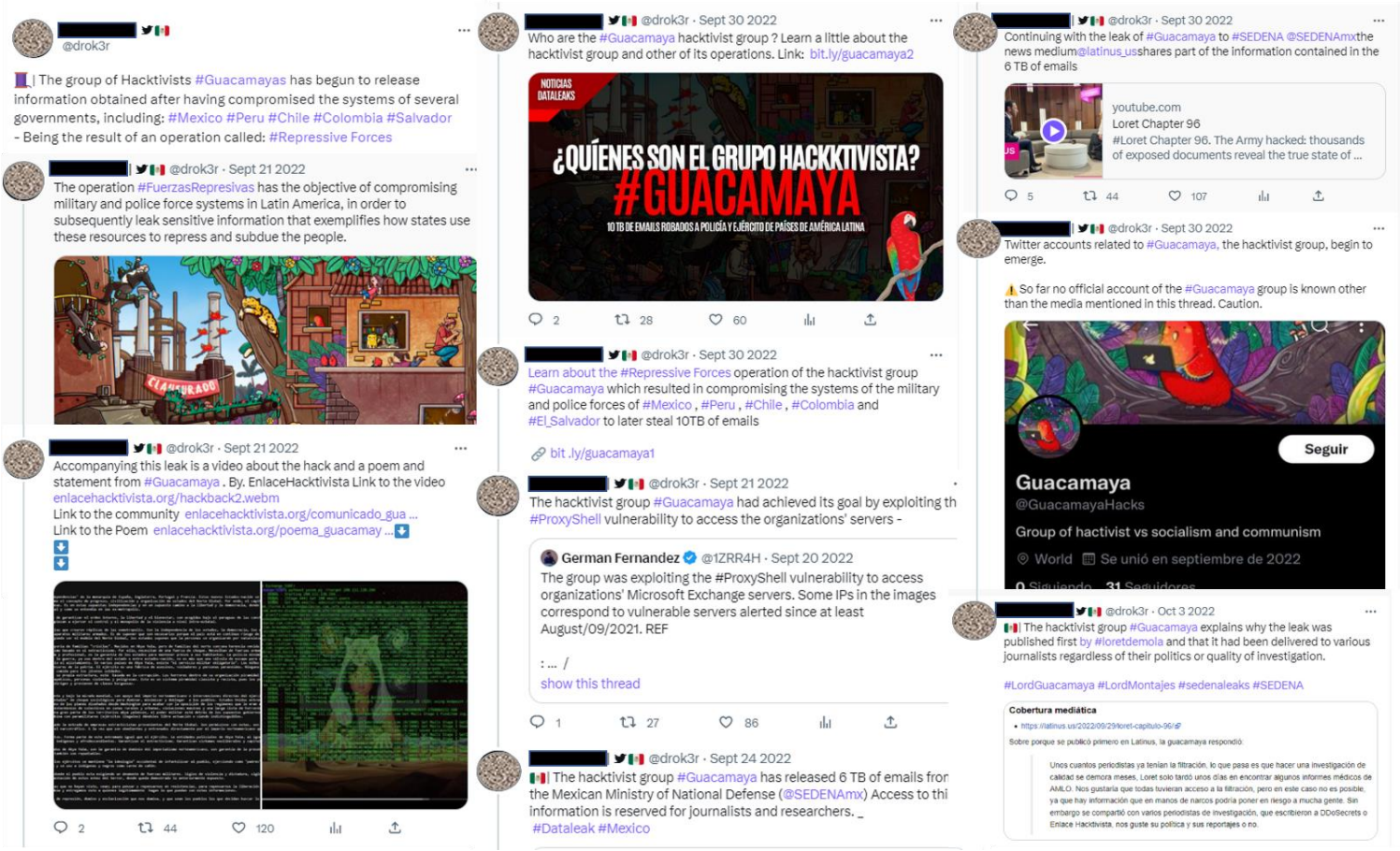

Figure 100: Tweets recollected from @drok3r regarding the documents leaked by Guacamaya Roja

Figure 11: @drok3r's Twitter profile reveals expertise in cybersecurity

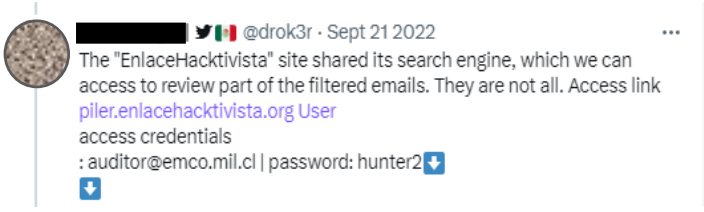

Figure 11: The user shared credentials to access the filtered emails from Guacamaya

A with the previous examples, the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks was never used on this thread and the reach and engagement of the thread is comparably less than Loret's and Latinus's posts.

However, it shows that the #GuacamayaLeaks hashtag was created after the discussions were sparked on Twitter, even if it was not possible to determine which user, account, media outlet or even social media platform, lit the discussions[2].

The final stage in the netnography the focus was to observe the responses to the original tweets. These not only amplified the discussion with other topics addressed, but revealed discourses, concerns, and sentiments from a large part of Mexican society regarding the hacktivist group activities. This last selection of 30 responses was made to understand how the public interpreted or reinterpreted the information leaked, the message that the hacktivist group is trying to communicate through sharing information through a third party and how the intermediaries in the information flow between the hacktivist organisation and the private users was altered through the media outlet Latinus and Mexican journalist Loret de Mola (Table 2)

6.4 Media coverage

I could observe how several media outlets and journalists engaged not only with the content and the debate generated around the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks, its delicate information regarding the Mexican government, and its approach with Mexican journalist Carlos Loret. According to a column written by Carlos Loret de Mola for the national newspaper El Universal, they accessed the information, it was a collaboration between journalists and the hacktivist group (shared later in its social media channels, see Figure 13).

[2] The selection continued after the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks appeared on 1st October, after Latinus and Loret de Mola's account distributed the information. The selection included posts from other media outlets, civil organisations, journalists and private users. These posted on their own and endorsed on the original information, elaborated on who were the hacktivists behind the leak, or described how was the approach of the hacktivists to the media. They were also considered in the selection considered them not only as respondents, but as content user generators (Table 1).

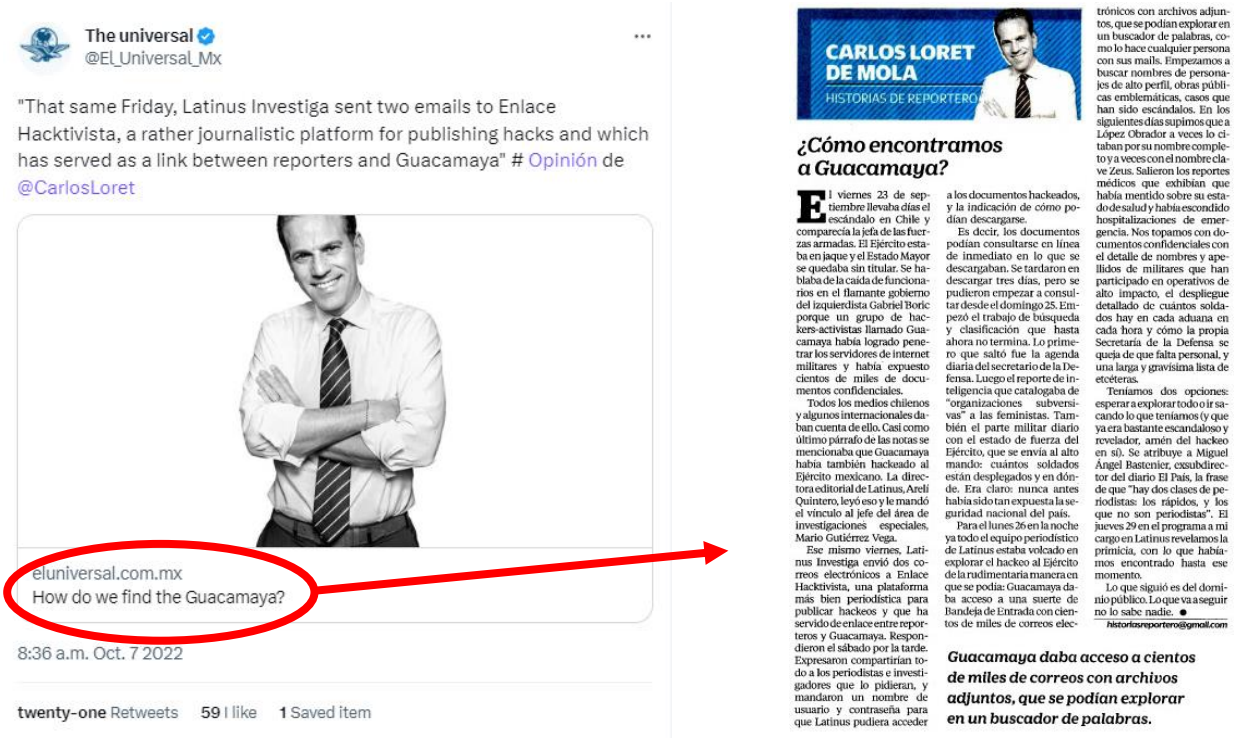

Figure 12: El Universal coverage of the approach between the hacktivists and Loret de Mola.

