FROM THE FOREST TO FACEBOOK: ANALYZING THE ONLINE ACTIVISM OF

AN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT IN GUATEMALA

by

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ABSTRACT

Social media is among the most recent tools of propaganda used to manipulate the public; it has the required ingredients to reach a wide audience while lacking the regulations that exist for other forms of mass media designed to prevent the spread of misinformation. While recognizing these concerns, this thesis demonstrates that social media is not always a tool for manipulation. Rather, social media also serves as an invaluable political tool that grassroots social movements use to pursue environmental and social justice. To support this argument, this thesis analyzes the online presence and content of the Association of Petén's Forest Communities (ACOFOP) in Guatemala on Facebook over a six-month period. ACOFOP's Indigenous and non-Indigenous members manage the world's largest community forest and form part of many international land rights and conservation alliances. To understand how ACOFOP uses social media to pursue and achieve its political objectives, the author conducted a content analysis of ACOFOP's Facebook page over a six-month period. Using open coding methods, this analysis reveals that ACOFOP uses social media in order to 1) strengthen its international solidarity networks, 2) protect and advocate for Indigenous rights around the world, 3) fight climate change, and most importantly, 4) to secure their members' land rights that are currently threatened by outside economic interests and large-scale development projects.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media is among the most recent tools of propaganda used to manipulate the public

(Beauchamp, 2019). It has the required ingredients to reach a wide audience and also

lacks the regulation over other media designed to prevent the spread of misinformation.

Some have argued that social media undermines democracy (Bossetta, 2018; Haidt, 2019;

Magnis, 2019). In the case of the rise of the far-right, nationalistic political parties, social

media is perhaps working against democracy or at least helping to suppress it. The

examples of Russia's involvement on Facebook and Twitter to manipulate the outcomes

of the U.S. presidential election of 2016 paired with Brazilian President Bolsonaro's

exploitation of WhatsApp and Facebook give rise to reasonable anxiety about the rise of

nationalism and far-right agendas through social media (Beauchamp 2019). Media

scholar Jay David Bolter proposes that the far right is using "the politics of flow," the

component that makes social media addictive, to capture audiences and pull them to its

side (2019).

Despite these undemocratic practices, for many people and organizations

social media allows the unheard to have a voice and gain political visibility and solidarity

once they organize together. Looking only to the far-right use of social media neglects its

potential as a conduit for democratization. Just as politicians can take advantage of social

media, so can the voiceless in the general public use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to

gain clout. Social media has been a powerful tool for mobilization of social movements,

which are arguably the average citizen's most powerful point of leverage with their

governments. As the internet has become more available to a greater number of people,

social media has transformed into a public forum where all can participate. In particular, it has been a place where those who are ignored by their governments can build community across greater distances and be heard. Internationally known and successful movements such as Mexico's #YaMeCansé (Enough already) and Guatemala's #RenunciaYa (renounce now) provide evidence that the internet and social media can serve as a powerful resource for the people. Grassroots organizations have also tapped into the invaluable source available at the fingertips. Hashtags often represent the social movements of today. #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo have become part of the collective American consciousness. In Mexico, the #YaMeCanse and #YoSoy132 (I am 132) student protest movements have reached international renown through their social media outreach. These are among some of the most well-known movements of the Spanish-language cyberspace, but others are treading into this new territory to reach wider audiences and garner international attention.

One notable grassroots organization that is taking advantage of social media is the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) headquartered in Guatemala. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous peasant-run organization has played a critical role in both environmental conservation and political activity in Guatemala. As a result, ACOFOP serves as an excellent model for other environmental justice movements world-wide seeking to uphold Indigenous rights, environmental justice, and conservation. Though ACOFOP has successfully secured forest concessions for member communities and has great acumen in lobbying for its interests, the organization faces many threats from private entities and the Guatemalan government (Gomez & Mendez, 2007, p.11).

In order to understand how social media can be used as a force for

democratization and social and environmental justice, this thesis poses the following questions: How are ACOFOP's political goals evident in its social media platforms? And, how does ACOFOP's social media presence contribute to the strength of this grassroots, environmental and social justice movement?

To answer these questions, this analysis employs open coding methods to analyse online media content from the six-month period of August 2019 to February 2020. This analysis reveals that ACOFOP uses social media in order to 1) strengthen its international solidarity networks, 2) protect and advocate for Indigenous rights around the world, 3) fight climate change, 4) and most importantly, to secure their members' land rights that are currently threatened by outside economic interests and large-scale development projects. In doing so, this project contributes to the literature on social media and politics by demonstrating that social media platforms serve as powerful tools for spreading political messages and maintaining support for advocacy efforts.

II. BACKGROUND: The Creation of the Association of Petén's Forest Communities

To understand why ACOFOP is a significant organization to study in regard to social media activism, it is important to first understand the conditions that led to the creation of the association as well as the current threats it faces. In impoverished and war-torn Guatemala, organizations run by the largely peasant Indigenous population are critical to creating a more democratic state (Nelson 1996). ACOFOP is one of these organizations. Founded with the primary objective of creating and uniting communities managing forest concessions, ACOFOP has created a symbiotic relationship between the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) residents and the environment they protect. Forest management of the MBR is the "cornerstone of the economy and community life [within concessions] and an effective way to fight poverty and the social marginalization of the territory (Gomez & Mendez, 2007, p.27)."

The MBR was officially established in 1990 by the Guatemalan National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) that was created the year before (Association of Forest Communities of Petén [ACOFOP], n.d.). The MBR is located in the northern department of Guatemala called Petén. It covers 35,854 square km and contains rich biodiversity and hundreds of archaeology sites (Gomez & Mendez, 2007, p.3). While for a time Petén's Maya Biosphere served as Guatemala's hinterland, since its creation it has become an internationally important biodiversity hotspot for its diverse ecology. When the MBR was established in 1990, architects partitioned the protected area into three types of zones: 1) "core zones" absent of human presence with the intent for strict conservation, 2) "multiple-use zones" suited for sustainable resource extraction, 3) and a "buffer zone"

where there are no land use restrictions (see Figure 1, Devine, 2018) (Gomez & Mendez 2007; Devine, 2018).

