

Mass Media, Violence, and Peacebuilding: A Qualitative Study in Mexico

**Mauricio Meschoulam, Carolina de Benito, Cristina Blumenkron, Andrea Muhech,
Tania Naanous, Alexa Ramírez, and Sofia Quintanilla**

*Mexico Research Center for Peace
Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico*

Abstract

Mexico is consistently ranked as one of the least peaceful countries on Earth, which impacts citizens' negative perceptions about their government. A study conducted by Meschoulam, Hacker, Carbajal, De Benito, Blumenkron, and Raich (2015), detected significant distrust of the mass media, which is another factor that, according to prior studies (Institute for Economics and Peace [IEP], 2016), may encourage peacelessness. This study sought to broaden the perspective of those investigations through 80 semistructured qualitative interviews with Mexican residents. The interviews explored the factors that caused participants to distance themselves from the media and the aspects that attracted participants to specific media outlets. In addition, this study explored the perceived relationship between the media and the government, and also perceptions regarding the news coverage of violence. The results of this investigation revealed that the interviewees distrusted the media because they perceived that it is controlled by the government. Furthermore, participants reported sentiments such as anger, fear, frustration, and apathy as a result of what they perceived to be an excessive exposition of violence by the traditional media in their news coverage. Most participants preferred to use social media as alternative sources of information. However, many of the interviewees also reported that they distrusted social media. Therefore, the participants stated that they valued journalists who demonstrate objectivity and critical thinking, provoke reflection, question the government, uncover corruption, and promote debate about solutions. If, as prior studies have indicated (IEP, 2016b), corruption and the lack of a free flow of information are correlated with peacelessness, then every effort should be made to better understand how to develop a healthier relationship between the media and society to improve conditions for Mexico's future.

Introduction

Mexico suffers from peacelessness (Institute for Economics and Peace [IEP], 2016), which has affected Mexicans' perceptions in many ways. Public surveys have demonstrated a prevalent sense of fear that many Mexicans feel (Buendía & Laredo, 2010, Consulta Mitofsky, 2011, 2014). This was also identified in prior research by Meschoulam (2014) and Meschoulam et al. (2015). By exploring the social construction of values, perceptions, and conceptions of violence and peace, our prior study (Meschoulam et al., 2015) determined that the participants did not trust the mass media. This distrust was related in part to immense distrust of the government and to the connection that the interviewees made between what they perceived as extremely corrupt politicians and other segments of the system, such as the mass media. In addition, the participants reported various negative sentiments and emotions in regards to the mass media, such as frustration, apathy, anger and rage, as a result of their perceptions of the excessive and unnecessary exhibition of violence in news programs. Consequently, many participants reported that they stopped reading newspapers, watching the news on television (TV) or listening to the news on the radio. Other stated that they read, listened to or watched the media, but did not like the media or trust them as reliable sources and, therefore, preferred to construct their ideas and opinions about current events based on their own experiences, observations, and conversations with friends, families, neighbors and coworkers.

Because the relationship between the mass media and their audience is not only a matter of political science or the science of communications but a factor deeply connected to peace (Beena, 2009; Bonilla,

2007; IEP, 2016; IEP, 2016b; Savrum & Miller, 2015), that prior research (Meschoulam et al., 2015) was continued in a new stage to more deeply explore its results.

In this study, 80 new interviews were conducted; 40 interviews were conducted in Mexico City and 40 were conducted in other parts of the country. One goal of this investigation was to more deeply explore the initial findings that were related to the mass media coverage of violence (Meschoulam et al., 2015) and the use of social media and the Internet as alternative sources of news. An additional goal of this study was to detect whether other patterns found in the prior stages of the research were repeated for these 80 new participants.

This investigation does not intend to generalize its results to all of Mexico. The results only correspond to the 80 individuals who were interviewed. Nevertheless, the patterns that repeat across varied genders, ages, professions, and geographic locations of participants, and the consistency of the results with prior studies (Meschoulam 2014; Meschoulam et al., 2015) on mass media coverage of violence, suggest hypotheses that could be tested in broader studies. In addition, this study offers specific recommendations for policymakers, media representatives, and other scholars to strengthen the relationship and build trust between Mexican society and the mass media, which is a key factor for a democratic and peaceful society (IEP, 2016b).

This paper presents the results of this new stage in the investigation. Initially, the background and conceptual framework upon which this study is based are addressed. We then present the methodology and the most important results. A discussion of the results is provided, and certain recommendations are made for policymakers, media representatives and future research.

Background and Conceptual Framework

In 2012, an exploratory study was conducted in 25 states of Mexico to detect symptoms suggestive of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that were associated with organized criminal violence. Among other results, we noted a high correlation between mass media exposure and symptoms of stress and trauma, such as anguish, irritability, nightmares, and insomnia (Meschoulam, 2012).

Following that study, a new study was conducted that used a social constructivist framework (Assmann, 2008; Fagan, 2010; Stenmark, 2009), that consisted of a qualitative investigation to explore the process through which participants socially constructed their ideas and perceptions about violence related to organized crime and the possibility of building peace in Mexico. Eighty interviews were conducted in 29 different neighborhoods in Mexico City and in 13 other states within Mexico. The interviews were conducted on individuals who represented a broad array of demographic factors. The objective of those interviews was to investigate the role of the participants' individual experiences and observations, the role of rumors and social conversations, the role of mass media, Internet and social media, and the role of the government and criminal organizations, in how these interviewees formed conceptions and perceptions. Consistent responses and pattern repetitions emerged despite differences in gender, age, profession, and location. The results showed that participants socially constructed their values, perceptions, and conceptions regarding organized crime-related violence and peace, primarily on the following elements:

- (a) Individual experiences and observations;
- (b) Conversations with family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and associates; and
- (c) The experiences of other individuals living in close proximity to them.

