

ARTICLE

Posting the Journey to Juquila: Pilgrimage, Digital Devotion, and Social Media in Mexico

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Abstract

At the crossroads of scholarship scrutinizing digital religion and pilgrimage, this article analyzes the use of Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram by devotees of Our Lady of Juquila, a Marian image in Oaxaca, Mexico. It combines the close reading of content and descriptive online ethnography with web scraping and data analysis. The article sketches these platforms' role in pious expression, virtual community building, pilgrimage group communication, and devotional marketing, tracking closely the intertwining of religion and commerce, particularly religious tourism promotion. The data reveal that Facebook serves as the most popular platform for Juquila's devotees, thanks to its open, pro-sharing design and flexibility regarding group formation. As a result, it has become the essential hub of devotee expression. YouTube, thanks to its particular affordances, has become an ideal niche for narrating travel to Juquila's shrine and a showcase of the networked nature of devotion as users borrow tools, tropes, and expressive techniques from many sources, religious and secular. Instagram is the least popular platform among devotees because its design is less open and amenable to group communication. It does, however, facilitate both smaller, more intimate community formation, as well as shallow but significant community building on popular public pages run by religious tourism promoters hosting attractive, easily sharable, free stockpiles of images, memes, and devotional slogans. In the end, social media use appears to be stoking pilgrimage in Mexico and setting the stage for significant cultural change in the future as new tools, emerging shared devotional aesthetics, and media logics reshape religious expression and devotee communication. It is also becoming an unparalleled historical archive of popular religious culture.

Keywords: pilgrimage; social media; Mexico; Oaxaca; digital religion

Resumen

Surgiendo de la investigación académica de religión digital y los estudios de peregrinación, este artículo analiza el uso de Facebook, YouTube e Instagram por parte de los devotos de Nuestra Señora de Juquila, una imagen mariana en Oaxaca, México. Combina la lectura atenta del contenido con etnografía descriptiva en línea, *web scraping* y análisis de datos. El artículo esboza el papel de estas plataformas en la expresión piadosa, la construcción de comunidades virtuales, la comunicación en grupos de peregrinos, y mercadotecnia devocional, siguiendo de cerca el entretrejimiento de la religión y el comercio, en particular la promoción del turismo religioso. Los datos revelan que Facebook sirve como la plataforma más popular para los devotos de Juquila gracias a su diseño abierto, su facilitación del intercambio de contenido, y su flexibilidad con respecto a la formación de grupos. Como resultado, para los devotos se ha convertido en eje esencial de expresión. YouTube, gracias a su estructura distinta, se ha convertido en un nicho ideal para narrar los viajes al santuario

de Juquila y demuestra la naturaleza interconectada de la devoción, ya que los usuarios apropian herramientas, tropos y técnicas expresivas de muchas fuentes, tanto religiosas como seculares. Instagram es la plataforma menos popular entre los devotos porque su diseño es menos abierto y receptivo a la comunicación colectiva. Sin embargo, facilita la formación de comunidades relativamente pequeñas e íntimas, así como la construcción de comunidades superficiales pero significativas en páginas públicas populares administradas por promotores de turismo religioso que albergan imágenes, memes y lemas devocionales atractivos, fácilmente compartibles y gratuitos. Al final, este artículo argumenta que el uso de las redes sociales parece estar estimulando la peregrinación en México y preparando el escenario para cambios culturales significativos en el futuro a medida que nuevas herramientas, emergentes estéticas devocionales compartidas y lógicas mediáticas reconfiguran la expresión religiosa y la comunicación entre devotos. También se está convirtiendo en un archivo histórico inigualable de la cultura religiosa popular.

Palabras clave: peregrinación; medios sociales; México; Oaxaca; religión digital

On December 21, 2012, Candy C. posted “Mañanitas a la Virgen de Juquila,” on YouTube. On the surface, it is simply another version of the *ranchera* standard, a homage sung at anniversaries and Marian shrines. In this instance, Edelmira del Castillo of Alto Lucero, Veracruz, rewrote the lyrics and sings, pairing her tribute with low-resolution photographs. The result is a seven-minute testimonial documenting personal faith, an alleged miracle, and a bus pilgrimage in which Doña Edelmira expresses elation upon visiting Our Lady of Juquila at her basilica.

A YouTube video may not seem like traditional devotion, but Edelmira offers a digital *ex-voto*: a votive offering testifying to a miraculous intervention and fervent devotion. This, in other words, is a conventional act in a new medium. Her voice, her story, her “Mañanitas” could remain in cyberspace for centuries, unlike physical offerings at the shrine that often end up moldering in trash heaps. By May 2021, she had tallied 162,000 views and forty-five supportive comments.

This pious *veracruzana* is not alone. YouTube hosts scores of videos documenting pilgrimages to Juquila. Some are primitive, but others reveal careful editing, overdubbed music, and narration. A handful appear patterned on documentaries, music videos, travel shows, and social media campaigns. What follows is an analysis of Juquila’s recent history on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. This research emerges from Wright-Ríos’s larger study of Juquila’s devotion, a project that incorporates archival research, oral history, and participant observation. Our focus here encompasses walking, cycling, running relays, as well as vehicular travel to Juquila, a small town in Oaxaca’s southern Sierra. For us, social media’s impact on pilgrimage is not an isolated phenomenon. We have witnessed devotees consume, create, and share content before, during, and after their travels. Hence, our research tracks devotional promotion, community building, and expression. We assert that virtual networks, sharing practices, and online communication are now integral to Juquila’s pilgrimage. We have identified nearly a dozen distinct types of posts. They include tourism promotion, local celebrations, travelogues, group communication, personal devotion, event commemoration, DIY documentaries, *ex-votos*, commerce, and news reports.

From this material we offer several observations. First, social media is creating a rich repository of devotional expression. In the past, historians rarely found evidence produced by devotees. We have thus analyzed popular religiosity as mediated by elite observers and priests. Eventually this new virtual archive will allow analysis of religious change in extraordinary detail over decades, perhaps generations.

Second, we deduce that social media is fueling pilgrimage. Our other research suggests that the post-1950 expansion of Mexico’s roads and interstate commerce sparked a stunning expansion of Juquila’s pilgrimage (Wright-Ríos [forthcoming](#)). Social media is

stoking continued growth in the twenty-first century. Its emergence represents a marked infrastructural improvement, strengthening organizers' ability to communicate and marshal resources. Digital tools and platforms also facilitate promotion, official and otherwise. It also creates thicker interlinkages and wider connections (both virtual and face-to-face) between devotees and offers opportunities for expression and thus in-person and online community building.

Third, our findings echo Heidi Campbell's (2012b) analysis of "networked religion." Online devotion centered on Juquila does not supplant in-person observance and networks—it augments them. Followers remain active in neighborhoods and parishes while connected online. Individuals engage other peoples' devout sojourns and share their own. They can learn about, and perhaps join, established pilgrimage groups. In addition, our research shows that devotees draw unabashedly on trends in popular music as well as textual and visual tropes from secular and religious sources.