Figure 1

The Map of the Maya Biosphere Reserve's Boundaries National Parks and Forest

Concessions
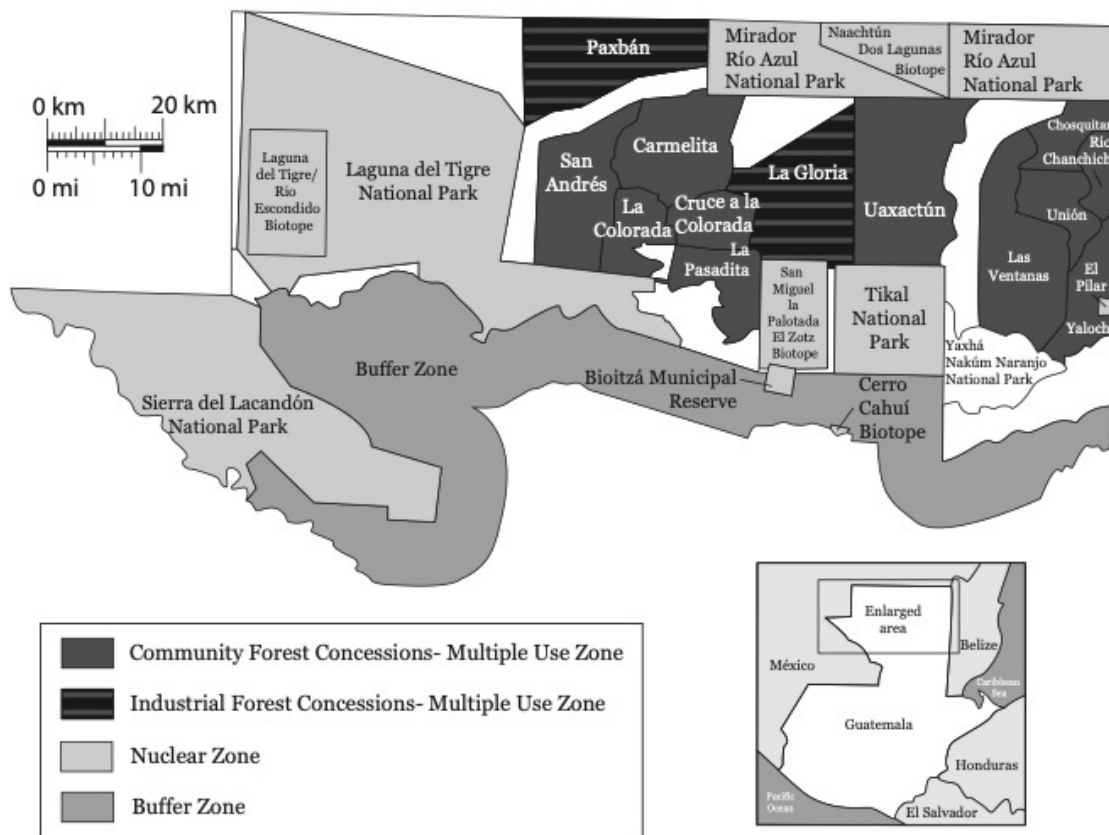
Source: Devine (2018)

Forest residents experienced the creation of the MBR as land dispossession (Devine 2018). The conservation restrictions imposed by CONAP infringed on customary rights of locals as stewards of the forest. When forest residents learned the Guatemalan government planned to create private timber concession for wealthy national

companies, they began to organize to defend their land rights and to create an alternative

sustainable forestry model. ACOFOP members also leveraged language in the

Guatemalan Peace Accords that promised land to peasant cooperatives. To address the

need for integration of displaced people during the Guatemalan Civil War, as well as

respond to pressures from communities residing in the reserve, CONAP created the first

community concession in 1995 that gave the community of San Miguel la Palotada the

right to sustainable extract resources, but not to own the land (Monterroso & Bary, 2012).

The Guatemalan state owns all the land in the MBR "core" and "multiple use" zones, but

communities have the exclusive right to extract resources in their concession for a period

for twenty five years (Gomez & Mendez, 2007, p.10). The grassroots activism that led to

ACOFOP's creation dates back to the early 1990s' creation of the Union of Chicle

Tappers and Wood Workers, who fought for access to the concessions against the private

sector and formed the Consultative Counsel of Forest Communities of Petén

(CONOFOP). This organization later became formally known as ACOFOP and

functioned as an advocate for the forest communities' rights (Gomez & Mendez, 2007,

p.10).

From 1996 – 2010, ACOFOP and its members created 12 community forest

concessions ranging from 7000 to 83,000 hectares of land for sustainable land use

(Radachowsky et al., 2012). These concessions are diverse; Several of the concessions

are managed by communities that have hundred year plus histories in the reserve as

chicle extractors, like Carmelita and Uaxactún. Other communities were established

more recently, like Cruce la Colorada, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s when state led

colonization of the Petén and civil war violence drove many to the forests of the Petén to

find land and escape violence (Millner et al, 2020, p.8).

Since its creation, ACOFOP has had to defend member communities from actors and initiatives that threaten the stability of the concessionaires' land tenure. Defending land tenure rights has been essential to ACOFOP's fight for the residents of the MBR. The intrusion of private sector interests in the MBR, as well the presence of organized crime and drug traffickers operating in the reserve, compounds the tenure insecurity that the communities experience (McSweeney et al., 2018). The Guatemalan government is unable to protect the region from illegal intruders, including loggers and drug traffickers, which poses a critical challenge to concessionaires (Millner et al., 2019, p.7). Furthermore, subsoil rights belong to the state, not the concessions, meaning the discovery of oil or another valuable subsoil resource could provide a financial incentive for the state to ignore or violate concession rights for the opportunity of profit (Monterroso & Barry, 2012, p.143).

Private interests currently threaten the concessions' community and ecotourism development as well. One example is the division caused by private ecotourism in the Carmelita concession. Ecotourism operated in coordination with the concession generates revenue and other benefits for the community. However, the intrusion of external parties in the ecotourism in Carmelita takes workers and does not benefit the community as a whole (Millner et al, 2019, 127). Even if the private ecotourism firm pays a fair wage, that wage benefits only the families of employees. On the other hand, the concession ecotourism benefits the entire community with reinvestment. Although the Carmelita concession is the first of the 9 active concession to be officially renewed, it still faces the threat from private sector industries, like the ecotourism.

These are just a few examples of the challenges that ACOFOP and its communities face in protecting their land rights and sustainable development model. Devine (2018) argues this ACOFOP-led struggle for land rights over time has solidified the position of the MBR resident and forest concessionaire as "a rights-bearing political subject," (p.580) which illustrates the significance of the organization's voice and legitimacy among its members.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

This thesis draws on and contributes to two debates and bodies of literature: explanations regarding the success and failures of community forestry in Guatemala, and the relationship between social media's role in enabling and/or threatening democracy worldwide.

III. 1 Explaining Success and Failure in Guatemala's Community Forest Concessions

Debate exists regarding the degree of success and reasons for success in community forest management in Guatemala. One of the keys to securing and maintaining land tenure rights for forest concessionaires is providing evidence that community forestry can help meet national socioeconomic and global conservation goals. By meeting the conservation objectives, especially, of the rights-granting Guatemalan state, the communities of Petén improve their chances of concession renewal (Monterroso and Barry, 2012, p.148). Several scholars and conservationists argue in favor of putting the MBR management in the hands of residents with ancestral ties above new residents or private interests (Gomez & Mendez 2007; Devine, 2018; Stoian et al., 2018). The concessions that ACOFOP represents demonstrate impressive environmental and socioeconomic progress in comparison with other forms of land tenure and management of the MBR (Blackman, 2015). For example, the deforestation rate in the multiple-use zones (MUZ) monitored by the concessions is .1% per year, which is especially remarkable given the area of land is 350,000 ha, (almost half of the MUZ area) (Stoian et

al., 2018, p.7). The buffer zone, where there are no land use restrictions, has the highest rate of deforestation per year with 5.5% (Stoian et al., 2018, p.7).