The column reads: “They [Guacamaya] said they would share everything with the journalists and researchers who requested it, and they sent a username and password so that Latinus could access the hacked documents, as well as the instruction of how to download them (...) Guacamaya gave access to an inbox with hundreds of thousands of emails (...) According to former deputy director of the newspaper El País, 'there are two kinds of journalists: the quick ones and those who are not journalists'. On Thursday 29th at Latinus, we revealed what we had found up to that moment. What followed is in the public domain. Nobody knows what will follow" (Loret de Mola, 2022).

Additionally, other journalists (@isagvh and @DeniseDresserG) and media outlets (@El_Universal_Mx, @AristeguiOnline) made a coverage of the hack, by either sharing their own links or redistributing the information disclosed by Latinus (Figure 14). Additionally, some private users (@drok3r) provided screenshots of the interviews given by the hacktivist group to other media outlets through ‘Enlace Hacktivista’ (Figure 15). These findings all confirm that Loret de Mola and his media outlet Latinus were the first to analyse the information leaked and distribute it virally on social media and amplify on the hacktivist group identity (Figure 14).

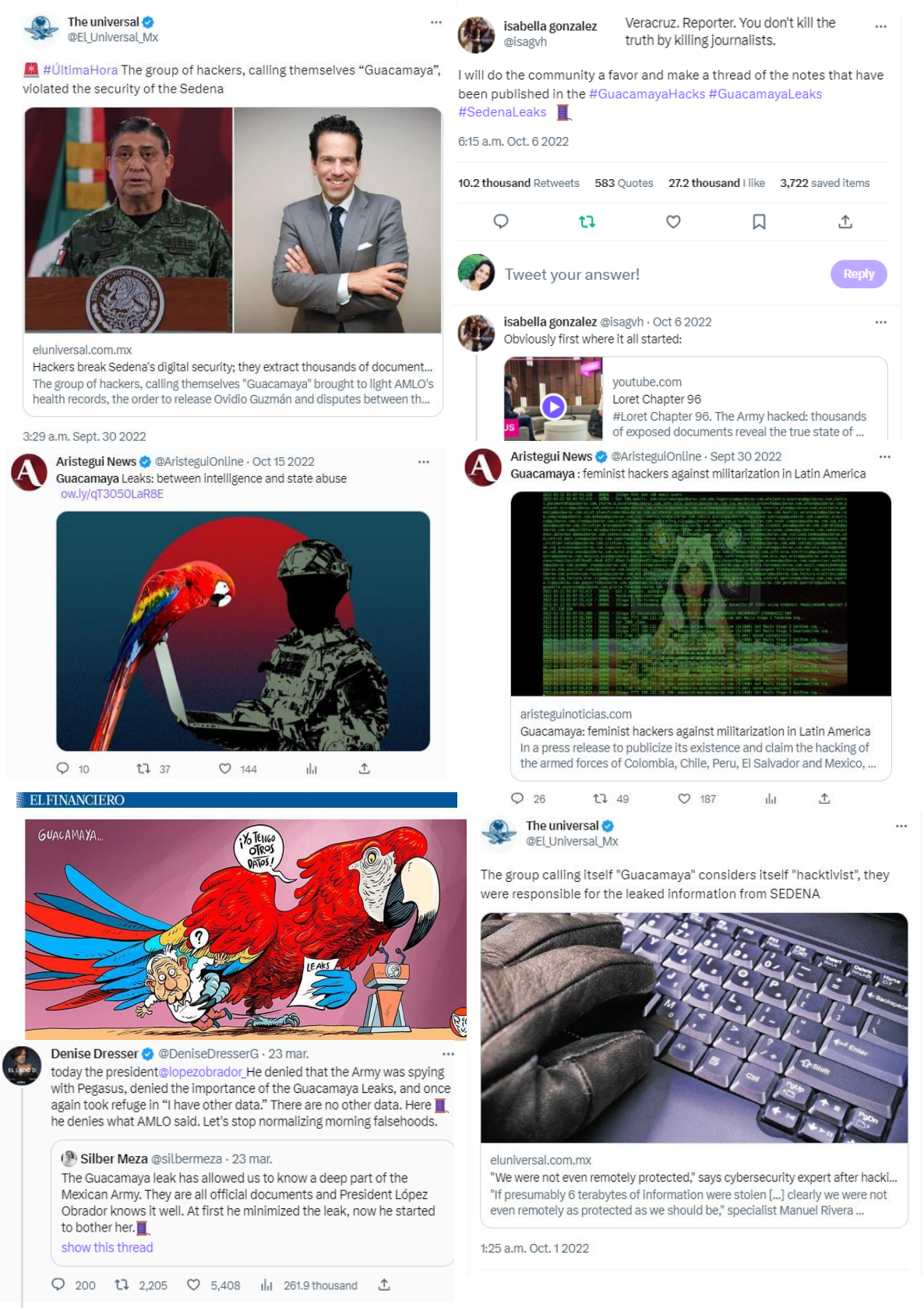

Figure 13: Journalists and media coverage regarding the hack by Guacamaya Roja and its approach with Loret de Mola.

In English:

"Regarding why it was published first in Latinus, Guacamaya answered: '(…) the thing is that to make an investigation of such a quality takes months. Loret only took some days in finding some of AMLO´s medical reports. We would like that all had access to the information, but in this case, it is not possible because there is information that in the hands of narcotraffickers could put at risk lots of people. Nevertheless, [the information] was shared with several investigation journalists (…) whether we like their political views, their work or not.

Figure 14: Guacamaya explained through Enlace Hacktivista why Loret de Mola was the first on publishing the information leaked.

Additionally, other decentralised collectives of hacktivists, activists and political leaders advocating for freedom of information and social justice such as Anonymous redistributed and supported the information leaked by Guacamaya Roja (Figure 16) engaged in the discussions brought up by the information leaked and the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks, which served as an amplifier of the hacktivist organisation and its aims.

Figure 15: Several accounts from Anonymous engaging in the discussion regarding the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks

6.5 Fake accounts, bots, and trolls

Besides the coverage provided by the actors described above, I could also observe that since the tweets from @latinus_us and @CarlosLoret were distributed, several accounts claiming the identity of the hacktivist group Guacamaya emerged. Accounts such as @GuacamayaHack, @GuacamayanLeaks, @guacamayaleak, @LeaksGuacamaya, @leaks_guacamaya and several others with similar names, with small variations in the use of capital letters and underscores were discovered (Figure 17)[3].

Figure 167: Several accounts claiming the identity of the hacktivist organisation Guacamaya.

[3] One of these accounts (@GuacamayanLeaks) even contains the blue check as a verified account on the platform, to make it appear as more legitimate to the Twitter audiences. This account contains in its biography a link asking for money donations and a link redirecting to a YouTube channel (Figure 18). Other accounts (@leaks_guacamaya) even redirect to the Institute of Latin America of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Figure 20), yet the reason for this is not known.