Fourth, although access to the digital realm does not fundamentally alter practice yet, it disseminates beliefs, narrative practices, histories, and activities to "friends" and "followers." In other words, social media diversifies and amplifies testimonial opportunities. Supplicants continue to bring flowers, candles, *milagros* (votive tokens), cash, and clay depictions of their requests to Juquila. They still publicize their devotion by displaying Juquila souvenirs in their businesses, homes, and vehicles, as well as on their bodies. But now they also post video clips, selfies, and texts celebrating their shrine visits and pilgrimage group affiliations.

In this realm our work builds on the insights of Frank Graziano (2007, 2016)—although he does not engage digital devotion—and his analysis of the deeply personal narrative dynamics of Catholic votive practice. In our view, traditional petitionary and storytelling dimensions of traditional piety have colonized social media. For example, devout requests for celestial aid are still paired with personal pious promises or vows (*votos*) online, and digital testimonials of struggle, miraculous advocacy, and Marian protection remain common. But online offerings may have greater significance. Graziano argues that in leaving symbolic items and texts at shrines, devotees symbolically extend their presence in sacred spaces. In the digital realm, this notion of enduring presence can last much longer, and interaction with fellow devotees is possible on an entirely new level.

Fifth, pilgrimage-related social media offers new spaces of sociability, supportive community, and expressive opportunities that could catalyze dramatic changes over time. As we show, each platform's affordances encourage innovative activities. Facebook functions as the hub where individuals and groups find and share content while developing virtual communities with autonomously established norms. It also engenders meaningful mutual-aid functions while stimulating the emergence of a distinct devotional aesthetics (e.g., memes, emoji). Facebook's pro-sharing design, moreover, encourages engagement with media from other platforms. YouTube, in contrast, has emerged as the preeminent storytelling space because it facilitates the narration of journeys and testimonials. The platform also hosts a dialogue and exchange dynamic between the various actors (e.g., common devotees, church authorities, pilgrimage organizers, individual priests, tourism promoters), depicting the route, symbolic locations, and the shrine site as an idealized space and place. Instagram's design, meanwhile, has given rise to a dual-use dynamic. On the one hand, it offers intimate communal spaces of pious expression linking individuals and a small number of preapproved followers. On the other hand, it hosts commercially oriented public pages encouraging religious tourism. The latter have become popular with devotees, as they offer a stockpile of sharable messages, memes, and images. In concert, although none of these digital practices is radical, each is reshaping the contours, reach, and modalities of pilgrimage expression.

Finally, the platforms facilitate creative responses to new challenges. For example, amid pandemic disruptions entrepreneurs on social media began leaving floral arrangements

and messages at the shrine for devotees unable to travel. Crucially, this paid, proxy devotion service includes uploading photographed offerings and devout messages on the town's promotional Facebook page—a page that boasts 196,000 followers (Conoce Juquila 2022). Likewise, devotees “replaced” Juquila's virus-shuttered votive chapel, “leaving” offerings for the Virgin in a new digital space (El Pedimento Virtual 2021).

The scholarly backdrop

As we have indicated, researching “digital religion” leads immediately to Heidi Campbell (2012a, 2013; Campbell and Vitullo 2016). As Campbell points out, scholars, as well as leaders of denominations, began debating the topic on the heels of the internet's inception. Could virtual religion replace traditional worship? Would a digitally savvy laity bypass religious authority? Scholars joined virtual communities, interviewed participants, and analyzed online textual content. Simultaneously, institutions embraced new technologies, and online communication became crucial for many denominations (Campbell 2012a). By the early 2000s, the coexistence of face-to-face and virtual spheres was the norm, and this sparked a more nuanced debate in the 2010s. Research revealed that users do not separate religious and secular activities in the digital realm, and no great authority crisis materialized. Virtual connections generally bolster preexisting identities and offer digital community alongside traditional analogues.

These observations, in turn, brought an increased focus on practitioners, which coincides with a shift among scholars toward “lived religion,” the study of how religion “works” for believers, and how individuals “use” religion amid mundane activities, social and spiritual (Ammerman 2021). It is in this context that Campbell (2012a) emphasizes “networked religion,” meaning integration within wider realms of interaction and the constant remixing of ideas and practices from distinct spheres.

Pilgrimage is one piece of this puzzle. Virtual travel represents an old practice. For example, the Way of the Cross entails an imagined walk through locations associated with the Passion. A handful of scholars examine digital pilgrimage. Connie Hill-Smith (2011) scrutinizes “cyberpilgrimage” and asserts that users find virtual trips worthwhile. A Juquila cyberpilgrimage has not materialized, but the Archdiocese of Oaxaca held a COVID-inspired, virtual novena during Juquila's festival in 2020 (Rodríguez 2020).

Other studies offer insights related to pilgrimage and social media. For example, Caidi, Beazley, and Colomer Marquez (2018) examine selfie posting during the hajj, a practice pilgrims sustain despite authorities' disapproval. They note that individuals find documenting their journeys through self-portraits a core part of their experience. The images (and associated text) reveal their feelings, stoke interactions, dramatize progress, and attract followers. Caidi (2019, 2020) goes further elsewhere, analyzing selfies and social media as part of a larger information landscape accessed by Muslim pilgrims before, during, and after their journey. She describes would-be pilgrims accessing materials from online and offline sources, deploying ideas and narratives secured through personal networks and incorporating experiences and emotions from their own pilgrimage.

Another circle of discussion employs the concept of mediatization to describe the ubiquity of media logics in religion (Loustau, Norget, and Hoenes del Pinal 2022). Catholicism, these scholars suggest, is particularly apt for this approach. Dogma on priestly mediation and saintly intercession, the performative nature of many practices, and the enduring emphasis on images and objects as conduits of grace bolster a culture of intermediation. What is new is the current level of media saturation. For many individuals, engaging a constant stream of religious messages alongside others represents the norm. Scholars, therefore, speak of integration—the intertwining of digital religious practice and

daily life. Religious institutions in turn depend on digital technologies and value lay content, as it can magnify orthodox messaging.

A final sphere of debate centers on the nature of pilgrimage and its relationship to tourism—or the melding of devotional practices, understandings of travel, and commercialization processes. Scholars argue that the closer they scrutinize these phenomena, the more difficult it becomes to separate them (Badone and Roseman 2004). Both represent realms of consumption, as well as meaning and identity construction amid movement over landscapes imbued with significance. In addition, ideas about life-changing travel experiences animate both spheres (Chemin 2012). This step should not be understood as a “demotion” of pilgrimage. Scholars no longer view it as an isolated practice. Instead, they analyze it alongside secular travel, embodied experience, information consumption, and everyday religion (Coleman and Mitchell 2001; Mesaritou, Coleman, and Eade 2020). More recently, researchers have begun examining pilgrimage as a quintessentially connective practice extending complex threads of “articulation” between devotional actions, ideas, and institutions and a wide spectrum of religious and secular spaces, processes, and cultural forms (Coleman 2022).