More recently, ACOFOP's participation in the program, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) has shown the global, environmental benefits of the community forestry concessions in the MBR. However, the uncertain future regarding concession renewal in the coming ten years destabilizes these benefits (Millner et al., 2019, p.8; USAID, 2014, p.33).

ACOFOP concessions have shown that the community forestry model paired with good planning can reap socioeconomic benefits as well. Stoian et al. report that investment in education and healthcare has resulted in an increase in access to formal education (2018). They state that "about 20% of community forestry enterprise members report not having had the opportunity for formal education, while 100% of their children are benefitting from some form of formal education" (Stoian et al., 2018, p. 6-7). Furthermore Bocci et al. find that household income has increased for those living within the concessions (2018). These statistics indicate that ACOFOP concessions are meeting the goals that are necessary to establish evidence of excellent governance of the MBR.

Out of the different types of forest management that exist in the region, many argue that community forestry outperforms strict conservation models like national parks and wilderness reserves. Arnold (2001) argues that state governments generally control forests with the notion that the state can most efficiently and conscientiously manage the land. However, in reality and particularly in developing countries "states [have] usually been unable to provide effective control over large areas" (Arnold, 2001, p. 9).

Where consensus exists that the forest concessions are the most effective

model for conservation int eh MBR, there exists more nuance debate regarding why three of the twelve concessions have failed, been cancelled, and residents evicted. In particular, Radachowsky et al. note that the communities like Carmelita and Uaxactún, which have histories in forest management, have been the most successful (2012). Radachowsky et al. (2012) are more critical though of the concessions run by migrant communities who lack the technical expertise needed for forest conservation and tend to allow more cattle-ranching and agriculture, which causes greater deforestation (p.24). Stoian et al. echoed their statements showing that migrant communities lacked not only experience in forest management practices but also "technical assistance provided by NGOs" and "availability of high-value timber species" (2018 p.7). Devine et al. (2018) illustrate the role that organized crime played in the cancellation of two of the so-called "migrant" concessions. Their research demonstrates that the success of the forest communities is much more complex, and that there are many factors contributing to the success or failure of the concessions.

Other scholars claim that the institutional history of Guatemala is what contributes primarily to the efficacy of community forestry initiatives. Rodriguez Solorzano and Fleischman (2018) compare Mexico's Calakmul reserve and Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve to demonstrate the degree of institutional impact on community forestry outcomes. While Mexico experienced important land tenure and agrarian reforms which worked to the benefit of the most economically marginalized peasant farmers, Guatemala's agrarian revolution was ultimately quashed. The US initiated a coup against the democratically elected President Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala, and the chance for proper land reform ended (Barrett 2007). Following this administrative upheaval, the

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Guatemalan government in word prioritized the peasants living in the Peten while the majority and best land ended up in the hands of wealthy due to their unfair land distribution system and exclusionary pricing (Rodriguez Solorzano & Fleischman, 2018, p.283). This difference in institutions heavily influenced the conservation outcomes of the two reserves with Calakmul proceeding with greater ease and efficacy than the Maya Biosphere Reserve (Rodriguez Solorzano & Fleischman, 2018).

While it might be tempting to break success and failure along the line of more historically established communities with concussions founded by communities that were founded in the 1970s and 1980s, this argument has problems. It suggests that only concessions with longstanding histories in the forests and cultures of forest care can be successful. I agree with Stoian et al. (2012) and Devine (2018) that dynamics outside of the community, like the level of funding, NGO assistance, and the pressure individual communities experience from criminal organization play a much larger determining role in concession outcomes. In the next section, I turn to a much less appreciated role of ACOFOP: the democratization of governance in Guatemala. As ACOFOP's supporters attest, the community forestry model is a sustainable and cost-effective form of forest management that also adheres to "principles of self-determination and democracy" (Arnold, 2007, p.19).

III. 2 *Social Media and Democracy*

Social media movements around the world have been studied to understand the practices and strategies that are most successful in bringing online interactions,

offline (My Stealthy Freedom, Renuncia Ya, Ayotzinapa somos todos). Those most familiar to Americans would include the Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements. Several authors writing about the efficacy of social movements online focus on the online content's ability to produce emotional reactions (Casas & Webb Williams, 2019; Nikunen, 2018). By many this is considered to be essential to creating a lasting impression that will result in some degree of mobilization. Nikunen (2018) explores the ways, what she calls, affective practice impacts the development of two European movements. Affective practice is the way activists use morality and emotion to motivate viewers through social media (Nikunen 2018). Casas and Webb Williams study affective practice in action by measuring the impacts of images on Twitter. Their results show that though not all emotional triggers are effective in driving likes, retweets, and comments, all of those emotions (fear, anger, enthusiasm) produce responses (Casas & Webb Williams, 2019).

Others have highlighted the use of hashtags for creating solidarity to build their movements (Stewart & Schultze, 2019; Abascal-Mena, 2015). One analysis of the My Stealthy Freedom (MSF) movement resisting the compulsory hijab law in Iran emphasizes hashtags as ways to create what Stewart and Schultze call "imagined" and "situated" solidarity (2019). In the case of MSF, imagined solidarity was facilitated by group interaction on Facebook while situated solidarity was created by hashtag-prompted posts which brought the imagined online solidarity to concrete unity offline (Stewart & Schultze, 2019).

However, these examples of activism serve as poor points of comparison to ACOFOP's activism because of the conditions in the US as opposed to those in

Guatemala. In the US approximately 90% of Americans have internet access (Pew Research Center, 2019. On the other hand, in Guatemala only 41% are online, and likely, few of this population are living in rural areas (Alliance for Affordable Internet, 2018). According to the Alliance for Affordable Internet, the average cost of one GB of data is about 4% of the gross national income per capita (Alliance for Affordable Internet, 2018), which is a high cost considering that about 60% of the population lives under the poverty line (World Bank).

As a result, I found literature focusing on other movements with origins in the global south, especially Latin America to be of greater value to my analyses though that is not to say there are not lessons to be learned from the movements based in the United States. For example, Spears-Rico (2019) addresses the significance of social media activism as a tool for Indigenous people in Mexico who have long been oppressed by their government. Like Guatemala, Mexico has a history of repression of Indigenous rights, and these wrongdoings have become increasingly salient as trending hashtags like #AyotzinapaSomosTodos (We are all Ayotzinapa) have brought international attention to their issues (Spears-Rico, 2019).

Social media movements of Latin America such as #RenunciaYa and #YoSoy132 have been extensively studied as powerful real-life influences, which have gained traction and international attention through the internet. Parallel movements, especially those originating in the United States like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, have proven that social media is fertile ground for contemporary social movements. All of these movements are political in nature. Attaching a movement to a hashtag and developing a well curated social media presence is now a critical aspect of pursuing political goals and

gathering followers. These viral movements have been the subject of many researchers, but other movements with slower growth have not caught the attention of academia. One powerful political force that has been overlooked in regard to its social media presence ACOFOP in Guatemala, a community-based resource management organization. Despite the absence of literature focusing on ACOFOP's social media, the movement is strong and highly influential both regionally and globally.