The participants reported a lack of trust in traditional mass media sources, which was linked to expressions of distrust towards the government. From the participants' perspectives, the system is structurally corrupt, and a perverse circle is formed around the government, criminal organizations, and the mass media. In addition to distrust of the mass media, the research noted that participants consistently reported negative feelings when reading, watching, or listening to media reports. Participants continually stated that the media exhibited too much violence and made them feel stressed. As a result, certain participants stated that they preferred to avoid certain media outlets, while others stated that they tuned in to media outlets but did not believe that they were reliable sources.

This does not mean that participants do not read papers, watch TV, or listen to the radio (70% of participants mentioned those themes at least once). This may only mean that participants do not trust what they read, watch, or listen to in the media. Their perceptions and conceptions regarding organized criminal violence and peace are more greatly influenced by what they experience and observe in their surroundings, and by what they talk about with family, friends, coworkers, or neighbors. In fact, taken together, all the themes related to experience (own, someone close, one single experience, experience from work), the combined frequencies represent 50% of the ways by which participants socially constructed their ideas and opinions related to organized violence and peace. In contrast, traditional mass media (printed, TV, and radio), captured a frequency of 13% for influential elements in participants' views [...] Mostly younger participants tended to use Internet and social media ($f=94$) as alternative sources of information to traditional mass media. Many of them said they trust much more to what they see or find out in social media, than what they listen to or watch in traditional media. (Meschoulam et al., 2015, p. 7)

According to these results, there appears to be a rupture or breach between a segment of society and certain TV networks, newspapers, radio stations, and media representatives. Furthermore, participants from the study often referred to the category as "The Mass Media," as if it were a single body and governed by the same persons and interests. Therefore, as patterns in that direction were growing, it became apparent that more intense research was needed (1) to confirm whether those patterns were present among other individuals from different cities and other areas around the country and (2) to explore those patterns more closely and attempt to develop a more profound sense of their meaning.

Prior research conducted in various parts of the world (Barreto, Borja, Serrano, & López-López, 2009; IEP, 2016b), has demonstrated the importance of the relation of the mass media and peacebuilding. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on two aspects of prior research: (a) the free flow of information as a pillar of peace and (b) the ability of the mass media to construct or deconstruct discourse and perceptions that lead to violence and therefore, the ability of the media to build peace within or across national borders.

According to research published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), the free flow of information is one of the pillars of positive peace (IEP, 2016b). This concept implies that a healthy relationship between the media and the society they serve is one of the conditions for peacebuilding. A society moves away from peace when citizens perceive that freedom of expression is oppressed. Peace may also be absent when citizens perceive that information is being blocked or tampered with. Furthermore, when audiences feel distress or fear and, accordingly, decide to reduce their contact with the news, societies become less informed, affecting democracy and the core qualities of peace (Barreto, Borja, Serrano, & López-López, 2009; IEP, 2016b).

Certain scholars believe that the media has an active role in peacebuilding. Galtung, Lynch and Mc Goldrick (2006) stated that news coverage of violence must go beyond the violence itself and attempt to address the subjacent conflicts and potential solutions to problems. This type of coverage is commonly referred to as *Peace Journalism*. Furthermore, Lukacovic (2002) explained that when peace journalism is implemented, audiences exhibit lower levels of anger and fear, and higher levels of hope and empathy.

These concepts appear to be corroborated by specific cases. In one study (Rashid Khan & Jan, 2011), two hundred and fifty Pakistani journalists and citizens were interviewed about the conflict their country has experienced in recent years, and 70% expressed the belief that journalism can help build peace, although it can also increase conflict. Participants of that study also reported that mass media sources can be used as a tool to hide conflict. Bonilla (2007) assessed Latin America and argued that because TV and the Internet are generally used to obtain information quickly, when news is not covered with veracity, an atmosphere can be created such that violence increases. Savrum and Miller (2015) studied the conflict in Cyprus, one of the most intractable conflicts that persists on Earth. The authors contend that because the mass media, specifically newscasts, represent a crucial source of information, many citizens rely on the media and expect the information to be trustworthy. However, when it is determined that the media and authorities are colluding, trust is betrayed, and the media protects the interests of the powerful; this situation can potentially disrupt peace. According to Beena (2009), certain media outlets have been influential in

breaking down stereotypes regarding the India-Pakistani conflict, whereas in other cases, they have solidified prejudices. Therefore, in Beena's view, the media have an ethical responsibility to motivate critical thinking. Munteanu (2011) explained that journalists and newscasters can help prevent conflicts from occurring. That can only happen, however, when the media fulfill their responsibility by being objective, impartial, reliable, and trustworthy.

Choi and James (2007) studied this issue in greater detail. Echoing the liberal Neo-Kantian peace theory, which argues that democratic regimes are less likely to have wars between them (Doyle, 1983), the authors highlight the role that the mass media has in building and sustaining democracy. From this perspective, the function of the media in regards to international peace becomes transcendental. Institutional democracy, economic interdependence, and state membership of international organizations could affect norms and institutional restraints. Consequently, open and free media may directly influence decision makers' behaviors towards peace.