The blurring of spheres is not a by-product of new technologies and twenty-first-century capitalism. Ian Reader (2014) maintains that pilgrimage and commerce have remained mutually constitutive across eras and cultures. Building and renovating shrines to attract devotees, competing with other devotions, selling souvenirs, and maintaining trade fairs and transportation networks has been integral to pilgrimage for centuries. The historian Suzanne Kaufman’s (2005) analysis of the shrine at Lourdes offers one of the most detailed discussions of this dynamic. Eschewing attempts to separate “authentic piety” from “commercialized religion,” Kaufman documents the vibrant evolution of the Lourdes devotion and pivotal role of commodification, marketing, and media promotion in the shrine’s stunning success. In her view, there is no strictly spiritual development of the Lourdes phenomenon. It was commercial from the start.

Juquila’s devotion has experienced only episodic official promotional efforts, but in the past decade a concerted, marketing campaign has taken shape. Church officials staged a Vatican approved coronation of the four-hundred-year-old image in 2014, which they promoted online. In the same year, the Oaxacan state tourism ministry began marketing “Route of Faith,” a trademarked itinerary leading to the shrine (Comunicación Social del Gobierno 2015). Subsequently, federal officials named Juquila a “Pueblo Mágico” in 2020, a recognition that brings government oversight regarding the town’s historic preservation (Milenio Digital and Rodríguez 2020). As we discuss here, devotee actions and devotional promotion are also part of this process.

An eclectic methodology

To better understand the role that social media plays in pilgrimage, we analyze posts related to the Virgin of Juquila on Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook because devotees prefer those platforms, as evidenced by the quantity of posts as well as the large number of groups and users. The analysis of social media posts represents a kind of descriptive ethnography (Tsuria 2020). We also utilize digital tools to facilitate data collection, but we do so idiosyncratically because each platform has its own policies: Instagram and YouTube permit web scrapers (coding programs that extract and process information), but Facebook does not. But even in the first two instances, our analysis of expression, sentiment, and communication necessitates manual collection and analysis.

In the case of Instagram, our data emerged from a mixture of manual searches and digital compilation facilitated by a web scraper. Ours is a command-line application written in Python that locates and downloads requested information. In this instance,

Martínez-Don modified a template scraper to compile data from the hashtags used by Juquila pilgrims, including username, URL, caption, comments, and likes for each post. The hashtags include #virgendejuquila, #santacatarinajuquila, #rutadelafe, and #vivejuquila. Each one netted hundreds of posts, requiring that we analyze individual posts and sort them into distinct categories.

Like Instagram, web scrapers for YouTube are common and modifiable. YouTube users, however, rarely use hashtags. Instead, title searches serve as the best means of accessing pilgrim content. Thus, our data from YouTube emerged mostly from keyword searches and tracking individuals who post frequently. Search terms like “peregrinación Juquila” (pilgrimage Juquila) and “viaje Juquila” (trip Juquila) netted the most results.

Facebook’s data policy forced us to depend on manual data collection. The site is extremely popular among pilgrims. They can create separate communities using Facebook groups and share prayers, pictures of pilgrimage, and live-streamed novenas. In addition, there are not only written posts by individuals but also institutional pages, groups, and image and video posts. We relied on keyword searches. We then compiled our findings in an Excel file, documenting interactions (likes, comments, follows) for the user, group, page, or post, as well as the URL. We also categorized videos (e.g., devotional, organized group, tourism).

Still, it is difficult to gain a big-picture understanding. Thankfully, as part of Tubular Labs’ Tubular for Good Program, we were able to gain greater insight into video sharing related to pilgrimage. Tubular specializes in video analytics, and hence is helpful for examining YouTube and Facebook. Unfortunately, because Instagram mostly features still photographs, Tubular’s data for the platform is limited. It is also important to highlight that the output depends on what is entered into the site’s search bar, where we searched across platforms using keywords, hashtags, and usernames. Although it is impossible to locate all Juquila-related content, its software allows greater data collection. Other limitations remain: Tubular’s data for Facebook begin in 2015, but data for YouTube are available beginning in 2019. Hence, we can compare trends in uploads and engagement between these platforms only over the past few years. These searches confirm, however, that Facebook is the most popular pilgrim platform. Through Tubular’s software and manual data collection, we were able to gather and analyze large quantities of data regarding the role of Juquila pilgrimage on social media (See Fig. 1).

Facebook

Understanding pilgrimage in Mexico is impossible without engaging Facebook. In fact, it is the most important social media platform for devotees of Our Lady of Juquila. Much of this is because Facebook is designed to facilitate the posting of DIY content and personal commentary, as well as the sharing of media from myriad sources. Like pilgrimage itself, Facebook runs on connection and engagement between social spheres. The platform also allows for different kinds of pages and profiles, which serves the varied needs of devotees and gives users significant control over communal norms. Thus, it has emerged as the most popular platform for the creation of networked devotional community with significant mutual aid functions. In our estimation, these characteristics have made it the online pilgrimage devotion hub. We also believe that it represents the platform where significant transformations of votive practice are in the offing, thanks to virtual chapel creation, the platform’s emergent devotional aesthetics (e.g., memes, emoji), and online petitionary offerings customs.

We have identified four kinds of group pages on the platform: official sites, prayer groups, virtual votive spaces, and pilgrimage group pages. Scrutiny reveals considerable overlap, but the functions of each type of page remain distinct. Some virtual spaces may

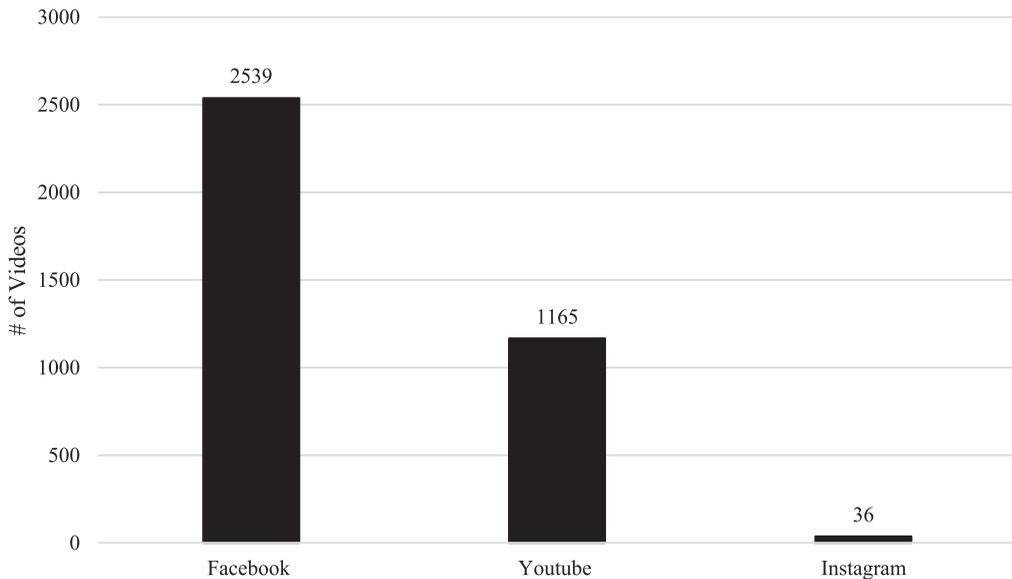


Figure 1. Tubular Labs—Videos Posted with “Virgen de Juquila” Keywords on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, 2019–2022.

fade as the pandemic recedes, but for organized pilgrimage groups, Facebook is crucial. Leaders create groups on the platform to facilitate communication, recruit participants, celebrate trips to the shrine, and coordinate tasks. In addition, just as pilgrimage intermingles the personal and communal, pages often function as support networks.