The lack of democratic governance institutions, a history of state sponsored genocide, and enduring poverty and inequality make collective social organizing in Guatemala difficult. However, the concessionaires, especially with the collective power of ACOFOP, have the potential to democratize the political and economic systems that oppress them. International agencies have been very important to assisting MBR residents to achieve these goals of democratization, increasing political participation by influencing with funding. Exerting influence on these international actors is critical for funding and creating international pressure. Conservation International, the Nature Conservancy, and the World Wildlife Fund in addition to other international organizations have advocated for "greater community involvement," which contributes to the existing domestic pressures led by ACOFOP (Taylor, 2010, p.177). Networking is incredibly important for ACOFOP because of the limitations of democracy in Guatemalan society. However, as Sundberg argues, social activism is another key to marginalized groups in Guatemala conceptualizing themselves as citizens who have a voice in government. The early years of the Maya Biosphere Reserve were exclusive of local communities and called upon Northern NGOs and USAID to assist CONAP in governing the reserve. The idea driving this policy of environmental stewardship was

highly paternalistic and based on the "people's presumed inability to understand

conservation (Sundberg, 2003, p.725)." Since then, ACOFOP has successfully advocated

for an expansion of its constituent communities' rights, and this thesis argues that social

media activism has been key in achieving this aim and is becoming a new frontier for

advocacy efforts.

IV. METHODS

My research concentrates on the role that social media plays in highlighting and supporting ACOFOP's political agenda, and more broadly, the possibilities of social media to contribute to, rather than undermine, democracy globally. To achieve this aim, my methods are designed to answer two main questions: How are ACOFOP's political goals evident in its social media platforms? And, how does ACOFOP's social media presence contribute to the strength of this grassroots, environmental and social justice movement?

To address my research question, I engage in mixed methods research. This approach includes online conceptual content analysis of ACOFOP's social media activity on Facebook. Content analysis is a "research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952)." Using coding techniques, descriptive statistics, image analysis, and discourse analysis I illustrate that ACOFOP uses its social media platforms to promote its political goals towards strengthening solidarity networks, uplifting Indigenous rights, addressing climate change, and securing concession renewal.

IV.1 *Data Collection*

I chose to analyze all social media posts on ACOFOP's Facebook page from August 1, 2019 to February 9, 2020. The project began in August of 2019 and made a practical starting point coinciding with the start of the Fall semester when I first started my research. February 9, 2020 marks the end of the week celebrating the thirty-year

anniversary of the founding of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. To capture this important event in my data, I extended my sixth-month period of study to an extra week. I chose to focus on Facebook in particular as ACOFOP publishes a great deal of the same material on its other main social media platforms, Instagram and Twitter. Most importantly, ACOFOP is most active on Facebook. Additionally, Facebook has the greatest amount of engagement with 11,921 people who like ACOFOP's page and 12,245 followers. ACOFOP's Twitter page has 2,208 followers, and its Instagram page has the least engagement with 2,064 followers. These numbers are accurate as of February 10, 2019. Because of the disparity between the engagement on Twitter and Instagram compared to Facebook, I chose to exclusively study ACOFOP's activity on Facebook.

I chose data to collect based on the types of engagement possible on Facebook. In an Excel spreadsheet, I created a sheet for Facebook, and I recorded quantitative data including the date of the post, the number of likes, the number of shares, and the number of comments for the quantitative component. I recorded the hashtags used, an image description, key words from the post, and tagged accounts for the qualitative component. I selected key data to record and later be analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

IV.2 *Data Analysis*

To analyze the Facebook data, I took a grounded theory approach. This theoretical background informs my content analysis. As explained by Charmaz, "the grounded theory method emphasizes the process of analysis and the development of theoretical categories, rather than focusing solely on the results" (Charmaz, 2008, 156).

By taking this theoretical approach to the content analysis, I derived the analysis from the data rather than prescribing results.

I analyzed the quantitative aspects of the Facebook data to address some of my research questions and understand the "interrelationships" between the qualitative codes, which emerge from the interactions and interplay of the data as explained (Saldana, 2011, p.92). Most generally I wanted to know how often on average ACOFOP posts on Facebook. Answering this question indicates the degree of ACOFOP's engagement and effort put into maintaining its social media. I also want to determine the average number of likes, shares, and comments on the social media platform. To connect more directly I wanted to determine which posts had the highest numbers of likes, shares and comments to evaluate the qualitative codes and themes which coordinated with posts with the greatest degree of engagement. For the purpose of this Honors thesis, the number of likes, shares and comments account for the degree of engagement.

In the process of documenting the qualitative data, I used coding techniques which, "function as a way of patterning, classifying, and later reorganizing each datum into emergent categories for further analysis"(Saldana, 2011, p.95). After documenting the quantitative data, all of the selected data from the three social media platforms, I used in vivo coding to directly transcribe the hashtags and associated organizations that had appeared in posts. In vivo coding "refers to a code based on the actual language of the participant," or in this case, the language of the author(s) of ACOFOP's social media posts (Saldana, 2011, p.99). Descriptive coding, on the other hand, is used to "summarize the topic of a datum (Saldana, 2011, p.104)." To include the discursive content and imagery of posts, I used descriptive coding to capture the essence or theme of the post. I

found it important to use in vivo coding for hashtags and tagged organizations because the exact language used in the post is necessary for creating online networks. Though I left the hashtagged material and the titles of associated organizations in the original Spanish when coding, throughout this Honors thesis, I have written the original and the English translations. Descriptive coding was more effective for the imagery and discourse analysis for two reasons. Because the original posts are published in Spanish, and my thesis is written in English, descriptive coding was necessary in the process of translation. Also, many of the ideas evident in the discourse of the posts were best summed up in the ideas they projected rather than the explicit language they used. For example, a post may have shown an image of a jaguar, but the message may have discussed biodiversity and climate change without communicating anything specific about the animal itself.

At this point I begin the step of categorizing the codes and measuring occurrences of the qualitative coded data. The three broad categories defining ACOFOP's political goals as expressed online are strengthening solidarity networks, uplifting Indigenous rights, addressing climate change, and securing concession renewal. There is a great deal of overlap between codes creating interrelationships between the social media data. This is especially evident in posts that may have codes including, for example, "Indigenous activism, U.N. Climate Week, climate change, and exchange." In a case like this one, the categories of strengthening solidarity networks, uplifting Indigenous rights, and addressing climate change are all present in the same post. To avoid the complication and inherent bias in choosing which codes are most definitive of a post for the purpose of categorizing and entire post, I am not sorting each post into a single category but rather

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each code into a category. I have made a catalog of all the codes and sorted them into the

categories determined early in the data logging process. From that point, I counted the

number of times each code was used and ranked them within their data categories of

image description, subject of post and associated organizations as labeled in the Excel

spreadsheet.