However, certain authors including Bernabé (2011) offer a more conservative perspective. Bernabé argues that the culture of peace and mass media is often governed by contradicting principles. News stories have different market value; topics related to the culture of peace are not as popular as other types of news, which makes it complicated to introduce those stories into the media narrative. In any case, as Gilboa (2010) explains, the media can be a positive or negative influence, but those aspects remain vastly unexplored. More research is needed, in the author's perspective, to better understand the true impact that the media has on violence and peace. The present study seeks to contribute to this issue.

Therefore, the need to further explore how the relationship between the mass media and the Mexican society was damaged became evident. Which specific TV networks, radio stations, programs, newspapers, or journalists were the participants referring? Are certain media outlets perceived differently than others? Which media sources were perceived differently and for what reasons? What makes participants respect certain media outlets and what repels them from other media? What causes frustration, apathy, anger, rage or other negative sentiments about certain media outlets or specific journalists and how are those sentiments socially constructed? What role do social media play in this environment? What, according to study participants, should the media or journalists do to become more reliable? What topics should the media report and how should these topics be reported for the participants to decide to approach those media? From the perspective of participants, how should mass media report violence?

Methodology

Setting

This study included interviews with 80 participants. Half of these participants were residents from 35 different neighborhoods in Mexico City. An additional 40 interviews were conducted with participants from the Mexican states of Baja California (3), Chihuahua (2), Colima (1), Durango (1), Guanajuato (2), Guerrero (2), Jalisco (2), México State (4), Michoacán (2), Morelos (4), Nuevo León (1), Oaxaca (2), Puebla (2), Querétaro (1), Quintana Roo (3), Sinaloa (2), Sonora (2), Tabasco (1), Tamaulipas (1), Veracruz (1), and Yucatán (1).

Participants and sampling strategy

This research used a purposive sample strategy that included diversity in gender, age, geographic locations and professions. The sample was based on the following demographic data from Mexico (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía [INEGI], 2015): In the Mexican Republic 73,109,794 persons are older than 18 years; 34,980,052 (47.85%) are male, and 38,129,742 (52.15%) are female. Of the total population over 18 years old, 19% range from 18 to 24 years old, 65% between 25 and 29 years old, and 16% are older than 60. Seeking consistency with those demographics, the sample used for this study included 80 participants of which 38 were male, and 42 were female. Of the 80 participants, 15 were between 18 and 24 years old,

53 were between 25 to 59 years old, and 12 were older than 60. In the case of Mexico City, participants from 35 different neighborhoods were selected to obtain diversity in the income and socioeconomics of the sample. Participants from different states were selected for the sample to represent some of the most violent states and cities, as well as some of the less violent areas. Finally, participants with very different professions were included in the sample to achieve credibility in the pattern repetition. The selected participants were employed in 59 different occupations and included 6 students with various careers. However, the sample does not intend to represent all geographic locations, social sectors, incomes, or professions in the country. The procedures used to contact, recruit, and conduct the research adhered to Mexican laws regarding privacy and the security of information and data and adhered to the ethical standards of Universidad Iberoamericana, whose Internal Review Board approved this investigation and its procedures.

Data collection

Data collection included 80 individual interviews that were conducted in Spanish, the native language of participants, and lasted one to two hours. The study used a semistructured interview protocol. Variations of questions of that protocol were introduced to elicit further details. Fifty-eight interviews were conducted face-to-face, eighteen were conducted by telephone, and four were conducted using Skype. As in previous stages of this research project, the telephone and Skype were used only for logistical and security reasons because several participants were located in some of the most violent areas of the country (Consejo Ciudadano para la Seguridad Pública y Justicia Penal, AC. [CCSPJP], 2014; CCSPJP, 2016). Telephone and Skype interviews were contrasted against the face-to-face interviews to verify that they did not vary in their results. The pattern repetition remained identical in all cases. All interviews were digitally recorded. Notes and signal elements about the interviews were also used.

Data analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using *NVivo* qualitative software. Preexisting and emerging categories were used for the analysis (see below). Certain categories that emerged during our prior study (Meschoulam et al., 2015) were now considered preexisting categories. Other preexisting categories were extracted from previous studies such as those covered under the section *Background and Conceptual Framework* above. Many more categories emerged during the interviews. Words, sentences or paragraphs were encoded on these categories to detect patterns and repetitions, as well as the potential emergence of new themes, until saturation was achieved. Table I provides the preexisting categories:

Social Constructors:	Own experience or observation, Experience of someone
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Experience/Observation/Conversation	close, Oral conversation, Excessive violence (high impact violence), Fear or terror, Frustration, Impotence
Social Constructors: Mass Media	Radio, TV, Printed media or Internet portals of printed media, Internet news websites, Cultural/Music/Entertainment programs, Distrust of mass media, Trust or credibility of mass media, Scant or no contact with media, Mass media exhibit too much violence, Negative feelings regarding mass media or a specific media source (anger, frustration, repulsion, sadness, apathy, etc.), Analysis programs are interesting, Boring (programs or media is boring or not interesting), I use mass media to obtain information, Used to have contact with media, not anymore, Indifference (not interested in news or public affairs), Synthesis/ brevity, Too long articles or texts, Fast or timely, Someone else turns it on, Hurry/speed/ easy access, Lack of time, Objectivity, seriousness, journalistic rigor, veracity, or credibility, Information is different where I live than elsewhere
Social Constructors: Social Media	Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Other, Trust in social media, Social media causes interest or attraction, Distrust of social media, Social media causes repulsion/Do not like them
Perceptions and conceptions: Causes of Violence and Solutions for Peacebuilding	Structural peace or structural violence conception, Corruption, Education as a peacebuilding factor, Distrust of government, Mass media and government are colluding, Mass media and organized crime are colluding, Organized crime threatens media, Lack or loss of values
Perceptions and Conceptions related to Peace	Peace understood as links and relationships, Peace understood as respect or absence of violence/ not “messing” with one another, Peace understood as tranquility/ calmness, Inner peace, Mexico is not peaceful, Mexico is peaceful