Within group pages, virtual votive spaces, and Juquila prayer groups, members share content from YouTube and TikTok. Pages frequently provide links to Instagram sites too. We also note the sharing of Juquila material generated by tourism promoters. This dynamic is where Facebook’s hublike nature emerges.

From a different perspective, Facebook showcases the “networked” nature of devotion. Devotees can scroll and click from one digital space to another. As they do, they offer prayers, devout emoji, and supportive comments. They share links to religious music videos, ponder religious images, and enjoy clips from other pilgrimages. They also upload their own content. Naturally, criticism, even insults, appear in comments.

The most strictly devotional are the prayer groups. With evocative names like *Virgen de Juquila en Ti Confío* (2022), *Comunidad Virgen de Juquila en Facebook* (2022), and *Pedido de Oraciones en comunidad a la Virgen de Juquila* (2022), the groups attract individuals’ appeals for intercession and prayers, as well as testimonials. The idea is not only to communicate with Juquila but also to inspire supplications from others. In general, these groups emerged in the past five years and have succeeded in attracting members (as of January 2022, they had 5,554; 516; and 28,431 followers, respectively). They often list rules and promise to block violators. For example, *Virgen de Juquila en Ti Confío* bans political commentary, sales pitches, images unrelated to Juquila, photographs of saints featuring money, and posts promising good fortune if shared widely.

In terms of content, posts reproduce the practices long visible at shrines. The difference is the possibility of sustained interaction. Many ask others to pray for family members. Some repost videos of masses and novenas originating on the shrine’s page (*Santuario de la Inmaculada* 2022). Devotees also share music videos. Many posts attest to Juquilita’s support or attribute a pregnancy to her intervention (Ramírez 2021). Comments usually praise the posters, calling on Juquila to bless them, or deploy the praying emoji or type

“Amen.” Comments also include requests for information about roads and shrine accessibility.

Individuals often seek support in these prayer groups. For example, in August 2021, a devotee from Tlapa, Guerrero, posted a photograph of the image of Juquila at the Pedimento (a famous votive chapel) and requested that the Virgin cure her aunt’s cancer. In the fifty-one comments that follow, she receives an outpouring of encouragement and prayers. Midway through the comments, however, she notes that her aunt has died. Condolences follow.

Not surprisingly, during the same year, a cyberchapel appeared on Facebook, called El Pedimento Virtual de la Virgen de Juquila (*oficial*) (2021). Citing the tradition of making clay models of votive requests and leaving the items at the chapel, the moderator stresses that the pandemic-inspired closure of the Pedimento inspired the establishment of a virtual space. The page invites devotees to make their offerings at home and share pictures with the group: “With the faith of all of us, very soon the Virgin will grant your request.” In sum, devotees are making use of the opportunities social media offers—virtual space, networked communication, content sharing, and community.

We also located pages dedicated to Juquila’s devotion in the United States; for example, *Virgen de Juquila en Greensboro* (2017), which re-creates the Juquila experience for immigrant devotees. With nearly eight hundred followers, it promotes rosaries in private homes and provides updates on the construction of a Juquila chapel in North Carolina. It also shares posts recounting the legendary history of the Oaxacan image. Finally, this page promotes a large celebration on the eve of Juquila’s feast day (December 8).

The Facebook pages maintained by pilgrimage groups represent yet another genre. They can vary greatly. For example, market vendors in Oaxaca who organize an annual walking trip to Juquila maintain a group with sixty-six members (*Caminando Juntos* 2022). In contrast, large cycling groups employ the personal profile approach and list nearly five thousand friends (e.g., *Peregrinación Ciclista Nuestra Señora* 2022). In contrast to prayer groups, many users know each other personally.

On the surface, these pages have three functions: communication among organizers, information dissemination, and the celebration of the group’s annual journey. In this realm, social media has afforded an extraordinary advance. Many groups travel to the shrine between mid-November and mid-December; and thus a few months prior, leaders announce meetings and issue invitations. Comments added to the posts often express eagerness to make the journey and include salutations naming friends as well as praise for the Virgin (e.g., *Peregrinación a Pie* 2017). In addition, posts discuss task delegation: for example, ordering T-shirts and meal planning. Among larger groups, organizers produce posters in hard copy and digital formats announcing the itinerary. Organizers put up posters, rendered in the same showy style as announcements for village festivals, around town and post the digital version on their Facebook page (*Peregrinación Ciclista Nuestra Señora* 2018). In addition, organizers acknowledge donors with photographs and laudatory captions. Often groups show off their custom hats and T-shirts and reveal the makeup of the organizing committee for the following year (e.g., *Peregrinación Ciclista Santa Catarina* 2019). Finally, the pages also serve as sharing platforms. Many uploads include pictures and clips, and organizers post them both during the pilgrimage and afterward, essentially creating photo essays (e.g., *Peregrinación Santiago Miahuatlán* 2022).

It bears mentioning that the number of members and friends surpasses participants each year. In part, some pilgrims only take part intermittently, and still others are merely supportive family and friends. Among larger groups, which can reach two hundred to six hundred pilgrims and dozens of vehicles, kitchen crews, medical staff, and mechanics, the communal resonance of the groups is noteworthy. The complex logistics required to sustain endeavors of this size for thirty to fifty years make these groups important local institutions. Thus, not only are their social media circles large; the masses marking the

start and end of each sojourn to Juquila fill parish churches with pilgrims and local supporters. There is also an uncoordinated, tag-along tradition connected to large pilgrimages. Often hundreds of additional devotees travel to Juquila independently to join the cyclists and walkers at the shrine. In a sense, ancillary mobilizations represent parallel affiliated pilgrimages.

Mutual-aid dimensions are important. The bonds forged amid journeys to shrines likely attracted pilgrims historically. Social media accentuates this dynamic. In fact, group pages can serve as message boards, rallying their members to comfort fellow devotees.

On the most basic level, individuals post blessings invoking Juquila on religious holidays. It is common to see birthday greetings, invitations to in-person events, and posts announcing important life events. Users sometimes share posts from prayer group pages and recitations of the rosary and masses on Facebook live (e.g., *Caminando Juntos 2022*). In addition, posts announcing the passing of a family member are common, inspiring condolences in the comments.

Groups are especially attentive when a member dies. Posts often show the departed during trips to the shrine, frequently superimposing their image over landscapes along the route alongside a picture of the Virgin of Juquila (e.g., *Peregrinación Santiago Miahuatlán 2018*). Many members offer their sympathies and testify to years of comradeship. They also post animated memes depicting angels, black ribbons, and crying emoji.