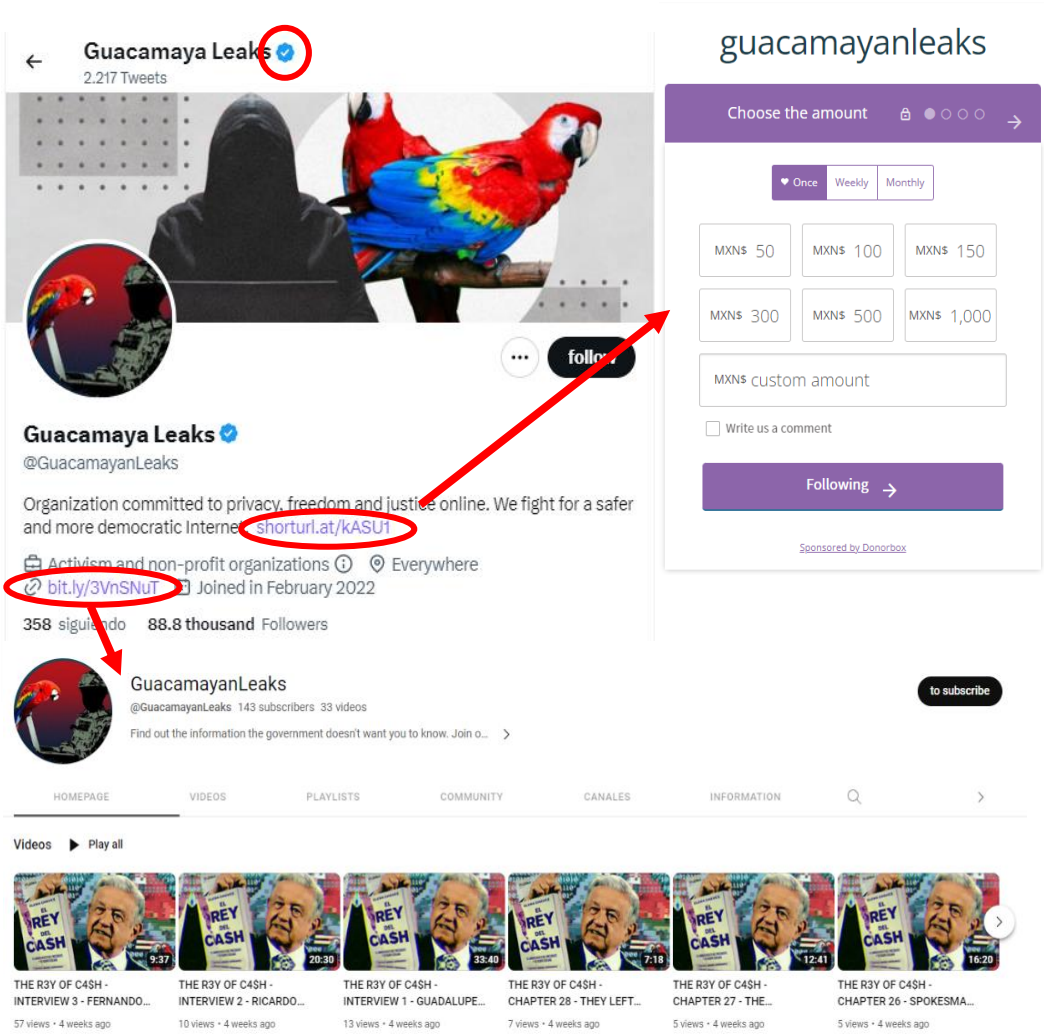

Figure 178: @GuacamayanLeaks has claimed the identity of the organisation through a verified account and a YouTube channel, and even asks for external donations.

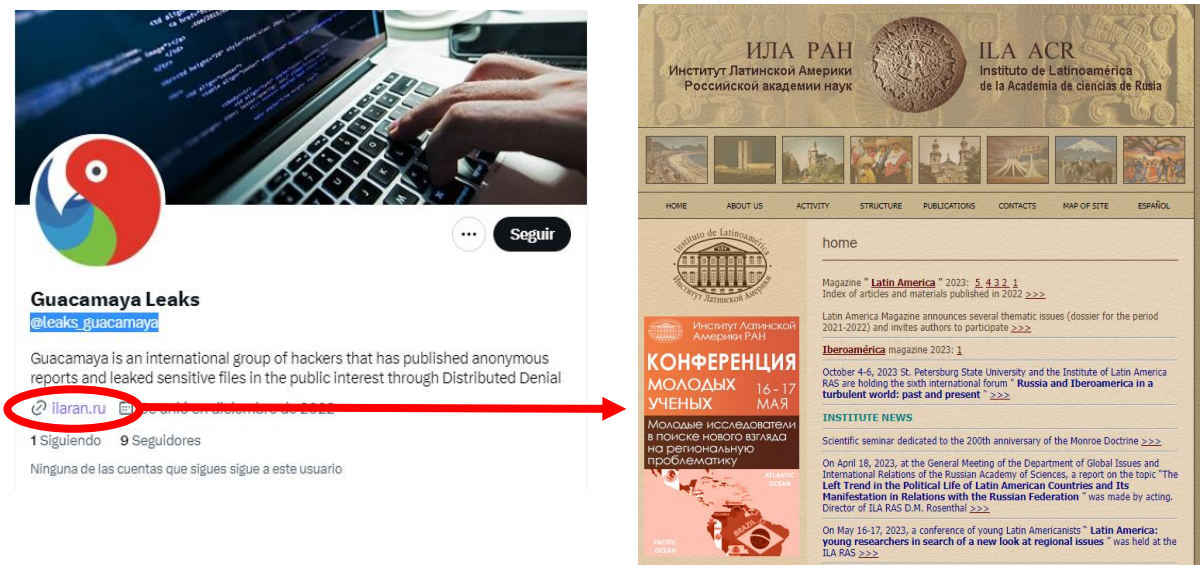

Figure 19: A link shared in a fake account leads to the Academic Institute of Latin American sciences in Russia.

This happened even though the hacktivist group had already explained through Enlace Hacktivista that they would never own accounts on social networks and that these accounts were fake (Figure 20).

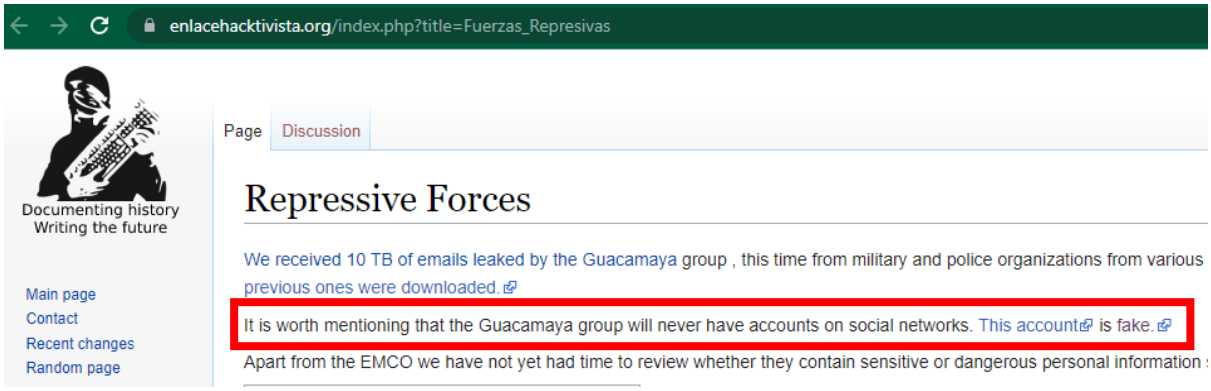

Figure 20: Guacamaya group explained through Enlace Hacktivista that they did not own any social media accounts.

Nonetheless, many users identified these accounts as fake and claimed that this was a problem for the purpose of the hacktivists (Figure 21). However, it remains uncertain whether other users believed what these accounts spread in the name of the organisation or were able to identify them as fake as well.

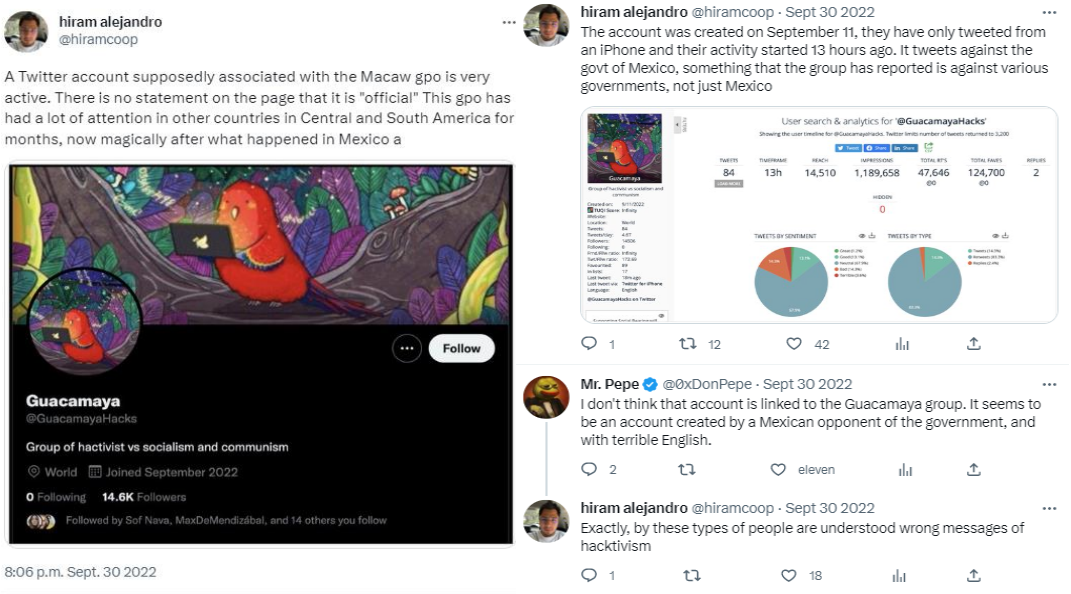

Figure 21: A user identified that the account @GuacamayaHacks was not the hacktivist organisation.