One of the main limitations that I encountered in my analysis is simply that I

worked as an individual rather than in a team. My coding and analysis were filtered

through my own bias and interpretation. As a result, I could not achieve a level of

objectivity, certainty of what is true, in my research or even intersubjectivity, an

agreement of what is true between researchers (Neuendorf, 2017, p.18). Reliability,

validity, and generalizability were also limited. Much of my analysis was based on my

individual interpretation.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of my analysis. The open coding techniques revealed four themes and political goals, which are the focus of this section. I first provide descriptive statistics on the volume and temporal patterns of ACOFOP's Facebook activity. Next, I describe the four main objectives evident in ACOFOP's social media content in detail.

The content analysis revealed some information about the levels of activity on ACOFOP's Facebook account. Over the period of 193 days lasting from August 1 to February 9, there were 158 posts. The number of posts per day was an average of .8 posts. Often times, the content would be centered around an event and the number of posts would increase over that period of time. For example, during the United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as COP 25, there were several posts centering around ACOFOP's participation in the event both leading up and during the event. Another important example would be the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the MBR. The content analysis kept a record of codes associated with the hashtags, post language, and images. These allowed me to see when an event occurred and what it says.

ACOFOP has a total of 12,160 likes on its content and 12, 546 followers as of March 28, 2020. The post with the most likes was a post announcing the renewal of the Carmelita community's land concession. This post had 919 likes, 341 shares, and 69 comments. This came as no surprise given the significance of concession renewal to ACOFOP's agenda. Securing concession renewal and ultimately upholding the land rights of the community foresters is the most prescient objective of ACOFOP. The online

celebration of the Carmelita renewal and the post's corresponding high level of engagement emphasizes the salience of this political goal. The degree of activity on this post stands out against the average amount of engagement overall.

The average ACOFOP Facebook post has 43.7 likes, 18.3 shares, and 1.7 comments. These numbers are quite low compared to the post with the greatest activity. However, ACOFOP faces some challenges to building its community online. One hurdle is the fact that nearly all posts are in Spanish. While this makes sense for ACOFOP's current following, it also prevents a population of interested English speakers from participating. Another interesting dynamic is the way people comment on ACOFOP's posts. There are typically few comments, but when there are multiple comments, the followers who comment do not interact with one another. In general, the comments are isolated rather than interactive. A third barrier is the access to internet in Guatemala where presumably there would be the greatest interest in monitoring ACOFOP's Facebook. As previously mentioned, in Guatemala only 41% are online, and it is probable the majority of those online live in urban areas distant from the MBR (Alliance for Affordable Internet, 2018). Also, the relative cost of internet service to cost of living in Guatemala could hinder Guatemalans from following ACOFOP (Alliance for Affordable Internet, 2018). These combined conditions suppress ACOFOP's ability to gain a wider audience, however, this does not mean that the support it has found on Facebook is at all insignificant. The following sections suggest just the opposite. The four categories for coding aligned with the four political themes in the Facebook content: 1) strengthening solidarity networks, 2) fighting climate change, 3) advocating for Indigenous rights, and 4) securing concession renewal. The qualitative data recorded

includes the hashtags, image description, the subject of post, and the individuals or organizations tagged.

V.1 *Strengthening Solidarity Networks*

The first category of strengthening solidarity networks is evident in the posts centering on educational exchanges to share the community forestry model. ACOFOP also demonstrated effort towards maintaining and strengthening solidarity networks by regularly tagging allied individuals and organizations. Some important allies included the Alianza Mesoamericana de Pueblos y Bosques (Mesoamerican Alliance for Communities and Forests), Coordinadora de las Oranizaciones Indigenas de la Cuenca Amazonica (Coordinatory of the Indigenous Organizations of the Amazonian Cuenca), Guardianes del Bosque (Guardians of the Forest), the Rainforest Alliance, and many others. ACOFOP tagged a person or organization in 74% of its posts over the studied period. While tagging may seem an arbitrary action that everyone does on Facebook, I interpret it as a politically motivated action. Maintaining relationships is critical for ACOFOP to leverage power in its more contentious political agendas like securing concession renewal. As a result, tagging allies and posting about creating connections with others is a genuinely significant action.

The community forestry model is at the center of ACOFOP's work. Frequently its Facebook page reflects this by posting images that establish the connection between human actions and the environment. Many images depict community forestry in action and in general the MBR residents who are working to protect their environment. For example, there are a number of photos showing MBR residents with xate palms, one of

the MBR's non-timber forest resources. Several of these photos are accompanied by #DesarrolloSostenible (sustainable development) or #ForesteriaComunitaria (community forestry), which help to draw connections with other groups working towards similar goals. One photo of a woman working with xate is paired with a caption telling the reader how their community forestry model both protects the forest and helps alleviate poverty in the region providing jobs for "thousands in areas where there exist few economic alternatives" (ACOFOP, 2019). The image also features the ACOFOP stamp and symbol which again highlights the relationship between humans and nature showing a human figure carefully holding leaves and a jaguar. Finally, the #SomosBosquesParaSiempre appears at the bottom of the photo to remind the viewer of the pictured woman's connection and interdependence with the forest.

Figure 2
Woman with xate leaves

Source: (ACOFOP, 2019).

The solidarity networks that ACOFOP has formed are perfect examples of transnational advocacy networks (TANs). Many of its political agendas are accomplished through efforts involving collaboration among a number of actors. Together acting in solidarity advocating for Indigenous rights or climate action, for example, ACOFOP and its allies have made major accomplishments for its constituents. ACOFOP's collaboration with other organizations is significant given the interplay that influences outcomes of TAN actions. Hadden and Jasny (2017) argue this point, and their research found that NGOs often function interdependently and make like tactical choices. Given these relationships, it is important to note ACOFOP's political goal of strengthening solidarity networks. With these organizations and many other actors ranging from nongovernmental organizations to celebrities, these networks are important for advancing ACOFOP's goals.

As significant a role that ACOFOP plays in Guatemala, private interests are constantly threatening the land rights of MBR residents. Dr. Richard Hansen's initiative to construct a train through the Mirador Basin, which would disrupt the lives and conservation practices of the MBR residents (Soy502, 2019). Additionally, the community foresters face the threat of narco-traffickers initiated agrarian change that destabilizes the authority of the forest communities. As explained by McSweeney et al., the U.S. "war on drugs," "interdiction incentivizes traffickers to repeatedly establish new transit sites, [and] seek out evermore remote 'frontier' landscapes—i.e., the relatively land- and resource-abundant spaces of smallholder agriculture, Indigenous territories, and protected areas" (2017, p.7). So, traffickers take advantage of spaces like the Maya Biosphere Reserve and threaten the livelihood of the concessionaires. The rights to the

concessions were not initially secured without a fight and will not be maintained without collaborative effort. Though Facebook is likely not the destination where alliances are formed between the members of ACOFOP's TANs, it provides a platform for displaying and reinforcing solidarity networks. ACOFOP's engagement with other political actors demonstrates its commitment to maintaining and strengthening its solidarity networks. Though it may seem unimportant to tag allies and post pictures of events with them, it is an essential reality in the contemporary world with the heavy emphasis on social media presence.