YouTube

Examining clips posted by Juquila's followers on YouTube represents a different kind of archaeology. If Facebook is the communications hub where the intimate communal work of shared prayer and mourning takes place, YouTube offers a virtual realm where distinct actors forward their notion of Juquila and the pilgrimage as an aesthetic site of unparalleled enchantment. Pilgrimage group videos depict the shrine town and route as a special gathering place of shared devotion, a monument to communal accomplishment, a beacon and backdrop for a celebration of collective pride and solidarity. Catholic Church authorities, in contrast, portray a sacred historical site under cogent, orthodox stewardship, a testament to its Christianizing mission. Tourism promoters conjure a space of accessible primordial authenticity, unforgettable folkloric intimacy, and personal transformation. And some priest YouTubers embrace the pilgrimage as a teaching opportunity. These distinct framings of Juquila and their uniquely scaled perspectives, however, are not in simple competition. They are in dialogue, with considerable, ongoing cross-pollination. Together they point to the importance of narrative, entertainment, and dramatization in digital devotion, a realm that, while distinct from Facebook, essentially works alongside the competing platform.

At first glance, the videos simply revisit a venerable tradition, the narration of pious travel. Our Tubular searches reveal that Juquila-related video posting and viewing spike each November and December, coinciding with the peak pilgrimage season centered on the weeks surrounding Juquila's official feast day, December 8. At these moments, YouTube postings frequently surpass Facebook videos. Tubular data reveals the dampening impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which decreased shrine visitation in 2020 and 2021 (see Fig. 2). We expect it to return to prepandemic levels in the coming years.

A wider matrix of material on the platform remains important because Juquila's followers avidly share this content. Comments reveal that pilgrims enjoy tourism videos where our Lady of Juquila presides over an enchanted landscape of salt-of-the-earth people, centering calm, and sublime grace. This material emerges from established patterns of marketing Oaxaca as an archetypal, authentic space. But promotional videos target religious Mexicans, not foreign tourists. They peddle a dreamy, vaguely devout

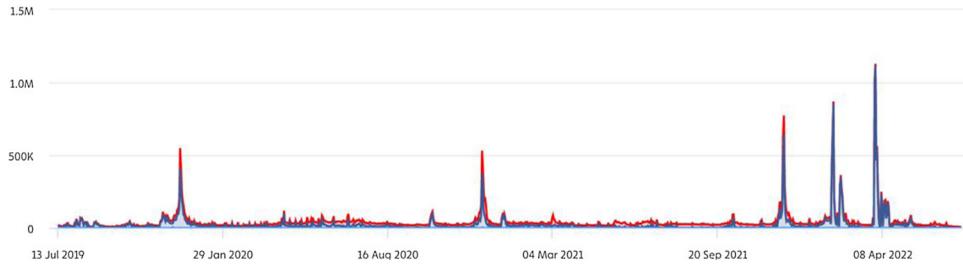


Figure 2. Tubular Labs—Video views for “Virgen de Juquila,” searches, 2019–2022. Red signifies YouTube videos, and blue indicates Facebook videos.

cultural nationalism that frames pilgrimage in a warm, golden glow (e.g., Oaxaca Bonito 2016). We never hear devotees’ voices: they are spoken for—typically by a soothing, male narrator—and we contemplate actors portraying devotees from a distance as they encounter local culture. A stereotyping is taking place, but it is of the sort that many Mexicans applaud. Pilgrims, like blanket weavers, mezcal distillers, and indigenous dancers, appear as exemplars of Mexico’s primordial essence.

The earliest pilgrimage videos on YouTube date from about 2008. Unsurprisingly, they are unsophisticated, often featuring montages of grainy photographs, jittery video, rudimentary transitions, and minimalist captioning. Typically, these filmmakers merely added music to a slideshow. We refer to this as the music-video approach (e.g., Giovanni Miguel 2008).

The pilgrimage clip from 2009 the small indigenous town of Guelavia, Oaxaca, offers a good example (Maple 2011). It begins with a title shot celebrating the town’s twenty-fourth annual trip to the shrine. Paired with a 1980s English-language ballad (“Right Here Waiting” by Richard Marx) images show the group ambling through valleys and forests, interspersed with touristlike snapshots: resting friends, shared meals, and alpine vistas. The lyrics are irrelevant, but the melody and vocals suffuse the video with melodramatic longing. Close to the end, group pictures tacitly announce, “We made it . . . together.” The final frame states, “Greetings to those living in the USA.” This dynamic predates YouTube: for decades Mexicans have filmed cultural events to share with distant friends and relatives.

A wider sampling reveals cultural variations. For example, distinctly Indigenous communities often include dance groups and village bands. Thus, a video from Tlahuitoltepec focuses on the brass ensemble while dancers in plumed outfits perform at the basilica in Juquila (Reycondoy 2008).

Between 2013 and 2015, longer, more elaborate videos became common, and some large groups began posting annual videos. Many of them reveal the hallmarks of novice filmmaking. Others clearly sought out technical expertise. In fact, it is common to find YouTube channels where digital entrepreneurs post pilgrimage videos alongside clips of town festivals, quinceañeras, and sporting events (e.g., Playa Turisloco 2018).

For the most part, clips simply tell the group’s story. Visual style, plotting, composition, and background music suggest a tool kit inspired by news media, documentary film, advertising, reality television, social media, and music videos. Innovation isn’t the point. As the historian Antonio Rubial writes (2001), pious genres foreground the exemplary, embrace formulas, and stick to conventions. In other words, pilgrimage posts meet long-standing expectations for how devout narratives should unfold, look, and sound. They chart episodic progress through a symbolic landscape and featuring perseverance, fellowship, solidarity, piety at emblematic locations, and a festive, votive spirit. These clips, nonetheless, represent a stunning democratization of pilgrim narrative; thirty years ago, few devotees could disseminate their own stories.

A cycling group from Tepeaca, Puebla, offers a good example in its video of 1 hour and 24 minutes from 2014 (Arrazador11010 2014). Featuring an all-male cast of riders, it captures the fiesta-on-wheels character typical of large groups using the framework of music video montage. Tapping different genres (*ranchera*, praise pop, mariachi, and *norteño*), they chain together clips featuring riders with a series of songs, most of which include Juquila-related lyrics. Amid the climactic final climb to Juquila, riders accompanied by the group's mobile truck-altars battle fatigue to the evangelical power pop of Miel San Marcos and singer Christine D'Clario's "No hay lugar más alto." The chorus repeats the simple paradox, "There is no higher place . . . than being at your feet," echoing a commonly phrased votive promise among pilgrims: to "llegar a tus plantas." The video then moves still deeper into ecumenical territory, ending with an evangelical folk hymn in a Mayan language, which is not spoken in Puebla. It may represent an attempt to add a sheen of authenticity via indigenous cultural nationalism, or perhaps an appropriation of music deemed sacred even if only vaguely understood.

Taking a different tack, a group from Tlaxiaco, Oaxaca, posts multipart documentaries. Calling their group the Caminata de Fe (Walk of Faith) and presenting themselves as Peregrino Films, they upload polished videos to their own YouTube channel. Their ambitious goals first appear in the self-consciously titled "Documental antropológico . . ." from 2014—a ten-part series of short videos featuring the stately masculine voiceover common in radio advertising (CaminatadeFe 2014). In addition, the narrator explains devotional practices (which is rare) in keeping with the social science style adopted by Peregrino Films (Caminatadefe 2015a).