Table I: Preexisting categories

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the results, several triangulation methods were used throughout the research. The interviews were conducted by six members of the research team to reduce the risk related to personal bias. The data analysis was conducted by seven members of the team who processed different interviews at different points in time. The patterns and repetitions were confirmed despite variation in the interviewers and data analysts. Meetings were conducted throughout the data collection and data analysis periods and the inputs from all the team members were considered. In addition, interviews were conducted with individuals from both urban and non-urban areas and participants that represented different ages, genders and a wide variety of professions. Furthermore, comparisons and contrasts across age, gender, location, and profession, were conducted to verify the results and the patterns remained very similar among those demographic groups. Finally, the results of the investigation were compared and contrasted with the

results of the first two stages of the project and verified that the pattern repetition was consistent with the results of the first stages of the research project.

Transferability

The results of this investigation are not transferable to the entire Mexican population because they were formulated from a small and unrepresentative sample. These results refer only to the 80 interviewed participants. However, pattern repetitions among those interviewees are significant. Furthermore, the results of the present investigation are substantially similar to the results of the first two stages of this research project (Meschoulam 2014; Meschoulam et al., 2015). Therefore, hypotheses are suggested at the end of this paper, which could be tested with larger samples.

Results

The most reported frequencies that occurred when analyzing all the participants' interviews included the following: *Distrust of mass media*, which received 790 or 5.8% of the total of 13,593 mentions and was mentioned by 100% of our participants at least once, and *Manipulation of information*, which received 498 mentions by 92.5% of the participants. The third most occurring frequency was *Objectivity/seriousness/honesty/journalistic rigor* (f=461 in 94% of participants), and the fourth most occurring frequency was *Negative feelings related to media* (f=458, 89% of participants). Table II provides a general overview of the most occurring frequencies.

Categories coded	Frequency of occurrence during interviews (f)	Percentage of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Distrust of mass media	790	100%
Manipulation of information	498	92.5%
Objectivity, seriousness, honesty, journalistic rigor, and trustworthiness	461	93.75%
Negative feelings related to media (Anger, upset, repulsion, sadness, and apathy)	458	88.75%
Structural peace or violence	405	82.5%
Distrust of government	405	80%
Own experience or observation	372	81.25%
I use media to get information	350	86.25%
Frustration or impotence	343	76.25%
Media exhibit too much violence	317	88.75%

Table II. The 10 most frequently mentioned occurrences. Total participants=80

General overview and contrasts

i) What distances participants from mass media

According to the results of this investigation, participants were pushed away from the mass media primarily because of the following factors:

1. The mass media, in general, did not appear to provoke trust in the interviewees. The most frequently mentioned theme was *Distrust of mass media* (f=790, 100% of participants). When this theme was further explored, most participants indicated that they perceived that information was constantly manipulated by journalists (f=498, 92.5% of participants). This issue was also related to two other elements: One, the participants expressed a very high distrust in their government (f=405, 80% of participants), and two, numerous participants believed that the mass media and the government are colluding (f=211, 73% of participants). Consequently, the participants distrusted the media because they believed that the media must obey the government (f=210, 70% of participants);
2. Most participants in this investigation (89%) believed that the mass media provoke negative feelings in their audiences, (f=458) such as fear, anger, frustration or apathy, in part because the mass media unnecessarily exhibit too much violence (f=317, 89% of participants). Several interviewees expressed that the mass media are peace disruptors because they promote misinformation or generate a negative environment (f=308, 84% of participants); 36% stated that the mass media causes them terror or distress (f=61). Below are examples of those comments:

The media can't really cover all the news because the government doesn't let them, really. [...] (Participant from Quintana Roo, Pool Keeper, May 14, 2016).

[...] I believe it is a lack of professionalism on the part of the newscaster. I believe it's really unethical. I also distrust the TV, but basically, that's how the government controls the entire society. (Participant from Mexico City, Housewife, May 5, 2016).

[...] I believe that the communication media are corrupt [...] and the information is shown after being very manipulated by the government. (Participant from Quintana Roo, Flowers Seller, June 19, 2016)

Well, I have spoken to several people. I have tried to resume watching TV [...] I thought my personal views were affected by my immaturity, and now I believe I have stronger criteria, and my maturity is stronger. Well my dislike has increased, and my distrust has increased [...]. Our state of mind depends a lot on what we watch and listen, and how we watch and listen to it [...] I feel like it's a waste of senseless energy, you know. So there are many things that go around the world that you cannot control. And because seeing so many negative news –which is the only thing that's on the news or at least in the few that I remember, anxiety, frustration, and the disappointment factor become more present. So I say, what's the point in watching that when my goal is totally different? Because my biggest tool is creativity, then if I surround myself with negative things, the only thing I'm going to project in my creative process are negative things, you know. (Participant from Guanajuato, Digital Designer, July 31, 2016)

It's like very strong, you become so involved, well it happens to me with news, and it's like, Oh my God! I get afraid and say "I hope this doesn't happen" [...] Or I don't know, it's like, how they sell it to you, it's like they want to have you right there, like "Be afraid! This and that is happening", so you sometimes don't want to watch news because it's like, death, death, robberies, fight, war, and you go

away so you don't feel that way, because it's like they infect you in a certain fashion. (Participant from Mexico City, Cashier, May 26, 2016).