Figure 3

Group led by ACOFOP studies community forestry in action

Source: (ACOFOP (c), 2019).

Among the primary codes associated with the category of reinforcing solidarity networks are education and exchange. Many of the posts illustrated exchanges between

ACOFOP communities and other organizations from Colombia, Nicaragua, and Brazil for example. For the communities in Petén, the community forestry model has reaped huge benefits for both the people and the environment they live in. As a result, ACOFOP has made many efforts to provide education to residents of the MBR as well as outsiders on the community forestry model. The MBR is the largest tract of land managed under this model, and very successfully so for that matter. Many of ACOFOP's posts focus on current events for the MBR communities including exchange and educational events. A salient exchange event included a tour of the forest for an international course in forest management involving six different organizations and institutions, which is pictured above. The images documenting the tour show participants in the MBR gaining hands-on experience in the community forestry model used in the MBR.

Figure 4

ACOFOP collaborates with APRODEIN and Taking Root

Source: (ACOFOP (f), 2019).

The community forestry model has provided MBR residents with the opportunity to sustainable work that has benefitted the community socioeconomically and environmentally. In many ways, the community forestry model is essential to the socioeconomic development of the people who practice it and live there. The community forestry model does not belong to an exclusive club. In fact, many of ACOFOP's Facebook posts feature exchanges with other organizations in which the communities of the MBR share their model with others. These posts demonstrate a commitment to solidifying relationships with these other organizations. Another example pictured below shows ACOFOP's partnership with the NGOs Taking Root and the Asociación de Profesionales para el Desarrollo Integral de Nicaragua (APRODEIN), to share an education event with Nicaraguan youth. In a variety of settings, ACOFOP holds educational events to spread its model. Though Facebook does not serve as a site for organization of events or even necessarily a point of contact, it is a significant platform for showing others the connections ACOFOP has established with similar organizations. Additionally, Facebook posts demonstrate a commitment to maintaining and fostering the transnational advocacy networks that ACOFOP has formed.

ACOFOP also uses the tagging function on Facebook to reinforce relationships with other organizations and individuals. Through the use of tags, hashtags, and the language within posts, ACOFOP has strengthened connections with a range of groups and people including the Catholic Church, actor Leonardo DiCaprio, and the Alianza Mesoamericana de Pueblos y Bosques. ACOFOP uses social media to assert its political network and project the strength of its coalition building. What may seem to an individual using Facebook socially as a normal practice on social media, has greater

significance for ACOFOP. A tag is not simply a tag but rather an assertion of a political tie.

V.2 Addressing Climate Change

      The second category of fighting against climate change was often represented in codes and hashtags related to ACOFOP's environmental conservation efforts. Some of the posts calling for action against climate change were general while others were topical based on current events. Some of the major events that occurred over the studied period included the Amazon forest fires, U.N. climate week, COP25, and the Australian bush fires. ACOFOP used hashtags including #ClimateStrike, #ClimateWeekNY, #PrayForAmazon, #Action4Amazonas, and #COP25, for example, to draw attention to their solidarity for climate action. Other hashtags highlight the efforts that ACOFOP makes in the MBR. The tags #CeroIncendios (zero fires) and #SalvemosPetén (we save Petén) underscore how the community foresters of the MBR mitigate climate change through their work at home. The hashtag #CeroIncendios indicates the efforts the community foresters have made to prevent forest fires to the point that there are virtually no forest fires in the multiple use region of the MBR that the community foresters monitor. The combination of content and hashtags demonstrate the ways that ACOFOP fights the effects of climate change on its own along with its efforts to mobilize with others in the political struggle. These posts indicate a dedication to fighting climate change through online content.

Figure 5

Infographic describing severity of climate change

Source: (ACOFOP (g), 2019).

The core of ACOFOP's mission is to protect their home, the MBR, and their land

rights. For ACOFOP, one of the most prescient threats to this objective is climate change.

ACOFOP expresses a progressive stance on climate change and publicly advocates on its

Facebook page to use the language of a "climate crisis" to more fully express the nature

of the global threat. The image to the left shows one of ACOFOP's Facebook posts

sharing an infographic from Pictoline. This comic-like infographic advocates for the use

of more urgent language in climate discussions, specifically by using the term "climate

crisis" rather than "climate change." Many of ACOFOP's posts addressing climate change use provoking language to "recognize the urgency of the situation so that we can better confront it," as they state in the same post (ACOFOP (g), 2019).

Figure 6

Image of "green lungs" superimposed over MBR

La labor de las comunidades forestales de ACOFOP es la base del programa de reducción de emisiones de #Guatemala, asegurando la protección del 70% de la Reserva de la Biosfera Maya, uno de los últimos pulmones verdes del mundo 🌿 #SomosBosquesParaSiempre #ForesteriaComunitaria #GuardianesDelBosque

Source: (ACOFOP (e), 2019)

In general, ACOFOP openly confronts the climate crisis. However, it also takes care to demonstrate the ways that the community foresters of the MBR are specifically fighting climate change. Especially as the Amazon rainforest has been put at risk under the Bolsonaro administration in Brazil, the vitality of other forests is critical to

fighting climate change. Considering the deforestation that has occurred in Brazil's

Amazon region, largely due to poor governance and a blatant disregard of Indigenous

rights encouraged by President Bolsonaro, protection of the MBR has become even more

critical (Survival International, 2019). As the Earth loses its forests to deforestation,

protecting forest resources is ever more significant. One of ACOFOP's video posts uses

the metaphorical imagery of literal "green lungs," to show the importance of forests like

those of the MBR. Due to forests' contribution to the atmosphere and the vegetation's

processes of releasing oxygen and taking in carbon dioxide, forests like the MBR

essentially function as the Earth's lungs thus resulting in the term, "green lung." The text

of the post says, "the labor of the forest communities of ACOFOP is the base of the

program for reduction of emissions in Guatemala, assuring the protection of 70% of the

MBR, one of the last green lungs of the world"(ACOFOP (e), 2019). This post points

directly to the climate outcomes produced by the status of the forest concessions in Petén.

As a vital component of the GuateCarbón project for reduction of carbon dioxide

emissions due to deforestation, ACOFOP has a globally important role of protecting land

rights for its constituent forest communities. The GuateCarbón project relies on the

efforts of forest communities and the creation of a carbon-credit system to incentivize

reducing emissions through deforestation (Rainforest Alliance). This project financially

empowers the forest communities of ACOFOP to carry out their mission of protecting the

forest and thus combatting climate change.

     ACOFOP not only advocates for action to mitigate climate change, but also

regularly demonstrates the organization's role in one day reaching a stable climate.