The following year they innovated again, posting a single, fifty-two-minute documentary (Caminatadefe 2015b). After a brief introduction, they jettison the male voice-over and opt for a first-person female narrator intertwining five different women's testimonies. It remains scripted, but a young woman voices these testimonials as a single account, airing feelings of self-doubt, chronicling an evolving, nuanced appreciation for collective solidarity, voicing a sense of divine companionship, and celebrating personal fulfillment upon arrival at the shrine. As with others, each day's challenges provide structure, a format that amplifies the self-improvement themes common in pilgrimage (and tourism). Music sets the mood: soft orchestral pieces accompany introspective moments, ominous strings coincide with cold rain at twilight, and languid mariachi instrumentals provide the backdrop for sunny mountain traverses. If the group was hoping to attract a wider audience, it worked. The 2015 documentary is one of the most viewed Juquila videos on YouTube.

As we stressed at the outset, the videos posted by pilgrimage groups do not provide the full picture. Alongside them, we find promotional videos. Some of these clips mix advertising and devotion. At the upper end of production values, we have the videos produced by the tourism industry. These often reside on YouTube channels, such as Vive Oaxaca, Sobre Tierra Oaxaqueña, and Oaxaca Bonito. They employ drones and slow-motion, time-lapse sequences. Often, they also embrace the music video style, although they almost always choose upbeat electronic music of the kind that accompanies TV series and romantic comedies. They are also fond of the loosely repurposed variation on the quick-cut, falling-in-love montage typical of the latter (Sobre Tierra 2017; Vive Oaxaca 2020). Oaxaca's state government employs a "story" built around a wide-eyed bourgeois couple enjoying the rustic marvels of Oaxaca guided by the male narrator extolling "millenarian traditions," natural wonders, and the life-changing powers of the region. Deploying personal-discovery tropes of new age wellness, he purrs, "Take a pilgrimage to yourself." At the end, the adorable couple approaches Juquila's altar, heads bowed, floral offerings cradled in their arms, as the narrator declares: "Oaxaca is a journey. Choose your route. The Route of Faith, Juquila" (Oaxaca Bonito 2016).

Ironically, this advertisement idealizes the locations along the route to an extent that makes them nearly unrecognizable. Nonetheless, it is important to stress the commonalities with devotee-made videos: in both cases, the message is that Juquila will transform you.

More humble promoters also contribute content. As we would expect, a handful of “influencers” offer Juquila featurettes. These tend to be niche marketed: video blogs from young couples, a motorcycle enthusiast’s road-trip video, bus companies promoting tours, and even a DIY children’s travel channel (Chinoax 2014; Madommi 2020; Traketin 2020). In a different vein, a Oaxacan band offers a music video in which they sing and act out their visit to Juquila, devotional purchases, and votive practices before showing a phone number for bookings (Cronos 2017).

This set of examples may seem transparently economic, but again, the intertwining of devotion and commerce is both common and traditional. Requesting “help in business,” increasing sales, and attracting clients were part of votive petitioning long before the advent of the internet.

Official Catholic Church postings are typically unimaginative. For example, they offer overlong videos of low-resolution, live-streamed masses or short benedictions from the shrine (Arquidiócesis 2015, 2019). The church seems to be trying to catch up with an autonomous cultural practice sustained by devotees, inserting itself within a wider cyberscape of Juquila-related communication. The official church messaging focuses on orthodoxy. It stresses—sometimes literally, sometimes implicitly—that the clergy are the appropriate stewards of the shrine and the authoritative voice on Juquila’s devotion. The church’s message via rituals and sermons is simple: it encourages devotees to focus their energies on the priest-mediated sacraments and a full embrace of the Catholic Church’s moral teachings. Individual votive practice and pious supplication barely appears. The modest number of views suggest that pilgrims are not very interested in these messages.

It is important to remember that the church and its ministers rarely play a lead role in pilgrimages. We know of only one community in which a priest founded an annual pilgrimage (Pilgrims of Tonameca, Interview, Pochutla, Oaxaca 2017). Occasionally an individual priest travels with a group to Juquila. For example, Padre Martín Rodríguez, a charming, attractive young priest with his own YouTube channel, accompanied his parish’s cycling group to Juquila in 2019 and posted videos of his interviews with pilgrims. He teaches through lighthearted dialogues with children that include marking doctrinal errors with a baffled Jesus emoji (Rodríguez 2019a, 2019b).

Mostly, however, Catholic authorities remain at a distance from pilgrimage. The notable exception remains the promotional campaign for Juquila’s pontifical coronation on October 8, 2014. Online promotion was only part of this effort. The Virgin’s image received an elaborate makeover, and the archdiocese sent out press releases and posted explanatory guides explaining her revamped look and more complicated iconography. Posters appeared online and on walls in the state capital, extolling the Virgin’s official crowning. Banners also festooned churches in Oaxaca City (Chávez Botello 2014). Many clips of the event featuring the archbishop and a dozen additional prelates reside on YouTube (e.g., Arquidiócesis 2014). Some offer the nearly four-hour spectacle, as it was live streamed (Bypmexico 2014). The most viewed videos of the coronation, however, are highlight videos (e.g., Vive Oaxaca 2014).

Devotees, though, rarely mention the crowning. According to residents of Juquila, the event proved a disappointment (Sebastián Anaya, Interview, Juquila, Oaxaca, 2016). In truth, coronation videos are dull. They lack the pace, narrative, and engaging soundtrack of the devotee-made clips. YouTube statistics underscore the contrast: Tlaxiaco’s documentary lists 191,000 views and 902 likes (Caminatadefe 2015b). Meanwhile, the most popular coronation video has only 21,000 views and 173 likes (Vive Oaxaca 2014).

The church, however, has more impact when individual priests take a personal approach. For example, a priest YouTuber, Mexico City’s Padre José de Jesús Aguilar Valdés

(2021), enjoyed success with a Juquila travel video. Like a podcast host, his Juquila segment gained traction because viewers can imagine they know him. As their comments indicate, many “follow” him. He posts short clips centered on Catholic trivia, live-streamed Masses, self-help topics, and brief answers to doctrinal questions alongside his travel videos. On camera he calmly recounts the official history of the image, describes traditions, and visits key landmarks. His Juquila clip amassed an impressive 645,000 views by August 2021, a mere two months after its initial posting.

Instagram

When it comes to digital devotion, Instagram is unique. First, its design hampers individual users’ ability to build far-reaching communities unless they recruit a large online following. Similarly, even with a public profile, sharing widely requires the use of many hashtags or location tags. Even with many followers, it is nearly impossible for an individual user to know whether they reached their “target” audience. Typically, when a public account features a devotional photo with a Juquila-themed hashtag, it receives only a handful of likes and comments. Unlike Facebook and YouTube, Instagram does not utilize keyword searches, making it difficult to locate available content for a specific topic. Given these limitations, individual devotees utilize Instagram less for community building, like Facebook, or sharing montages and travel videos like YouTube. Instead, the platform allows users a space for sharing their experiences with a modest number of followers. Second, aside from individual pages, Instagram also hosts a few popular public pages dedicated to religious tourism at Juquila. By design they function as extensive stockpiles of easily sharable, simple, sentimental, and upbeat messages celebrating shrine visitation and Juquila’s “magical” reputation. Thus, what we observe is the presence of small community formation and what we could consider extensive but quite shallow community formation centered on promotional content sharing.