Most news is altered, I think, or they are only trying to create that sort of panic or stress in people, so that it becomes easier to manipulate people. (Participant from Michoacan, Orthodontist, September 24, 2016).

It is remarkable that 44% of the participants specifically expressed anger because they believed that the mass media treats its audiences as if they were stupid or dumb (f=74):

They (the media) treat us as if we were sheep, like: "do this and do that, say this, think this", and they think that is exactly how we are going to behave [...] they don't give you tools to reflect or think what they're saying. (Participant from Mexico City, Teacher, August 8, 2016)

They don't have to treat us as stupid people and hide things from us, because we know, we have experience, and we have lived, we are Mexicans. (Participant from Sonora, Restaurant Worker, September 15, 2016)

Other factors that were present during the interviews, but to a lesser degree, include categories such as *Media are biased or radical* (f=68, 36% of participants), *Media cover topics that are not important* (f=66, 35%), *Media only seek ratings/they only try to sell the news* (f=66, 35%), *Media are very repetitive/cover the same news* (f=66, 34%), *I don't have enough time* (f=65, 45%), *Media have too much power* (f=56, 32%), *Media have their own agenda* (f=49, 30%), *Programs are boring* (f=39, 29%). Only 14% of participants stated that they were pushed away from the media because their *programs or texts are too long* (f=20).

ii) *What attracts the participants to the mass media?*

Consistently, when the participants were attracted to a certain media outlet or journalist, they referred to the following factors: (1) The category *Objectivity/Seriousness/Honesty/Journalistic rigor* (f=461, 94% of participants) was the overall third most mentioned category. Since participants highly distrusted the media, they seemed to feel deeply attracted by those journalists, programs, or texts that inspired trust in them, and that trust appeared to occur only when they perceived that the media source is honest, objective, and journalistically rigorous. A journalist or program that was perceived as a promoter of critical thought and one that questions government authorities (f=96, 45%) was likely to have a better attraction factor in our sample. Similarly, almost 30% of the participants stated that they felt attracted to media sources that are reflective or "make you think"; (2) In direct connection with issues that pushed participants away from the media, the interviewees expressed that they were attracted by programs or journalists that exhibit less violent images, show care for the victims of violence, and do not focus only on the problems, but provide a serious coverage of proposals to solve those problems. Ideas that are very similar to these are included in the conceptual framework for *Peace Journalism* (Galtung, Lynch, & Mc Goldrick, 2006). That category received 205 mentions and was expressed by 80% of participants at least once; 41% of the participants stated that the mass media should contribute peacebuilding; (3) Once again, in connection to the negative sentiments that many of our participants (89%) reported during the interviews, which they felt are directly caused by their contact with the media, most of the participants stated that they preferred to only have contact with music, cultural, and entertainment programs, in contrast to news. Participants also stated that they were attracted by news programs that were perceived as softer, programs that combine hard news with music and cultural or scientific information. This category received 271 mentions and was expressed by 94% participants at least once. Below are examples of those comments:

Well, I want the media to cover news with truth. What happened, how it happened, and if there was abuse of authority [...] evidence, videos, voice notes, whatever. Mostly evidence. Not opinions, not hearsay. (Participant from Mexico City, Architect, June 24, 2016).

I'd like to see qualified journalists, so that we see that they are not manipulated, and they are doing their job for the benefit of the country [...] I'd like them to make me understand what is really happening. (Participant from Mexico City, Businesswoman, June 22, 2016)

With more respect, with more subtleness. I mean, yes, give the news, but you don't have to expose the person there. If she is already dead, at least show some respect and not expose her. (Participant from Mexico City, Household Worker, May 11, 2016)

I don't think it's OK to pretend as if no horrible thing was happening in the world, but I feel they use that violence to attract people so that they watch it. I mean, lots of times in the newspaper...an accident, and you see the picture there, or in the news, I mean, you don't need to watch so much to realize about how the situation is [...] you have to be respectful. In the end, it's a person, and you shouldn't use her suffering to your ends. (Participant from Oaxaca, Student, August 6, 2016)

I like the media that not only shoot the news, but they provide analysis, like they can disaggregate the news, provide a better approach, so you can question your reality. (Participant from Mexico City, Psychologist, September 5, 2016)

I like the media that give us what's true...Like if the man hit her, you see? They don't just give that news, but they say, that mustn't be done, or help so that this is not done, or explain why it happens. (Participant from Mexico City, Nurse, May 18, 2016)

So yes, I like to know how we can prevent it from happening, I like to know what we are going to do about it. Or, as to the negative things, how am I going to help? Something horrible happened, well OK, let's get into it and see how can we help. (Participant from Mexico City, Housewife, May 5, 2016).

I mean, like after giving you the information, that they also commented about what can be done about that, so you don't stay there with the impression that "everything's wrong, what's the point in trying?". Instead of that, I'd like that the mass media would also generate reflection so we seek for solutions at our own level. (Participant from Queretaro, Farmer, August 8, 2016).