Additionally, a notable presence of trolls was found in the online discussions. These individuals exhibited aggressive behaviours in their responses, which aimed at provoking controversial reactions and heated debates. They also employed personal attacks and inflammatory language against journalist Loret de Mola, Latinus and/or other users which congratulated on the leak. In terms of numbers, these were the kind of comments that I found the most.

Finally, I found accounts that exhibited behaviour and commenting patterns like real human beings. These accounts commented, engaged in discussions, and exhibited patterns reminiscent of genuine users. However, some feature aspects raised suspicions on their identity, like their usernames with a long string of numbers, their protected accounts, the aggressive language, lack of punctuation, or photo in their profile. These led me to believe that these accounts might be automated bots rather than real individuals (Figure 22) [4].

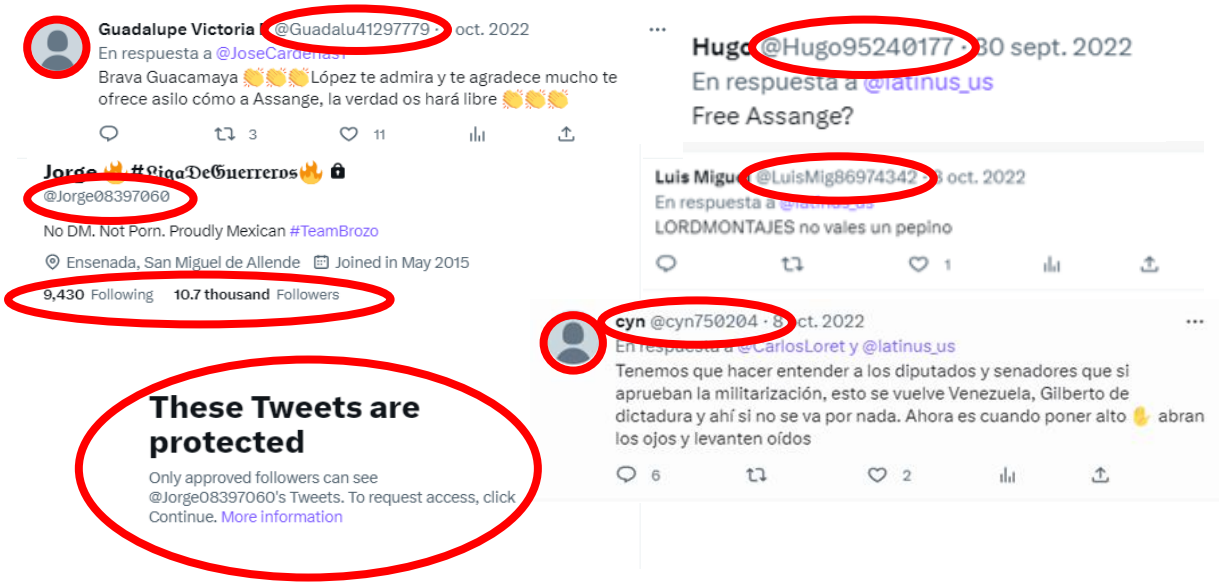

Figure 22: These accounts presented similar features irregular in accounts of real users.

6.6 Sentiment and topics addressed

In a first stage, the results provided by Brandwatch revealed that overall, the sentiment in the discussions was positive. The report stated that most of the tweets analysed congratulated on

[4] I have no concrete evidence to determine such a suspicion, except the arguments presented in the theoretical framework.

the work done by Guacamaya, Loret and Latinus. However, in more analogical research, I found a mix of positive and negative sentiments expressed in the posts analysed.

The main topics found were categorised regarding the topic they addressed and the sentiment. This categorisation aims to understand how the users' discussions and viewpoints diverge from the original goals of the hacktivist group and allowed the researcher to explore discrepancies between the intended purpose of Guacamaya and the interpretations and reactions of the online community.

6.6.1 Accountability and Justice; Sentiment: Approval

These individuals view the disclosure of sensitive information as a necessary means to shed light on issues regarding corruption and abuse of power by the state and the military. Users believe that the hacktivists of Guacamaya are performing a crucial service by uncovering hidden truths and holding those in power accountable (Figure 23).

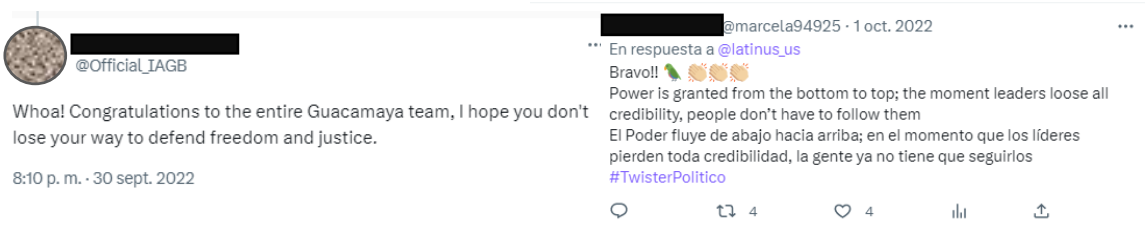

Figure 183: Responses to original tweets from Latinus that congratulate on the leaked information.

6.6.2 No evidence of the documents; Sentiment: Mistrust

These users are sceptical about the accuracy of the information and suspect that it might have been manipulated by Latinus and Loret's political agenda (Figure 24).

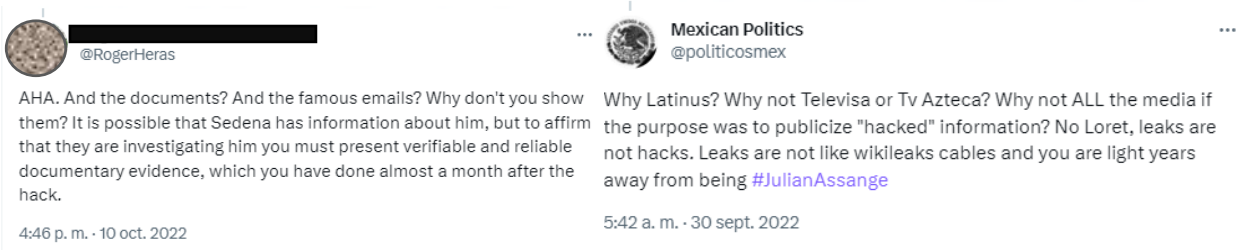

Figure 24: Users show scepticism about the #GuacamayaLeaks because of the agenda of Latinus and Loret.

6.6.3. The President's health; Sentiment: Pity

These individuals view the platform as a tool for propaganda or misinformation, emphasising the need for critical scrutiny and fact-checking. To express this, some users showed pity on

Latinus's coverage, arguing that such a big hack was only good enough to reveal that the health of the Mexican President was not great (Figure 25).

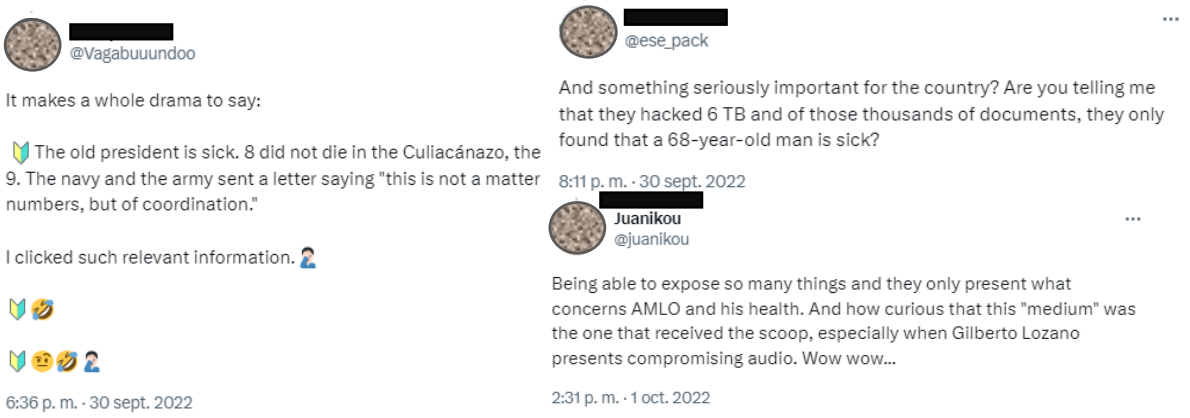

Figure 25: Users question the legitimacy of the hack as the first thing that Loret revealed after obtaining the information was that the president's health condition was not well.

6.6.4. #LordMontage; Sentiment: Rejection

There was a notable sentiment of rejection and anger towards Loret de Mola and Latinus. Many users express their rejection against him through the hashtag #LordMontajes (in English: Lord Montages) to argue that Loret is a non-reliable journalist, and that Guacamaya works for him. (Figure 26).