Pilgrimage manifests itself most commonly on Instagram through selfies. As we noted earlier, this genre of digital self-representation has become common globally (Caidi, Beazley, and Colomer Marquez 2018). Smartphones allow individuals to incorporate selfies into traditions of devotional testimony and identity construction as they travel. Juquila pilgrims often post a series throughout their journeys. In a sense, they are perfect for demonstrating progress: the subject remains the same, but the backdrop (often recognizable to viewers) changes, and eventually the shrine or Juquila herself appears in the frame. For example, @rafadelsa (2016) posted a selfie with two other men in March 2016 as he sat on the side of the road. The caption (misspelled in the original) reads, “Pqregriancion juquila #juquilaoaxaca #juquila #wedidit #virgenjuquila.” Through this image and the English-language slogan “We did it,” @rafadelsa’s four hundred followers learned that Rafa had arrived at the shrine. Unsurprisingly, devotees most often post selfies on December 8, the Virgin of Juquila’s traditional feast day, documenting their presence and often referencing their completion of a personal vow (*manda*). Hence, we see individuals positioned in front of the virgin’s flower-covered altar, accompanied by captions like “#VirgendeJuquila #Promesas #Gracias” and “Orgullosamente Juquileño” (@soypepe3 2021).

Essentially, selfies are shrine souvenirs, yet the form also suggests a degree of innovation. Devotees have long left portraits at the shrine, often paired with requests for intercession or declarations of gratitude. In the first instance, they often accompany a short text about a personal crisis or problem. Self-portraits are less common, although when devotees deposit diplomas or licenses, they often include a small photograph. In the second instance, they often accompany a declaration of thanks for facilitating arrival at the shrine. These generally do not qualify as “selfies,” a picture in which the subject is

holding the phone at arm's length. Usually, what we see are traditional snapshots. Selfies on Instagram (and Facebook) are different—rather than being left behind at the foot of the shrine like a portrait or devotional offering, the selfie allows pilgrims to carry proof of their devotion with them long after they have left the shrine. These selfies are not merely “for Juquila.” They serve to inform the devotees’ followers, document the poster’s participation in a religious act, and underscore belonging to a particular group of pilgrims.

The showcasing of group identity is still more pronounced when devotees upload “conventional” photographs to Instagram. Unlike selfies, which center a single pilgrim, many users share photos of groups, children, or scenic vistas. These pictures range from vivid, seemingly professional shots to blurry, haphazardly composed images. In nearly all cases, they share similar sentiments: devout gratitude and proud accomplishment. For example, @arthur_oax (2019), an account with nearly three thousand followers, posts high-quality images of Oaxaca. Alongside a picture of the Virgin of Juquila’s sanctuary, a caption states: “Hundreds of faithful followers stand before the Virgin’s image to ask for favors or give thanks for the blessings they have received. There is no doubt that faith moves mountains.” In this case, the user documents his pious sentiments with evidence of collective devotion. Similarly, some pilgrims share photographs of their children or nieces and nephews as a testament to familial devotion. For example, @luisito618 (2021) posted a picture of a small child standing inside the Virgin’s sanctuary stating, “We came to give thanks, my nephew Toñito and my family.” Likewise, @miangonher (2020) shared several photos of a young man (the user) and a small girl (his niece) in front of the Virgin’s shrine. Both posts imply cultural transfer, as young men reveal themselves sharing traditions with children. The posting of these photos on Instagram simultaneously serves as proof of arrival in Juquila, a kind of self-presentation as a conduit of Juquila’s devotion, and a praiseworthy fomenting of religious customs.

Beyond personal photographs, some devotees on Instagram share “educational” content. In truth, this is a common practice on Facebook too. Among the most common are retellings, likely copied and pasted from elsewhere, of the legends detailing the Virgin’s apparitions and miracles. Typically, they appear on Juquila’s feast day. Users, some with only sixty followers, post pictures of the Virgin accompanied by lengthy didactic captions. It is a traditional expression of devotion and gratitude, sharing the image’s story and bolstering her reputation. The votive chapel, the Pedimento, on the outskirts of Juquila offers the same stories in paintings decorating the ceiling. In essence, each devotee posting these texts joins the broader promotional campaign, and their Instagram page functions intermittently as a devotional bulletin board for their curated following.

On Instagram, we also note important sharing patterns that knit together individual pages and institutional pages connected to religious tourism promotion. There is also a network of interactions and cross-postings that connect Instagram to Facebook. Although it is no surprise to scholars of pilgrimage in other parts of the world, Juquila’s devotion, to a certain extent, runs on tourism (e.g., Thomases 2019). The most prominent example of this is Conoce Juquila (@conocejuquila on Instagram), a page with a strong presence on all major platforms, boasting nearly four thousand followers on Instagram. Through posts, devotees, merchants, and the merely curious publicize their devotion, market services, or simply celebrate the “food, culture, and religion” of Juquila. Most of these posts feature photographed pilgrims, romanticized pictures of the shrine and nearby spaces, images of traditional foods, colorful indigenous outfits and folklore, short videos of processions and rituals, and religious iconography. In essence, the page offers the standard marketing of Oaxacan tourism alongside a heavy dose of devotional representation and Catholic imagery. It is targeted at a particular niche in the market, we could say. As its Instagram and Facebook feeds demonstrate, Conoce Juquila features colorful and well-crafted posts, making it very popular with Juquila’s followers. Devotees and pilgrimage groups frequently share the page’s posts, usually accompanied by cheerful, even gushy, captions.

Virtual community building certainly occurs on Instagram and has evolved in tandem with tourism promotion as it weaves together the different platforms. Yet the community building that occurs on Instagram, particularly through tourism pages, differs from what occurs on Facebook. On Instagram, individuals and groups are essentially forced into two categories—public or private and thus macro- or microcommunities. While an individual can choose to follow a popular account like *Conoce Juquila* on Instagram, the interactions between those who engage with the page are far less intimate and involved than they can be on Facebook. Interactions simply center on consuming and sharing promotional content. Many users, moreover, share posts without bothering to follow the account. Thus, the statistics on “followers” significantly undercount engagement and impact.

For example, *@juquila_pueblo_magico* (2020) is a tourism account that uses the official “Pueblo Mágico” (magic town) designation granted to Juquila in 2020 by the Mexican federal government (Secretaría de Turismo 2020). In earning this status, Juquila joined 132 other Mexican communities recognized for their allegedly unique national character and the showcasing of national culture. With slightly more than two thousand followers, the Instagram page mostly features pictures of pilgrims posing in Juquila’s plaza. User engagement is quite limited, suggesting that only weak ties unite this group. Instead, the *@juquila_pueblo_magico* page simply offers a slideshow, inviting users to browse images, and share its posts. Inspiring “shares” is central to its promotional strategy. For example, in August 2022, one of the largest and oldest cycling pilgrimages to Juquila began to discuss and promote its annual November trip to the shrine on Facebook with a shared post from *@juquila_pueblo_magico*’s Instagram page (Peregrinación Ciclista de Huixcolotla 2022). It features a blurry snapshot of a road sign, Welcome to Sanctuary STA Catarina Juquila, and a caption reading “Each day my trip to Juquila is getting closer,” followed by a heart and the praying hands emoji. In the comments, Facebook friends began inquiring about costs and the itinerary. This example is particularly important because it reveals pilgrims’ deploying of tourism-promoting content from Instagram to stoke community building on Facebook, the platform pilgrims often prefer for interacting actively with one another.