Additional results regarding factors that appeared to attract participants to certain programs, journalists or media, included the following: *I access news because I feel that the issues are important* (f=174, 64%), *I feel attracted by the voice tone, or the kinder or softer way the journalist provides the news* (f=174, 58%), *Personal closeness/interaction/connection with the program or media* (f=152, 69%), *Geographic closeness* (f=119, 66%). Other factors that were mentioned, but to a lesser extent, included the *Clarity of the information* (f=86, 44%), *Media easily accessible* (f=86, 44%), *Contact with media as a habit or someone else turns it on* (f=76, 46%), *I feel attracted by media that cover diversity topics such as gender, environment, civil rights* (f=51, 33%), *that are funny or entertaining* (f=45, 33%), *that are synthetic or brief* (f=44, 33%). Interestingly, only 22% of the participants, expressed concern about the media being timely or fast, a category that was mentioned only 27 times among more than 13,000 other statements.

iii) Social media

In our prior study (Meschoulam et al., 2015), the use of social media was mentioned by participants as an alternative and more credible source of news than traditional media. This study explored these themes more

profoundly. In our sample, the most mentioned platform was Facebook (f=170 and 81% of participants). Twitter was second (f=69, 40%) and Instagram was third (f=36, 34%). Seven out of every 10 participants stated that they used social media to obtain information (f=168). Half of the interviewees stated that they trusted social media (f=110). Furthermore, 48% of the participants stated that they trusted social media more than traditional media such as newspapers, radio, or TV (f=102). Seventy-one percent of the interviewees used Internet portals that are not related to what they perceive as mainstream media (f=183). When this issue was explored more deeply, numerous interviewees stated that social media or the Internet provided more freedom to express issues and feelings (f=49, 34%). Other participants stated that they felt close and connected with people through social media (f=68, 48%) or that they liked the interaction that occurs in this type of platform (f=65, 47%). These factors confirm the results of our past study (Meschoulam et al., 2015), which indicated that many participants preferred to form their opinions and ideas through conversations with individuals who are close to them, such as family or friends, whom they trusted more than journalists or politicians that manipulate information. Therefore, social media was used, particularly by the younger interviewees, as a means to further that conversation, although not orally. Below are examples of these categories:

Because traditional media are a business. I don't think that the newscasters or editors have bad intentions, but they can feel forced, or threatened [...] whereas in social media, for good or for bad, everyone says what everyone needs to say, and if so many people say the same, I may think that this can be true, even more if this comes from different parts of the country. That's why I trust more in the public opinion expressed in Facebook or on the Internet than in traditional mass media. (Participant from Sinaloa, Volunteer Worker, August 21, 2016)

It's like someone uploads a video or a post and says "27 dead people by 12 o'clock". However, this was never on TV. Why? Because obviously there is a vested interest, or they don't want people to find out, because obviously the government... I repeat, it's a matter of tourism. But someone who is external to the government or to the media such as a big broadcasting company, well obviously, that person is going to upload that video because he is expressing freely and nothing will happen. (Participant from Sonora, Coffee Shop Server, September 20, 2016)

This study, however, detected a high degree of mistrust in social media, which was almost as high as the degree of trust. Nearly half of the interviewees (48%) expressed a major or minor degree of mistrust in social media (f=99). More than a third stated that social media can be easily manipulated by political actors or by common people who report rumors or unconfirmed news (f=66, 34%). Certain participants even expressed that they preferred to use traditional media because those media have certain control over the news they publish. Although these themes were present in every age group among the 80 interviewees in this research, it is noteworthy that when comparing the age groups, the younger participants used and trusted social media more than older participants. Below are examples:

Because I simply don't trust in the posts, sometimes they are hard to verify. Also, because of the comments that emerge immediately [...]. People start commenting even without finishing to read the news –it gets on my nerves that people only read the headline and don't dig into the news in depth, so I prefer simply going directly to the news pages. (Participant from Mexico City, Financial Worker, August 12, 2016).

Social media are not as trustworthy because anyone can publish or alter anything. Social media are more about your opinion or what you think, more than publishing news as they are. (Participant from Puebla, Student, May 14, 2016).

So the Internet still lacks a lot of solidity. It's media that you can't control, I mean, no one can control it, there are no rules like "this can be posted or this can't be posted", or "if you post this,

the consequences will be this”, [...] no regulation, and anyone can post anything, even lies, with a basis or not. (Participant from Mexico City, veterinary doctor, June 13, 2016).

iv) *Structural factors*

As previously explained, this study not only explored the relationship between the participants and mass media but also searched for connections between their perceptions and certain themes that emerged during our prior studies (Meschoulam, 2014; Meschoulam et al., 2015). From this perspective, many of those themes were often repeated during the present investigation, although the interview protocol was very different from the protocol used in the prior studies. A majority of participants (82%) believed that organized criminal violence is rooted in structural factors such as inequality, corruption or lack of education. Many interviewees reported a high degree of distrust of their government (f=405, 80%) or a distrust of politicians (f=178, 50%). Although the interviewers did not ask about this issue, the majority of participants (81%) stated that they preferred to form their ideas and opinions about their reality through their own experiences and observations (f=372) or through conversations with family, friends, or associates (f=173, 68%) rather than from traditional media. A deeper analysis of the results reveals the categories that emerged during the first stages of the research (Meschoulam, 2014; Meschoulam et al., 2015) are intimately connected to those occurring most frequently in the present research. The results indicate perceptions that mass media are one component of a large and corrupted system. In addition, the current study demonstrated that the participants believed that certain media programs or newscasts either intentionally or unintentionally spread fear.