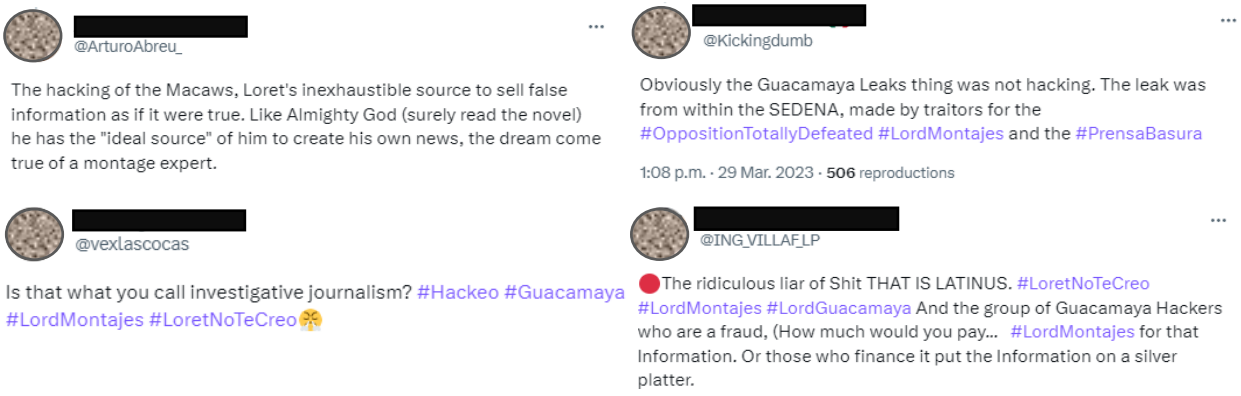

Figure 19: Users reject Loret's, Latinus's and Guacamaya's information is true.

6.6.5. Unification; Sentiment: Concern

A significant number of users are concerned about the information exposed and the abuse of power from the state. Some users call upon others to stay united towards a repressive government (Figure 27).

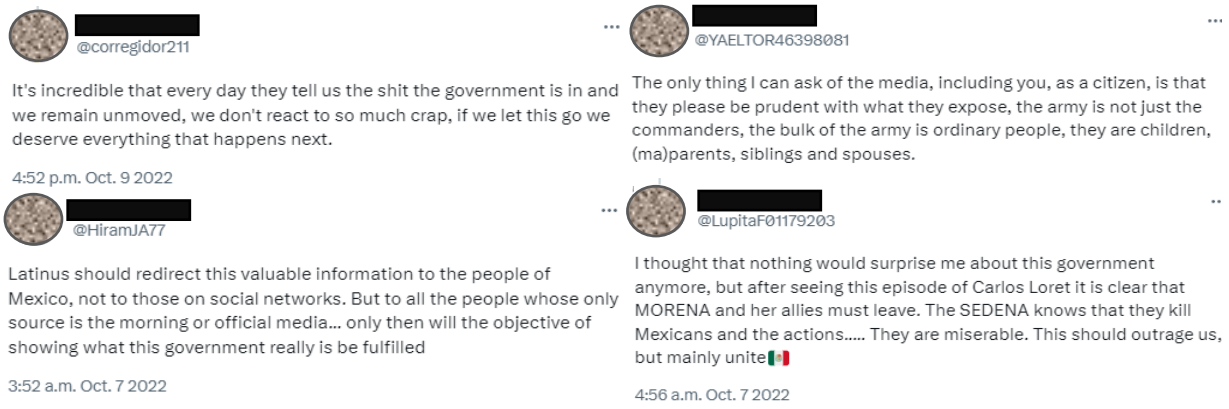

Figure 20: Instead of reacting towards suspicion regarding Loret or Latinus, these users reacted to the information hacked by Guacamaya and called upon defending democracy.

6.6.6. Topic: Transparency and free speech; Sentiment: Confusion

Many users draw parallels between the leaked information and Julian Assange, founder from Wikileaks, emphasising the importance of transparency and accountability. Users highlight the role of the hacktivist group uncovering hidden information which they believe the public has the right to know, but also show confusion. Some users advocate for defending their right to expose corruption without fear of reprisal, some others question how secure it is for these organisations to be exposing national security matters. Some see Guacamaya as resistance against censorship, and some others express their confusion towards their actions.

Figure 218:Users related the hacktivist group activities with Julian Assange and Wikileaks but seemed confused.

7. Discussion

In this chapter, the findings and analysis derived from the research are explored through the concepts presented in the theoretical framework chapter and compared with the literature review as well.

To understand the role of each social actor in the media ecology of Twitter, this study analyses all users who interact with the information based on Shannon and Weaver's (1998) communication model and then compared to what this thesis defends as an evolved communication process.

7.1 Guacamaya: Grassroots politics and the reminiscence of the ELZN

According to Jordan and Taylor's (2004) and Lechón and Ramos's (2020) definition of hacktivism, the way in which Guacamaya obtained the information from the Mexican Ministry of Defence was seen as a form of political activism. Guacamaya's intention was to directly challenge geopolitical issues and hold political leaders and institutions accountable, including the Global North and the Mexican government, for corruption and abuse of power.

The act of hacking played a crucial role in connecting activism with political action (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). The hack served as a form of contestation within the digital space, and the dissemination of the hack through Enlace Hacktivista was to amplify messages, raise awareness, and mobilise people for social and political causes, as highlighted by Peña (2017).

Guacamaya combines grassroots political protest with computer hacking. Their actions aimed at raising awareness and mobilising support for the restoration of Indigenous rights and the protection of land. Their actions involve nonviolent acts of dissent, using digital tools and platforms to challenge the authorities (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). Information technologies were not just a means of reappropriating information through technical skills, but an instrument for democratic politics that allowed them to contest power structures and advocate for social justice. Their actions call for an intercontinental effort for anti-neoliberalism that speaks to a worldwide audience (Castells, 2004; Jordan & Taylor, 2004 & Jeppesen, 2022).

Expressed in their manifesto, Guacamaya's motivations are driven by a desire for social change (Jeppesen, 2022). Through Enlace Hacktivista, Guacamaya advocates not only for free speech but also for better democratic practices and alternative economic models prioritising social welfare and environmental justice. The movement calls "for more communities to join in

dismantling all this injustice (…)" (Guacamaya, 2022) to unite communities and promote civil disobedience for a more just and sustainable future.

Their purpose, their aim and their manifesto are reminiscent of those radical guerrilla hacktivists that began using the Internet as a weapon in 1994. They are an example of what Castells (1996:2004) defined as "informational guerrilla", where hacktivist organisations use communication technologies as a weapon to mobilise large masses of people around the world. Just as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), Guacamaya is actively involved in supporting indigenous causes and opposing repressive forces.

Guacamaya's activities could be defined as 'mass action hacktivism' as it is most related to the anti-globalisation movement described by Jordan and Taylor (2004), Jeppesen (2022) and Tufekci (2017); as a grassroots movement that arises in response to inequality, social injustice, labour exploitation, and environmental damage. Their purpose, according to their manifesto, goes beyond reclaiming new technologies. It sheds light on matters that had been neglected or disregarded by global capitalist interests such as colonisation, extractivism and exploitation (Guacamaya, 2022). It fights to "recover people's voice and build community and cultures" (Rodríguez, 2008 as cited by Peña, 2017).

Guacamaya's communication strategy, involving a third party, recognises the limitations of technology but believes it has the power to challenge the prevailing neoliberal agendas. This aligns with Jeppesen's (2022) and Treré's (2016) conclusions, that hacktivist organisations, like Guacamaya, are reluctant to fully embrace social networks due to their corporate nature and the monetisation of social interactions.

Mass action hacktivism is based on the idea that technology's limitations can fuel social change (Jordan & Taylor, 2004). Hence, if Guacamaya's purpose is to promote social and political change, reappropriation of the digital space means that hacktivists must engage in a struggle to reclaim ownership over the digital space. Like physical territory, the digital realm has become increasingly privatised and controlled, constrained by surveillance capitalism and restrictive borders that limit its freedom (Peña, 2017; Sierra-Caballero, 2018). But technopolitics includes tactical appropriation of corporate social media platforms such as Twitter (Treré et. al, 2017). If power stays diffused, or redistributed among those who can shape the information and diminish the purpose of the organisation, where is the point in hacking?

According to Peña (2017) and Lindgren (2013), it would be a for Guacamaya to classify networks as technologies incapable of social change because of their capitalist nature (Peña, 2017) considering that social media networks have become an inseparable part of political and social processes (Lindgren, 2013). Activist organisations and social movements can now take advantage of these technologies and the benefits offered by the Internet to achieve their goals and challenge power groups (Sartoretto, 2015; Lindgren, 2013).