ACOFOP frequently posts infographics with information that asserts the importance of

Indigenous knowledge and women towards protecting the forest and therefore helping

prevent climate change. The organization also uses hashtags regularly to emphasize the

mission and accomplishments it has achieved. For example, #CeroIncendios (zero forest

fires) appears regularly to reiterate the success of ACOFOP community forest

management. Reports and satellite imagery indicate that the community forest

management has resulted in a significant reduction in forest fires and other sources of

deforestation like illegal logging (Gomez & Mendez 2007). Furthermore, ACOFOP

reports itself that less than 1% of fires have occurred in the areas under community

management (ACOFOP (b), 2019). Another hashtag to appear often on ACOFOP's page

says #SalvemosPetén (we save Petén). This hashtag sends the message that ACOFOP's

communities are preserving and saving the MBR from climate change among other

threats.

V.3 *Promoting Indigenous Rights*

ACOFOP's third theme is uplifting Indigenous rights. The organization's posts

regarding Indigenous voices are generally intertwined with the other content. Many posts

have overlapping codes that represent both advocacy for Indigenous rights and

concession renewal for example. One hashtag demonstrates well this particular

intersection. The tag #DerechosALaTierraYa (land rights now) comments on the land

rights struggle that the people of the MBR experience as well as the land rights struggle

of Indigenous people in general. Some of the hashtags are more particular to uplifting

Indigenous rights like #NiUnaGotaMás (not a single drop more), which calls for an end

to the violence against Indigenous people. A third major hashtag that ACOFOP employs

is #guardianesdelbosque (guardians of the forest), a reference to the organization of the same name, which advocates for Indigenous peoples.

ACOFOP's participation in the U.N. Climate Week in New York City of course highlighted the organization's dedication to encouraging climate action, but also, it used this opportunity as a platform for the Indigenous people it represents. ACOFOP posted several images of its Indigenous members representing the forest communities while wearing traditional

dress. While one showed the members with signs for the march, others showed Indigenous people in more authoritative positions. Though the images do not show the Indigenous members of ACOFOP in a politically powerful position, the posts portray Indigenous peoples as authorities of knowledge.

One post shows a panel for the U.N. Climate Week with Indigenous people there to share their critical insights for protecting forests and fighting climate change (see Figure 7). The text in the post emphasizes the message already clear in the image saying, "to include Indigenous peoples and forest communities in the equation is vital for success in the fight against climate change" (ACOFOP (d), 2019). Though the post may not directly say it, the content emphasizes the importance of Indigenous rights in this time of climate crisis. It communicates that to address climate change officials must protect Indigenous rights and listen to their insights on conservation. This post is also an example of how ACOFOP takes advantage of a hot topic, like climate change, to advance an initiative, like Indigenous rights, that is too often ignored by the most powerful.

Figure 7

Indigenous representatives speak at U.N. Climate Week panel for ACOFOP

Source: (ACOFOP (d), 2019).

Historically, Indigenous peoples across the world, and in Guatemala in particular, have been oppressed severely by the governments they live under and continue to experience repression. The Guatemalan Civil War heightened tensions between the government and the Maya population to the point that the military led a genocide against them. The United States Institute for Peace truth commission report states that of the 200,000 killed in the Guatemalan genocide, 83% were Maya and 17% were ladino (U.S. Institute of Peace [USIP], 1997). While Guatemala made attempts at restorative and reparative justice by holding a truth commission and establishing a day of remembrance, violence against Indigenous peoples still occurs (USIP, 1997). Indigenous rights to life and property have been under siege over and over again in Guatemala. An NPR article reports on the more current conditions for Indigenous peoples as of 2019. Maria Martin

reports on the disappearance and death of Juana Raymundo, an Indigenous leader in her community. Martin adds that such violence against Indigenous people is becoming more common with nearly 20 deaths in just the previous summer (2019). While the primary focus of ACOFOP is to maintain the land rights of its Indigenous and ladino community, simply keeping them alive is also once again a critical move.

ACOFOP centers much of its activism on environmental protection and land rights, but it also has used hashtags and imagery to draw attention to violence against Indigenous people. One post that appeared on Facebook displayed an image of an Indigenous man representing Lobo Mau, who had been murdered by illegal loggers in Brazil, along with a call for justice for Indigenous people in Latin America (ACOFOP (i), 2019). The words on the post not only demand justice for an Indigenous Brazilian man Lobo Mau, but also, they highlight the importance of Indigenous peoples to the protection of "80% of biodiversity and the fight against climate change" (ACOFOP (i), 2019). Again, ACOFOP uses the more politically popular topic of climate change and environmentalism in general to defend the need for protections of Indigenous peoples.

Figure 8
Image of indigenous man and call for justice for Lobo Mau

Source: (ACOFOP (i), 2019).

The image comes from the organization Guardianes del Bosque (translated as Guardians of the Forest) and tagged with #NiUnaGotaMás or in English #NotASingleDropMore and written in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. This particular post is a reminder of the dangers Indigenous and ladino foresters face at the hands of illegal loggers and ranchers.

A subtle way that ACOFOP advocates for Indigenous rights is by frequently using the hashtag #GuardianesDelBosque in reference to the organization of the same name. Guardianes del Bosque is an organization that connects foresting communities in Latin America and Indonesia. They are active on social media producing content that highlights the efforts and successes of Indigenous people around the world. ACOFOP's use of the hashtag not only comments on the importance of their organizations as "guardians of the forest," but also, it demonstrates their alliance with this international activist organization (Guardians of the Forest, n.d.).

V.4.*Securing Concession Renewal*

The final and most important political objective from ACOFOP's Facebook is securing concession renewal. Some of the most important evidence of this agenda is evident in the previously mentioned post on the renewal of the Carmelita concession. The fact this post accrued the greatest number of likes, shares, and comments provides evidence that not only is this an important goal for ACOFOP, but also, it is important to the Facebook community that surrounds ACOFOP. I interpret the other three political themes as building blocks towards this much larger goal of ACOFOP.

#SomosBosquesParaSiempre is the common thread linking many of the themes

that appear in ACOFOP's social media as it finishes off almost every post the organization crafts. The hashtag, translating to "we are the forests forever," illustrates the connection between the forests of the MBR and the people that reside in its communities. Their relationship is essential to protecting and conserving the biodiversity within the MBR as well as upholding the rights of the Indigenous and ladino residents. This hashtag is clearly representative of the driving principles of ACOFOP and is a unifying message, which seamlessly connects the themes they discuss online. Though ACOFOP features a variety of topics on their social media, the battle for concession renewal is the most evident and most critical theme. Ensuring the renewal of the community forest concessions above all means the communities of the MBR get to maintain the rights to live in their homeland, but also, it guarantees the protection of the MBR.