Despite instances like this, the contrast with online Facebook communities, where users discuss, plan, and support one another throughout the year and amid stages of pilgrimage, remains sharp. However, it is important to note that these Instagram pages offer a less demanding form of community. In other words, public pages like *juquila_pueblo_magico* allow followers and casual visitors to participate virtually in the town’s festivities by consuming and sharing images and messages. In addition, the photographs form part of the information reservoir that devotees can access as they contemplate their own forays to Juquila.

From the many examples of devotional practice and community building observed on Instagram, we can conclude that for many pilgrims, it is a platform for sharing personal pilgrimage experiences with a smaller, curated audience. Whether it be through selfies, dad-and-daughter-style snapshots at the shrine, or high-definition pictures of visiting pilgrims congregating in Juquila’s plaza, devotees can document their journey and share their feelings of pride and devotion with their followers. Sometimes, as we have seen, these images are spread more widely on other Instagram pages and then other platforms. And these, at times, then spark more intimate exchanges between individual devotees. In other words, in looking carefully at Instagram, we observe Juquilita’s network in action.

Conclusion

Scholars of pilgrimage often point to its open, adaptable nature as the key to its remarkable endurance across centuries. They stress how it functions as a form of engagement with a legendary past, a past that devotees can creatively envision entering

while experiencing landscapes and locations understood as sacred. Thus, we see participants deploy storylines, roles, metaphors, and settings drawn from church teaching, media, folklore, film, and fiction (Chemin 2012). Simultaneously, pilgrimage continually metabolizes new approaches to travel and ritual alongside prevailing understandings of identity construction and consumption.

Our research reveals that pilgrimage's historical flexibility has been extended further by the advent and subsequent ubiquity of social media. Our examination of pilgrimage-related practices on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram suggests that devotees' creative use of new digital tools and eager embrace of virtual spaces and platforms fuels pilgrimage. Social media facilitates communication, organization, and promotion while offering new opportunities for expression, mutual support, and community.

Our findings reside at the nexus of new trends in the study of digital religion and innovative approaches to pilgrimage. The key is to focus on how pilgrimage incorporates ritualized and nonritualized practices and provides "articulation" between behaviors, beliefs, and narrative forms. Pilgrimage is centrally about interrelationships: its practices emerge and grow through associations between activities and institutions. From this perspective, pilgrimage endures because it bridges processes and structures in wider society and evolves alongside them. It is marked by variety and possibility through its ongoing interplay with, and dependence on, social realms deemed secular, such as political and economic relations (Coleman 2022, 6–9).

In this sense, pilgrimage and social media appear "made for each other." Social media extends and stokes articulation; it facilitates the interpenetration of votive practices and devotional culture within realms of consumption, leisure, and entertainment. But as we show, this takes place differently on distinct platforms.

Facebook, given its open, multimedia, mash-up-encouraging design and flexible approach to personal profiles and group formation, has emerged as the most important, commonly used platform among Juquila's devotees and those promoting the famed image's devotion. It serves as the communication nucleus for individual pilgrims and pilgrimage organizers, as well as the institutional and commercial actors hoping to reach them. Moreover, it facilitates sharing from other platforms and the placement of videos, photographs, and selfies from fellow devotees, and religious images on users' personal feeds. The mutual-aid functions apparent in Juquila-affiliated Facebook prayer groups and users' use of posts and commenting to set up chains of condolences represent truly meaningful developments for devotees. In addition, the emergence of a distinct online devotional aesthetic adds a new innovative layer to the symbolic forms of communication surrounding Catholic image devotions. Finally, it is on Facebook where the most innovative (and potentially lasting) responses to the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, in particular the user-created, virtual *Pedimento* where fellow devotees post digital votive offerings, bundle their prayers for miraculous intercession in the comment section, and essentially listen to one another's struggles.

There are fewer posts on YouTube, but its singular focus on video hosting offers an ideal space for celebrating and narrating trips to Juquila's shrine, which explains the trove of DIY expression and devotional marketing videos produced by devotees, Catholic and secular functionaries, and commercial actors. Here we glimpse lay and institutional creativity in dynamic interaction as users take ownership of Juquila-inspired, visual storytelling and search for ways to amplify the dramatic, entertainment value of their YouTube posts to draw viewers, convey sentiments, fulfill vows, and expand devotion. Our findings also indicate that this platform provides an exceptional *entrée* into intertwining pilgrimage and commerce (especially recent efforts that fuel religious tourism). In this realm, drawing attention is paramount and the various actors posting Juquila-related videos embrace new tools and can be quite creative. Hence, we observe an abiding, even freewheeling, openness to borrow, remix, and repurpose tropes, music, ritual, visual

forms, and narrative structures with little concern for origin. Even Protestant popular music is fair game. As this dynamic suggests, the Catholic Church has very little ability to control this arena of devotional messaging and expression. It can only join the chorus, so to speak, by adding videos to the expanding, searchable archive and working to make its offerings more engaging and attractive.

Nearly all YouTube posters embrace notions of Juquila as a sacred, enchanted space and the image's devotion as a personally transformative experience. However, distinct posts imply different understandings of what pilgrimage-catalyzed change and pious commitment can yield. This underscores the hybrid, negotiated nature of devotion and votive practice. Of course, this was true before the emergence of social media, but YouTube offers us a newly rich source base for observing the process and the unique ways the platform's design is likely shaping the outcomes.

Pilgrims and devotees use Instagram least of all because it lacks the more open, hublike qualities of Facebook and thus is less useful to organized groups. But that doesn't mean it is unimportant. As we have pointed out, there are two important poles of Juquila-related expression on Instagram. First, individual devotees seeking a more intimate, curated community within which to share their devotional thoughts and shrine travel photographs embrace the platform. Second, actors actively encouraging religious tourism and pilgrimage have found the creation of public pages a particularly effective way to disseminate promotional material (some produced by page administrators and some autonomously created and posted by devotees). As we point out, local commercial actors offering services to devotees, like the proxy votive offerings inspired by the pandemic, have also flocked to public pages in hopes of reaching potential clients. This second, open realm of Instagram activity is almost certainly the most influential in terms of shaping the evolution of Juquila's devotion. As we note, devotees often share the photographs, memes, and messages originating on these pages within their Facebook groups.

In sum, it is an exciting early moment to research digital pilgrimage devotion. Access to smartphones, various platforms, computers, drones, and software is fueling pilgrimage while reshaping the way devotees communicate and learn about Our Lady of Juquila, engage votive culture, and express their own devotion. It is still too early to know if this dynamic will lead to fundamental transformations in image-centered religious practice and shrine visitation. At first glance it can seem like devotees are merely expanding and enlivening pilgrimage with new tools—but these are tools, media logics, and technologies that are reshaping other realms of social interaction around the globe. The Virgin of Juquila and her devotees—and promoters—are networked. In short, we believe the proverbial table is set for dramatic changes to come.

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