Comparing and contrasting results

Different tests were conducted to detect pattern repetitions and variations among the various groups of the sample. Comparison were carried out between (a) the Mexico City sample of 40 participants and the 40 interviews from other parts of the country, (b) the 38 male participants and the 42 female participants, (c) participants from different age groups, and (d) participants from different professions. The results of the cross category coding indicated frequency occurrence and pattern repetitions of the most important categories of this research across age, gender, profession, and location. Tables III, IV, V, VI and VII illustrate some of these comparisons. Certain differences were detected in categories that were mentioned less frequently. These categories must be the subject of future research to determine any potential significance.

Categories Coded	Frequency of occurrence during interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Objectivity, seriousness, honesty, journalistic rigor, and trustworthiness	225	36
Cultural, musical, and entertainment programs	142	37
Peace journalism proposals and less violent images	100	33
Closeness (geographic)	81	33
Way of saying news and voice tone	81	33

Table III: Most occurring frequencies regarding media attraction in female participants

Categories Coded	Frequency of occurrence during interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Objectivity, seriousness, honesty, journalistic rigor, and trustworthiness	229	38
Cultural, musical, and entertainment programs	126	37
Peace journalism proposals and less violent images	103	25
Closeness (geographic)	102	30
Way of saying news and voice tone	91	23

Table IV: Most occurring frequencies regarding media attraction in male participants

Categories Coded	Frequency of occurrence during interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Distrust of mass media	149	16
Manipulation of information	96	15
Negative feelings related to media (anger, upset, repulsion, sadness, and apathy)	87	12
Media exhibit too much violence	59	15

Table V: What pushes me away from media? Most occurring frequencies in participants of age 18-24

Categories Coded	Frequency of occurrence during interviews (f)	Number of participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Distrust of mass media	475	51
Manipulation of information	312	47
Negative feelings related to media (anger, upset, repulsion, sadness, and apathy)	283	46
Media exhibit too much violence	207	45

Table VI: What pushes me away from media? Most occurring frequencies in participants of age 24-59

Categories Coded	Frequency of	Number of
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	occurrence during interview (f)	participants who mentioned the theme at least once
Distrust of mass media	159	12
Manipulation of information	85	11
Negative feelings related to media (anger, upset, repulsion, sadness, and apathy)	77	12
Media are peace disruptors and promote misinformation	62	10
Media and government collusion	58	9
Distrust because media obeys government	58	11
Media exhibit too much violence	47	10

Table VII: What pushes me away from media? Most occurring frequencies in participants of age 60+

Discussion of findings

This study confirmed the results from our prior research regarding participants' distrust of the government and the mass media and participants' preference for forming their ideas and opinions based on their own experiences, observations, social conversations, or alternative sources such as the Internet or social media. However, this study explored these topics in greater detail and revealed the following:

1. Distrust in the media was deeply related to:
 - a. distrust the interviewees had in the government, primarily because they believed that the government manipulates news and that the media must obey the government; therefore, freedom of expression is limited, and
 - b. an overly excessive exposition of violence in news programs, which the participants perceived that the media uses to reach their audiences; this violence generated negative sentiments such as fear, anger, frustration, and apathy
2. The participants were more attracted to the media sources, journalists, and programs that
 - a. demonstrate objectivity, journalistic rigor, and trustworthiness,
 - b. use and provoke critical thinking to question authorities and do not treat their audiences as stupid or dumb,
 - c. show respect for the victims of violence by not excessively exhibiting images or videos and/or caring for the victims' identity, family and fate, and
 - d. provide coverage about solutions and not only about problems.

Although the majority of participants trusted social media more than traditional media, many also believed that social media can be used and easily manipulated by political actors or other citizens that abuse freedom of expression to spread fear, lies and rumors through fake news.

The sample of the present study is not representative of the entire population of Mexico or other countries. However, the results were consistent across phases one (Meschoulam, 2014), two (Meschoulam et al., 2015), and three of this project, and the patterns repeated across gender, age, profession, and geographical location. Therefore, these results may suggest testing certain hypotheses in other cases or using broader samples inside or outside Mexico. These hypotheses include the following:

The concept of the “influence” of mass media, at least for the present, should be the subject of serious questions. As long as certain newspapers, TV channels, radio stations, programs or journalists are perceived as a component of the corrupt system that prevails in countries such as Mexico, then the media’s influence as a social constructor appears to be limited. Conversely, the media has the potential to become a reliable source of information, to have a positive influence on society, and contribute to the free flow of information, and therefore, to peace (IEP, 2016b). However, that is only possible when the media is perceived to promote critical thinking, to display objectivity and journalistic rigor. A media source may also have a positive influence in societies when it questions authorities, when it seriously analyzes problems, when it shows restraint in the violence it exhibits, when it focuses more on discussing and debating solutions instead of only focusing on problems, when it provokes reflection, and when it treats audiences with respect and intelligence.