This fourth major political agenda, which subsumes the others, is the content that covers the contract renewal for the community forest concessions of the MBR. The forest concessions established over twenty years ago are set to expire in 2022 (ACOFOP (a), 2019). Though the community forestry model has been highly effective in protecting the MBR over the years, there is still competition from private industries and others which also hope to gain access to the land (Devine, 2018; Stoian et al, 2018; Monterroso & Barry, 2012). In 2005, ACOFOP fought for concessionaires' rights to their land when Dr. Richard Hansen attempted to use the Mirador Basin to develop archeological sites (Devine, 2018). Had this effort not been stopped by Guatemalan courts and community foresters' land rights been upheld, then many communities residing in the MBR would have been misplaced and the reserve would likely not be in the remarkable condition it is in today (Devine, 2018).

Today, the MBR still faces other proposals for giving access to the land to private industries. Recently, ACOFOP posted on its accounts about attempts to convert part of the reserve into a "Disney-like" theme park referencing an article covering the topic (Soy502, 2019). The post linked to an article by Soy502, a news site created for and by Guatemalans. The article discusses Hansen's proposal to construct a train and a theme park to run through the MBR. This post received a large number of shares, 99 total. All of the comments responded to this proposal negatively. Most other posts on ACOFOP's page are very positive, so I believe this one stirred the most reaction because it angered the users who followed the page. One user commented, "These proposals only show that the ignorance of the businesses in [Guatemala] without a doubt just want easy money generating destruction" (translated from Spanish) (ACOFOP (j), 2019). Another user voiced similar sentiments saying "Community tourism and ecological paths is what should be promoted. None of this generating pollution in the virgin forest" (translated from Spanish) (ACOFOP (j), 2019). It is clear that supporters of the MBR and ACOFOP are angered by the idea of ill use of the land. The community foresters of the MBR have managed the forest extraordinarily well. It simply does not make sense for outsiders to take over. This anger is strong enough to promote greater engagement on the platform. This could be an indication that targeting different emotions would be a good strategy for ACOFOP. Soy502 emphasizes there is a growing opposition to the theme park led by community forester organizations and Maya Biosphere Watch, but it is clearly a point of mobilization for supporters of ACOFOP (Soy502, 2019).

Figure 9

President Jimmy Morales visits communities in MBR

Source: (ACOFOP (h), 2019).

A visit to Petén from Guatemala's President Jimmy Morales alongside other officials including the US ambassador to Guatemala was the subject of the majority of the content on ACOFOP's social media during the end of October and early November. Their accounts had been flooded with images of the president with the men and women

who care for the reserve. According to the Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias (Guatemalan News Agency), the president was very pleased with what he saw when he visited San Andreas, Petén and acknowledged all the progress there. He also encouraged the ministers of the Environment and of Agriculture, Ranching and Nutrition to expedite the applications for renewal of the forestry concessions (Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias, 2019). One of ACOFOP's posts shows several images of the president seeing up close the wood working the foresters do every day. The language of the post also points out the support of Luis Arreaga, the ambassador to the United States. The enthusiasm of then president shows promise for the forest communities. With government support, the ultimate goal of renewing the forest concessions is in closer reach. Tagging and posting pictures of the president and ambassador are important signs of respect and appreciation. Just as ACOFOP must tag and share images with allies, it must do the same with government officials to conform to contemporary social media norms.

Another highly significant post over the studied period announced the renewal of the Carmelita community's concession. This post had the greatest number of likes out of all studied posts with 917. The image shows what is presumably the Carmelita concession with the words "Carmelita 25 more years of conservation and social development" (See figure 10). As the first concession to be granted renewal, this announcement represented a huge accomplishment for ACOFOP. On the other hand, it shows how much more the organization must fight for. With 11 other communities fighting for land rights, ACOFOP has much more work to do (Rainforest Alliance). The renewal of the Carmelita concession is a cause for celebration, but it is only the first

step of ACOFOP's primary goal of concession renewal for all 12 communities.

At the end of the period studied, ACOFOP covered the 30-year anniversary of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. It was clear from the posts building up to the event, that this would be a huge celebration for the forest communities of Petén. Though the lands under the designation of the MBR were always the ancestral home of the forest communities currently residing there, its official birthday is February 5, 1990. This celebration highlights the connection between the people and their forest. The post, like many others, is followed with #SomosBosquesParaSiempre (We are the forests forever) to highlight the way the communities and the MBR are interrelated. Just as the people care for the forest, the forest cares for them.

Figure 10
ACOFOP announces the renewal of the Carmelita concession

Source: (ACOFOP (k), 2019).

VI. CONCLUSION

As social media becomes more and more fundamental to branding and social salience, organizations and movements must adapt to include social media marketing in their outreach strategies. Though internet access is still limited in Guatemala, international connections that can be made with social media are still important to ACOFOP garnering influence domestically. Many scholars are critical of social media viewing it as a barrier to democracy (Bossetta, 2018; Haidt, 2019; Magnis, 2019). There is evidence though that ACOFOP has advocated effectively for change within Guatemala, and ACOFOP's social media activism has become a powerful component of its campaigns. This thesis seeks to address the paradox of social media as either a force to undermine or improve the state of democracy. To address this problem, this thesis asks the following two main questions: How are ACOFOP's political goals evident in its social media platforms? And, how does ACOFOP's social media presence contribute to the strength of this grassroots, environmental and social justice movement?

Using coding techniques, descriptive statistics, image analysis, and discourse analysis, I examined ACOFOP's Facebook page and discovered four main political objectives. ACOFOP projects four agenda on its Facebook page: 1) strengthening solidarity networks, 2) fighting climate change, 3) promoting Indigenous rights, and 4) securing concession renewal. These themes were evident in ACOFOP's language, hashtags, images, and tagging. ACOFOP demonstrated a commitment to the four political goals by regularly highlighting these issues and by maintaining an online network of individuals and organizations with a similar focus. ACOFOP's online activism reflects their other advocacy efforts as many posts show how the organization takes action.

These findings contribute to the literature by demonstrating how ACOFOP has expanded its movement through social media, in particular on Facebook. My analysis shows clearly how ACOFOP has focused its political agenda on Facebook but not exactly how this process has contributed to drawing additional support for the movement. However, the impact that social media has on the in-person movement would be an excellent focus for future research. Because social media marketing can have a significant impact, scholars should not disregard the power this tool can wield. Further research into marketing strategies specifically for organizations and social movements could be fundamental to advancing important human rights.

These findings also have important real-world implications. ACOFOP's success online could translate to efforts to stabilize democracy in Guatemala. Social media is an important platform for activism and mobilization. As my thesis demonstrates, networking is very important for ACOFOP's advocacy. It is clear that ACOFOP has taken advantage of the cyberspace as a platform for promoting its political priorities. Focusing on producing content and reinforcing solidarity networks through actions like tagging can help support these goals. Because ACOFOP's activism is essential to reinforcing democracy in Guatemala and providing a platform for Indigenous peoples, social media activism contributes to stabilizing democracy rather than undermining. While social media platforms may not inherently be linked to supporting or destabilizing democracy, they allow space for anyone to share their voice. The organizations like ACOFOP that take advantage of this platform determine if the social media will produce good or bad outcomes.

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