7.1.1 Guacamaya VS Wikileaks

The prominence of Assange as a relevant topic discussed around the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks revealed that Guacamaya was strongly associated with advocating for freedom of speech in the digital realm. Just as WikiLeaks, Guacamaya combined investigative journalism with high-tech hacktivism to expose hidden truths, promote accountability, and challenge power structures. However, WikiLeaks operated on the unrestricted flow of information for transparency and public awareness, while Guacamaya took a different approach by limiting public access to the information due to concerns about the safety of civilians and national security. Serving then as the first stage of gatekeeping, granting access only to some groups. This raises questions about the security of internet freedom, rights of access and to what extent is gatekeeping acceptable for hacktivists (Ramírez, 2018).

7.2 #LordGatekeeper and the political economy of attention

The way in which Loret de Mola frames the Guacamaya hack, and the information obtained, strongly influences the responses and opinions on Twitter (Maratea, 2014). As a high-profile, recognised popular journalist in Mexico, Loret and Latinus play a significant role in shaping how and what people think about #GuacamayaLeaks as they act as a filter for cultural understanding (Maratea, 2014). This is not new nor exclusive from Loret, since the beginning of time, media have modified the communication environment (Sartoretto, 2015).

There is a political economy of the attention, in which the hacktivist group, Latinus and Loret find themselves inevitably involved in competition for the attention of the users in the digital space. The first tweet containing the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks was made by Latinus on 1st October 2022. However, these posts do not mention at first the hacktivist organisation as responsible for the leak, nor its aim, identity, purpose, nor origins. To say that this was on

purpose as the result of a news agenda from Latinus would be speculation. However, according to Tufekci (2017) and Maratea (2014) platforms like Twitter are a contested territory where digital wars take place between different stakeholders, even when collaborating. The omission could be a strategy to obtain that power of attention in a centralised way. These posts were the result of a discussion that started before the hashtag was created, which leads to believe that the hashtag was created either by Latinus to draw attention, and as a reaction to the level of engagement. Still, the focus on the original tweets from Loret and Latinus, is neither Guacamaya nor its grassroots claims, but the result of media logic and perhaps a political agenda in which "thousands of confidential documents from the Mexican Army sent to @latinus_us reveal how the president hid hospitalisations and serious medical diagnoses (…)" (Loret de Mola, 2022).

Guacamaya Roja stated through Enlace Hacktivista that it leaked the information to several journalists, and that they could not control what each journalist decided to do with the information. However, all journalists will invariably decide which claims, issues, and events are more newsworthy (Maratea, 2014). Therefore, all the issues and claims colonisation, exploitation and extractivism expressed by Guacamaya on their manifesto, have been ignored and disregarded as non-important by Latinus' and Loret's media logic and hence, the audiences on Twitter as well.

Nevertheless, Maratea (2014) also argues that there is a close relationship between media and activists, in which they undoubtedly need each other. Just as Loret as a journalist needs stories, activists and movements need publicity for recruitment, support, and political pressure (Maratea, 2014). According to Loret's column distributed by El Universal, "it was a collaboration between journalists and the hacktivist group" (Loret, 2022). Guacamaya provided Latinus dramatic content while Loret was able to dig through an enormous number of documents, ensuring that the most politically significant information (according to his agenda) was shared with the public (Tufekci, 2017 & Maratea, 2014).

So, while Latinus's agenda filtered the information considering the Mexican President's health as the drama needed for sparking debate and drawing attention, media sponsorship was a key element to the recognition of Guacamaya as a group of feminist hacktivists. Was the attention generated from the collaboration an effective and a powerful source of political strength?

It could be argued that both entities, Guacamaya and Loret have their own political agenda (one being challenging the Global North and the other, demanding accountability of the state).

But the sentiment of pity from the users not only diminishes the purpose of the hacktivist group, but also the impact of the hack. Exerting control over media or journalists' communication would be a form of gatekeeping, contradicting the principle of free information in cyberspace. Therefore, hacktivists need to find the way of ensuring their message is accurately conveyed to the audience without disregarding collaborating with journalists, as this strategy expands Guacamaya's audience and increase its influence in the political landscape (Maratea, 2014).

Media coverage can then have a dual effect on activist movements. On the one hand, it can provide sponsorship and support, helping promote a cause and gain recognition. On the other, it can distort the purpose of a movement and lead to reinterpretations.

7.2.1 Journalists as scapegoats of truthiness

As shown in the hashtag #LordMontages, audiences on Twitter appeared to be divided regarding their perception of Loret and Latinus' coverage of the leaked information by Guacamaya. Some users rejected all the information that came through Loret, regardless of his role as mere transmitter, or demanded that the documents be released to the public audiences so they could believe him. Some consider him to be a 'paid propagandist' associated with the opposition, spreading false information about the president (Cortés, 2022 & Mc Phail, 2022) and consider him as non-reliable after being accused of manipulating information and creating montages (Cortés, 2022). But to disregard the information of the hacktivist group just because Loret was the transmitter talks more about the audiences than from Loret's gatekeeping practices. In the online world, credibility is no longer solely determined by the source, platform, or content itself.

To claim that Loret de Mola is a 'gonzo' journalist is a matter of perspective and perhaps opinion. Nonetheless, some journalists tend to inject their own perspectives and opinions into the stories they cover. The way Loret presented the information and the fact that he was the first to do so could have influenced the audience's 'truthiness', potentially undermining the original intention of Guacamaya. Perhaps it was not only the way he presented the information, but the fact that he was the one doing it. Association to his past wrongdoings could have led audiences into mistrusting him, rather than relying on facts.

In the digital realm, users form opinions based on their personal beliefs rather than factual evidence. When collaborating with media journalists, hacktivists need to consider that users

are overwhelmed by a huge amount of information they encounter daily and therefore, they tend to seek out sources that align with their beliefs. In the digital landscape, each user has their own specific needs, interests, or motivations that influence how they engage with online platforms. These include personal preferences for certain types of content and interactions (Kozinets, 2015). Additionally, according to Lupu et al. (2020), in Mexico's political environment, where trust in the political system is low and polarisation is high, individuals are more susceptible to believing misinformation. While greater exposure to social media platforms can promote participation and interaction, it can also increase mistrust towards media, and non-profit organisations, including hacktivists. Therefore, users' mistrust and scepticism are the result of a combination between information overload and socio-political context that has fragmented, confused, and procreated a hostile environment where an 'overtrust' in one-self's gut and convictions, or 'truthiness', ends up hindering meaningful political discussions that lead to finding a middle ground between different opinions.

7.3 A rhizomatic, chaotic interconnected space

As described in the methodology, this study acknowledges that social media is a complex and diverse space where a wide range of information, interactions, sentiments, and concerns are present. (Kozinets, 2015).

Additionally, the nature of Twitter as a digital medium part of an interconnected sphere can also impact how information is received and interpreted by the audiences as it has become a site of political conflict and debate (Lindgren, 2013) where power is contested and political resistance takes place (Peña, 2017; Barassi, 2015). Twitter's digital infrastructure system consists of dense networks that are very complex and chaotic (Castells, 2004; Sartoretto, 2015) as they all vary in time, content, users, keywords, topics, etc. Additionally, they are easily subject to alterations, confusions, reinterpretations and even redirections.

Within the same media ecology, it was possible to observe how several social actors interacted with the information from different angles. News media outlets, journalists, political leaders, regular users, experts in cybersecurity, bots, and trolls, all interacting not only through a single hashtag (#GuacamayaLeaks) but through different topics, responses, sentiments, and keywords. Each of these actors had a distinct role to play in shaping the conversation around the leaked information; in contributing to the reinterpretation of the purposes of the hacktivist organisation Guacamaya Roja; and modifying the information flow between actors.

In the traditional communication model proposed by Shannon and Weaver (1998), communication is a linear process where information flows from a source, transmitted by an encoder that sends a message to a decoder, and this last interprets the signal before the destination. In this case, Enlace Hacktivista along with Guacamaya would bes the **source** of information; Latinus and Loret de Mola would represent the **transmitters/encoders** disseminating the message through various online platforms; Twitter is the **channel** through which the information is delivered to the users; and finally, Twitter users would represent the **decoders** or the **receivers** of the communication process. In this model, bots and trolls, would represent the **noise**, because of their interference and distortion, affecting the reception of the message sent.

However, this thesis argues that the communication flow in the digital world is much more complex than a linear process. What was observed is a non-linear, interconnected, and dynamic system of relationships, in which individual tweets or users are connected by multiple pathways which are reminiscent of a 'synaptic behaviour' of the neurons in the human brain just as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe.