Implications for policymaking and peacebuilding

In alignment with the results of this study, we propose the following recommendations:

1. The relationship between the media and society is not only a matter of democracy and freedom but also a matter of peacebuilding. Therefore, any steps taken towards improving what appears to be a damaged relationship between the media and the Mexican society (GEA-ISA, 2015; Parametría, 2015; Meschoulam et al., 2015) may improve Mexico’s low levels of peace, as indicated by measures such as the Global Peace Index (IEP, 2016). The first recommendation is to dedicate significant efforts to strengthen the study of the topics that are discussed in this paper in a broader and more profound manner to determine whether the patterns found in this study are present in representative samples (in Mexico and/or elsewhere).
2. The results of prior studies and for this study should be shared with government officials, politicians, media representatives, and other stakeholders in Mexican society to contribute to their understanding of the social links and the pillars of peace that are broken and to avoid perpetuating the factors that lead to mistrust, fear, and anger among members of the society and between the media and society. Public officials should exert efforts to diminish information vacuums and must communicate credibly, establish facts, and propose viable and reliable solutions for Mexico’s problems, particularly regarding peacelessness. These efforts should include speaking about how to reduce violence but should also address structural factors that build peaceful societies (IEP, 2016b). Furthermore, politicians and policymakers may need to foster bridges between themselves and the citizens they govern by increasing the transparency of funds and actions, allowing journalists to question them and providing credible explanations for their decisions.
3. Apart from the politicians, if mass media representatives, journalists, newspaper editors, program producers, and newscasters seek credibility and solid links between them and their audiences, they would do well to focus on areas such as the following:
 - a. Work diligently to strengthen their credibility through different actions such as exhibiting a clear independence between the media and politicians, fostering critical and reflective thinking, questioning authorities about their decisions and actions, providing a forum for the critical voices of experts and audiences, and encouraging research journalism that uncovers corruption

- b. Effectively communicate to their audiences how they are taking steps to solidify their objectivity and journalistic rigor, and demonstrate the distance between them and the corrupt system
 - c. When reporting violence, show restraint in the use of disturbing images and in the continual transmission of videos that may be considered too disruptive, as the participants of this study expressed; instead, consider expressing and demonstrating respect for the victims of violent acts, their relatives and their communities, even if this results in not graphically exhibiting the violent act
 - d. Report violence truthfully and timely, but do not focus only on the violent events; instead, seek for the root and structural causes of that violence and encourage the analysis and debate of potential solutions or methods to reduce violence, invite experts, seek answers to important questions as to how the cycles of violence begin and may be stopped
 - e. According to this study's results, the participants focus less on the timing of a news publication and focus much more on how the issues are covered. Audiences are more satisfied when journalists analyze the root causes and critically reflect or engage in discussions about potential solutions rather than how quickly the newspaper, radio or TV station released a story. This suggestion does not imply that timely news is irrelevant, but rather that a better balance between opportunity and critical reflection or analysis is needed;
 - f. The voice tone, format of the programs, and the manner in which news is communicated are important elements, particularly for the interviewees of this research. Reporting a wide variety of topics, including music, art, culture and science in combination with news regarding economics, politics, or violence, may be appreciated by different audiences; and finally,
 - g. Ratings may be important for most media outlets, but according to the results of this investigation, which should be confirmed by more research, audiences may remain more loyal to media outlets that consider and respond to the abovementioned factors, which may create an economic incentive to respond to these suggestions.
4. Training programs for journalists may be implemented according to the recommendations provided in this paper. In these programs, journalists can develop strategies that reconcile their primary task to inform with the audiences' needs and sentiments, as expressed in this current study and prior studies.

Recommendations for research

The first two stages of this project (Meschoulam, 2014; Meschoulam et al., 2015) suggested that more studies are needed to determine whether the occurrence of themes and the repetition of patterns remained consistent in other samples. This study was intended to more deeply analyze a specific area that the prior study had detected: the relationship between mass media and the study participants. Due to a solid consistency of theme occurrence in this new stage of the research, certain hypotheses and recommendations were proposed. Future research may focus on those hypotheses. First, more qualitative research could be developed to codify more participants' views and expressions into the themes that are provided in this study or to detect new emerging categories and more deeply analyze the concepts that are shared in this study. A future study could be conducted in other locations in Mexico or in other countries. Second, a quantitative instrument could be developed from the results of this study and applied to broader samples, either in Mexico or in other countries, and used to test the suggested hypotheses or to adjust the hypotheses according to new results. Future studies could eventually lead to a reliable generalization of results and to more solid evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and media representatives.

Conclusions

The links between the media and the societies they serve is a matter of peacebuilding. The healthier this relationship is, the closer a society may be to peace (IEP, 2016b). Prior studies have demonstrated that in the Mexican context, many of the links that exist between the participants and the media have been damaged. Interviewees expressed distrust, anger and frustration with “The Mass Media” and expressed that they preferred to be disconnected from that media or did not trust what they read, watched or listened to. This study deeply explored these issues and sought to disaggregate a single “Mass Media” body to determine the specific factors that push participants away from those media outlets and what elements, if any, tended to attract them to other media outlets. The present investigation also analyzed which media sources or journalists were more valued than others and why. The results indicate that the participants reported distrust in the media that was deeply connected to distrust in the government and the corrupt system in general, primarily because they perceived that the media obeys the government and manipulates the news. Furthermore, participants in our interviews believed that the media unnecessarily exhibits too much violence and provokes negative feelings in their audiences purposefully to sell more news. Most of the participants expressed anger and frustration when they perceived that the media treats them as stupid and, instead of nurturing a debate or discussions about potential solutions to Mexico’s many problems, they hide the truth or disguise realities about the country. Therefore, the participants valued journalists who demonstrate critical thinking, provoke reflection in their audiences, question the government, uncover corruption, and promote debate about solutions. Mexico is one of the 25 least peaceful countries on Earth. If, as research has demonstrated, corruption and a lack of the free flow of information is correlated with peacelessness (IEP, 2016b), then every effort to understand how to develop improved relationships between the media and the Mexican society may improve conditions for Mexico’s future. This study seeks to contribute to that goal.

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