In this sense, Guacamaya serves as both the source of information and the encoder when hacking into the Ministry of Defence site and communicating with media and experts through Enlace Hacktivista. Enlace Hacktivista, as an intermediary, takes on various roles in the communication process, acting as a source of information by providing access to Guacamaya's documents and as a transmitter by sharing the hacked documents with media outlets. Latinus and Loret, traditionally considered transmitters, can also be seen as source, and at the same time as noise, interfering with Guacamaya's purpose due to their gatekeeping practices and media logic. Users can be encoders who shared information and self-generated content (Castells, 2004). However, due to the nature of social media in general, self-generated content can turn any user into the main source of information. In this media environment, all social actors are continuously playing different roles simultaneously, and cannot be categorised in one only role. Even fake accounts and bots, which could be considered solely as noise, can act as encoders, sources, and transmitters within the media ecology. And just as trolls, bots and fake accounts, cultural beliefs, values, and sentiments affect the communication process by redirecting discussions and promoting polarisation. Twitter then can be examined as a channel, a tool, a political arena, but also as a disruptor that influences the flow of information, alters the communication dynamics, and shapes public opinion (Sartoretto, 2015).

Twitter has an architecture of itself, with roads (connections), buildings (accounts), pathways (responses), passersby (users), and traffic signs (retweets, quoted tweets, saved items) that makes evident the complexity of relationships that exist between users, content, and broader social and cultural contexts, as well as the flows, and connections in which dynamics of online communities and cultures are built (Tufekci, 2017).

7.3.1 Twitter is a fenced garden

As all social media platforms, Twitter has many limitations that can perpetuate discrimination (Avellaneda and Velázquez, 2021) and hence, have consequences for democracy (Lupu, et. al, 2020). Twitter operates under a variety of business interests and its policies are mostly driven by financial concerns. So, while technology might be enabling individuals or hacktivist groups such as Guacamaya to gain momentum through media attention and public debate, it can also hinder support for the cause.

Twitter is exactly part of the explosion of horizontal networks of communication presented by Castells in the Network Society (2004) that enable individuals to create and share their own content, to anyone at any given moment, even though it always operated as a business. However, technologies are now becoming new forms of capitalist exploitation and accumulation while claiming to be tools that challenged globalisation and capitalism (Peña, 2017). Recently, Twitter was centralised by Elon Musk, entrepreneur and business owner known for his high-tech companies, such as Tesla and SpaceX. This centralisation not only means changes in the flow of information, but also that users now have less autonomy and decision-making power on how their private data and their digital actions are distributed and managed. This undermines the fundamental principle of freedom in the digital space, just as Lechón & Ramos (2020) and Barassi (2015) conclusions on privatisation and surveillance capitalism governing the Internet. But long before Musk, Twitter had already compromised with global capitalist interests that disregarded and neglected matters like the ones that Guacamaya fights for such as colonisation, extractivism and exploitation.

Additionally, Musk's influential presence extends to the political landscape, while Twitter plays a crucial role in political processes and shaping discussions on political issues. His influence now could extend beyond through digital discussions and content control.

Despite Twitter never achieving being completely decentralised and Musk's assertion of promoting internet freedom, the question remains: should users, media, and hacktivists, entrust their aspirations for digital freedom and access on a capitalist figure?

Twitter shows now “the best tweets” in its algorithmic filtering leads to certain content being prioritised over other. When other users posted before Loret or Latinus, these tweets were informative and neutral, pointing only to Guacamaya, their aims and their actions. However, these tweets did not receive the same level of attention as Loret and Latinus did. This is the algorithmic filtering on Twitter that has given visibility to certain actors, while leaving others in the shadows (Tufekci, 2017).

7.3.2 Twitter is noisy.

Social media platforms such as Twitter have also become a platform for viral misinformation, hate speech, violence, and polarisation, which calls into question its role as a tool for holding political leaders accountable and promoting democracy (Lupu et. al., 2020). The hashtags insulting Loret de Mola or Guacamaya, and even the Mexican President and the state is clear evidence that the platform has promoted the radicalisation of people's political attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and values (Lupu et al., 2020). On the other hand, Twitter might be simply reflecting the existing issues of the offline society or just amplifying the effects, as technology by itself does not generate new behaviours but rather alters the context in which these behaviours manifest (Tufekci, 2017).

Twitter is also very susceptible to actors who can influence and alter the flow of information within the digital realm, such as fake accounts, trolls, and bots. However, these actors are key in the new media communication environment when leading, redirecting and generating discussions and interactions just as users and media outlets. Even individuals’ own cultural bias, background and beliefs add another layer of complexity to the digital space and pose new challenges for activists in the network spheres, to get their message correctly spread without being distorted.

All these factors, along with the gatekeeping practices and media logic from journalists, can undermine Guacamaya’s credibility, as they all have the power to distort the initial message of the organisation, redirect, and contribute to different political discourses than the one that was intended. Twitter resembles a crowded table where everyone is talking at once, but some have megaphones, while others try to raise their voices sitting from the corner, making it difficult for meaningful dialogue to take place and for individuals to discern reliable information.

8. Conclusions

This chapter aims to finally explain how the interactions between users, gatekeeping practices, and other entities in the digital realm shape public discussion on Twitter. Additionally, it answers the research questions proposed in the introduction and hopes to shed light on the complexity of information flows and their impact. Finally, it explains which further studies are needed to explore how hacktivism and technopolitics develop on a dynamic space as an arena for political discussions and power, its complexities, challenges, and the implications digital networks have for social inclusion,

8.1 Digital wars for attention in a complex environment

The digital space is a complex and multifaceted environment where all actors present, real or fake, have the power to influence communication flows. Users, media outlets, cultural biases, gatekeeping practices, and media logic, regardless of their agenda, all contribute to the dissemination, interpretation (and reinterpretation) of messages. Communication roles are changing constantly between the social actors present in the digital space. Just as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described, communication processes in the digital sphere are a complex and ever-changing network of interconnected relationships, resembling the synaptic connections in the human brain or rhizomes, with non-linear and dynamic pathways. Every time a user signs-in to Twitter, a new communication process starts. Just as the findings shown, the origin of a hashtag is no beginning nor end, but the evolution of an endless conversation that mutates, and moves in between different platforms within the online and the offline world.

In this sense, it is possible to conclude that the evolution of technology and communication channels has contributed to the complexity of media environments. And if communication technologies continue to evolve, which is likely, it is possible to assure that communication processes will turn then even more complex (Castells, 2004; Sartoretto, 2015).

These dynamics pose challenges for organisations like Guacamaya in ensuring the accurate spread of their intended message. Within this media ecology, collaborations can help for visibility, but the fight for attention will never cease as power fluidly diffuses in cyberspace (Tufekci, 2017).

8.2 #GuacamayaLeaks in between polarisation and unification

In the political landscape, platforms like Twitter have become too useful, popular, and influential, that is hard to disregard discussions as non-relevant even in the offline space (Tufekci, 2017). The presence of both negative and positive sentiments highlights the complex dynamics and contrasting emotions that shape the online political landscape. Twitter may be an online extension of existing social and political issues. The findings of this research reveal that Mexican users are committed to political discussions online and open to debate, but have also become too sceptical, radical and mistrustful of the content they consume digitally. So while Twitter might be contributing to the polarisation of opinions, it departs from an already polarised society offline (Lupu, et. al., 2020) as technology does not create new behaviours but instead changes the environment in which they occur (Tufecki, 2017).

Discourses of polarisation and unification are both equally possible. The hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks, involved both sides discussing and debating different topics regarding the information leaked. The potential contribution for both discourses depends on the lens in which social media is analysed from. As a political arena, opinions about the hack were divided on Twitter, with conflicting sentiments and radicalisation among users. However, as a tool for mobilisation, Twitter was used by some to call for national unification, spreading their concerns widely and publicly, regardless of their opinion towards Loret's or Latinus' coverage. It is impossible to say if this evidence is enough to determine that these tweets shape political discourse for unification to a greater or lesser extent. However, it is possible to conclude that their presence in the digital realm and their potential of being a source of information, a message and a transmitter is likely to build bridges between disparate groups (Tufekci, 2017). Through their multidirectional roles, spread information, foster discussions, mobilise collective action, and connect with different networks.

Polarisation and unification are both part of the dynamics of the digital networks. Sparking discussions among those in agreement and those who disagree can either lead to dismantling digital bias and foster a more critical and informed understanding among individuals, ultimately contributing to the transformation of mindsets and the pursuit of social change (Jordan & Taylor, 2004, Maratea, 2014 & Tufekci, 2017).

However, there are other factors that could contribute to exact opposite effect. Mexico's political context, where trust in the political system is low and polarisation is high, individuals

are more susceptible to believing misinformation. Users' mistrust and scepticism are the result of a combination between information overload and a hostile environment where 'truthiness ends up hindering meaningful political discussions that lead to finding a middle ground between different opinions (Lupu et al., 2020). This prevailing atmosphere of distrust makes it challenging for users to open up to different opinions than their own. It also makes it hard for them to distinguish between what is true and what is false.

8.2.1 Technology is powerful, but imperfect

Mass action hacktivism has limitations because it depends on imperfect technologies made by humans (Jordan & Taylor, 2004; Wray, 2007). There is no perfect, ideal platform for social interactions, movements, hacktivists, media or journalists, because there is none that is completely neutral or impartial (Tufekci, 2017). Just as an offline territory, the Internet is an arena where cultural and political struggles are disputed by different political, cultural, economic, and social actors (Peña 2017). However, bringing civil disobedience into the digital realm presents challenges due to the different rules and dynamics of cyberspace compared to the offline world.

If hacktivists want to bring civil electronic disobedience through reappropriation of the digital spheres, they will struggle to create new spaces and tools for online protests. They can also redefine reappropriation possibilities within the existing digital domain (Grammatikopoulou, 2014), given the role of these platforms in governance, politics, journalism and social movements (Tufekci, 2017). Social media is nor good or bad, but neither neutral. Hacktivists cannot simply disregard social media's power to challenge political powers. Social media platforms, even when imperfect, have significant implications for politics as it enables individuals to access and share political information with communities beyond their immediate networks, expanding the reach of political news (Tufekci, 2017 & Jordan & Taylor, 2004).

But it is not only about exploiting social media spaces. While technology provides opportunities for grassroots movements and alternative public spheres to form, it is important for contemporary hacktivism and other forms of collective action, to understand that technology alone is not sufficient for creating social change. As explained, hacktivists need to navigate the complexities of digital spaces and employ strategies that emphasise democratic participation, inclusivity, and empowerment. Therefore, a combination of strategies between the online and the offline world could help Guacamaya's purpose to bring political justice.

8.3 Guacamaya's purpose VS Twitter reinterpretations

The main purpose of the hacktivist group mutated in its communication journey to mobilise online citizens through the reinterpretation of messages. On Twitter, Guacamaya's core message on Indigenous land rights and justice for the Global South was often overshadowed by discussions about journalists' credibility, the Mexican president's health, and associations of freedom of speech with previous hacking projects. While sentiments revealed anger and concern towards the state and the abuse of power, the redirection of these emotions on Twitter was clearly different from Guacamaya's main purpose, according to their manifesto.

The users' reinterpretation of these topics, particularly related to environmentalism, genocide, and terricide, tends to focus on less complex derived themes such as abuse of power, mistrust, and freedom of speech. And while, the reinterpretation opens up the opportunity for more people to engage and participate in discussions about the leaked information, it hinders Guacamaya's main aim, when Twitter users simplify complex topics due to an altered and filtered message influenced by a political agenda and gatekeeping practices from Loret and Latinus.

8.3.1 Gatekeeping and media logic is not a full diagnose

However, even without the noise and the gatekeepers, it is impossible to assure that the initial message from Guacamaya would have sparked a different discussion, or even reach the audiences it did. The conversation happened. The abuse of the Mexican government and its military in now of public domain. While the information has been subject of gatekeeping and, reinterpretations, Twitter as part of the digital realm provided attention towards Guacamaya's activities group.

Jorunalists as Loret and media outlets still play a significant role in disseminating information to a wide audience. But they also provide media sponsorship for hacktivist organisations such as Guacamaya to have a sit at the loud table and use their megaphone. Hacktivism in the end needs media attention and media logic needs dramatic storylines to get audiences' attention.

There are other factors beyond media logic and information filtering to determine what altered Guacamaya's main purpose. Further studies would be needed to explore perhaps if the conversation would have been different if other journalists different from Loret would have revealed the leak first. Or to explore to what extent, other actors such as users, trolls and bots redirected the conversation into other topics and sentiments, non-related to Guacamaya's

purpose. Digital networks such as Twitter have made communication processes way too complex. More studies to understand to what extent is traditional media hindering activists' purposes on the digital space would be needed to shed light on the impact of gatekeeping, or even the impact of polarised mindsets for hacktivist groups' activities within a in a socio-political context of mistrust.

8.3.2 A full reappropriation of the digital space

Hacktivism, in its pursuit of counterpower, needs to be not only about harnessing new technologies, but also about reclaiming people's voices and revitalising community and cultural values (Peña, 2017). Social media platforms, such as Twitter, are imperfect, but a vital arena for political and cultural resistance (Sierra-Caballero, 2018). Therefore, a partial reappropriation is not enough. If hacktivism is about reappropriating power, and power is diffused within the social media realm, why not fight for the reappropriation of these networks? Hacktivists should not rely on capitalist figures to achieve their aspirations of freedom. However, fighting for defending the Internet as a space for freedom, autonomy, and sovereignty exclusively outside the realm of capitalism may neglect the aspirations of other users who have placed their trust in capitalist interests (perhaps not consciously) (Lechón & Ramos, 2020).

The hacking part was enacted through exposing the information from the Mexican Ministry of Defence. However, according to this same definition, which stated that the activist part comes when organising agents for social justice through electronic civil disobedience, nothing happened (George & Leidner, 2019; Avellaneda & Velázquez, 2021; Wray, 2007). Online social mobilisation and discussions have primarily remained within the digital realm, focusing on topics such as surveillance, abuse of power, and concealed truths. Even if, at their core, these discussions touch upon issues of ecocide, colonisation, and exploitation, as accused by the group.

It is important then that hacktivist groups considers that while it might be difficult regarding freedom and reach, these technologies also offer a flexible space where people communicate and interact. Exploiting their nature could lead to a networked counterpower (Peña, 2017). In the end, hacktivism touches on the issue of dispossession and fights to regain control of these spaces and digital communication processes and practices can help challenge these hegemonic groups in society (Sartoretto, 2015).

8.3.3 Reappropriation for access

It is crucial to address the key question of inclusivity in technopolitics. Guacamaya's fight for Indigenous rights and the Global South is hindered by limited access to their stakeholders in the digital arena. The struggle for justice and freedom on the internet relies on information access. Without access, the question arises: how can hacktivists effectively call for social mobilisation for justice and freedom for those who have no access?

Despite the notion that the internet gives voice to everyone, the reality is that not everyone is equally included in the digital spheres. The gap between people who have access to digital technologies and those who do not, inevitably leads to unequal opportunities and outcomes (Morón, 2020; Maratea, 2014; Tufekci, 2017).

Reappropriation of the digital space needs to be redefined by hacktivists such as Guacamaya as a fight beyond attention power and towards closing the digital divide and promoting political inclusivity, particularly when advocating for Indigenous interests, which often face limited access to technology. By actively seeking ways to involve and empower these marginalised groups, hacktivists can ensure that their efforts are more representative and impactful. Bridging the digital gap becomes essential to amplify the voices of those who are typically left out of the technological sphere and to ensure their political participation and influence.

9. Appendixes

Category	Description	Number	Users	Key Themes	Sentiment
Original Tweets using hashtag	First original tweets using the hashtag #Guacamaya Leaks on 1st October 2022	2	@latinus_us	Accountability	Concern
Tweets that opened the discussion without using the hashtag	The tweets that sparked the conversation and led to the creation of the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks	4	@CarlosLoret & @latinus_us	Accountability, freedom of speech; abuse of power, President's health; identity/purpose of the hacktivists	Concern
Threads of information	Tweets that provide explanations or analyses of information discovered by Guacamaya before and after the leak was published by @latinus_us	6	@drok3r, @hiramcoop, @anonopshispano, @AlbertoEscorcia, @DionisioReyes, @isagvh	Accountability, freedom of speech, abuse of power; identity/purpose of the hacktivists	Neutral; concern; approval
Media outlets	Accounts and journalists that provided media coverage of the hacktivist group actions	4	@DeniseDresserG, @AristeguiOnline, @El_Universal_M@isagvh	Accountability, abuse of power; identity/purpose of the hacktivists	Neutral; Concern

Responses	Users responding to the original tweets of @latinus_us & @CarlosLoret using the hashtag #GuacamayaLeaks	30	@politicosmex, @mexicotequiero3, @KalEl7612, @AlessandraRdlv, @Vagabuuundoo, @Official_IAGB, @ese_pack, @solilioquioman, @juanikou, @BodderBruce, @marcela94925, @rubenanguiano, @marthaber, @ChekoBar123, @apoyoamx22, @ABELARDROD, @ArturoAbreu, @MRAngelMoreno80, @aracelibs, @jsalvio1, @susy_lore, @blue_coat, @Candylejas26, @YAELTOR46398081, @HiramJA77, @XimeAndrade13, @Eusvelazquez1, @corregidor211, @IramAbifGr30, @RogerHeras	Accountability, abuse of power, Mexican President's health, credibility and reliability of the information, justice, unification, Assange Wikileaks	Concern, approval, rejection, mistrust.
Fake accounts	Accounts that claimed to to be the hacktivist group Guacamaya.	7	@GuacamayanLeaks, @guacamayaleaks, @guacamaya_leaks @GuacamayaHacks, @LeaksGuacamaya, @leaks_guacamaya, @Guacmaya_Leak	Accountability, abuse of power, justice	Approval, concern

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