

## Digital transnationalism: Strategies against vulnerability in the immigration journey of skilled Mexicans in Vancouver

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### Abstract

This paper explores how skilled Mexican immigrants in Vancouver employ strategies to combat the vulnerability they face by dealing with constant upward and downward mobility in their immigration journeys. This paper examines how highly skilled Mexican immigrants living in Vancouver strategize against downward mobility using digital technologies. I build on 19 in-depth interviews with highly skilled Mexican immigrants living in Vancouver. Defining highly skilled migration based on educational achievement, the only requirements to participate in this research were to live in the Greater Vancouver Area, have a university degree and Mexican citizenship. The participants in this research have been in Canada on average 4.5 years, although some have been here for as long as 14 years or as little as 1 year.

I argue that highly skilled Mexican immigrants use digital technologies to implement strategies to reproduce their cultural, social and economic capital that allow them to differentiate themselves from “other” Mexicans that are not like them that live in the same city. Digital technologies give immigrants access to their homelands and their networks without having to leave the new country to which they have migrated, creating what some authors have called “thirdspaces” (Price and Whitworth, 2004; Skop, 2016) and the emergence of a new transnational habitus (Nedelcu, 2012).

Reproducing an alignment with the Canadian “we” in the digital space can be observed in the interactions that certain Mexicans have with others in digital spaces. Most of the interactions among Mexicans in Vancouver happened online due to a very limited amount of in-person events in the city, which mostly happened in September around Mexican Independence Day. In addition to the low quantity of Mexican community events in Vancouver, there is not a specific place in the city where Mexicans meet. Given the size and composition of the Mexican community in Vancouver, in comparison with other diasporic communities, there is no real demand for places where Mexicans can gather, which in turn contributes to the lack of community that is perceived by Mexican expatriates.

Previous research shows that the migration stage in which immigrants find themselves has a considerable impact on the management of their transnational relations. My findings are

consistent with the literature, as most of the participants are temporary residents with the goal of permanent migration and their use of digital technologies is mostly to learn about their new society in order to integrate.

## Biography

**María Esther Cervantes** has a degree in International Relations from Tecnológico de Monterrey, Mexico and Master of Arts with a specialty in Geography from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. She is currently a second year Ph.D. candidate in Geography at the University of British Columbia, where she has obtained awards such as the Fox International Fellowship, the Four Year Fellowship and the Mitacs Globalink Graduate Fellowship. Her dissertation focuses on the ways in which immigration policies and education affect the life choices of highly skilled Mexican migrants living in Vancouver and Seattle, shaping their understandings of citizenship and their identity. This dissertation contributes to the urgent need to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact the future of work, specifically for highly skilled immigrants, whose lives are intrinsically connected to the intersection of transnational education, immigration and employment laws.

María Esther is an incoming Fox Fellow at MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale University. María Esther also works as a Researcher at the Latin American Open Data Initiative (Uruguay) where she has published several policy briefs and reports related to migration, artificial intelligence, gender and data for development. María Esther has worked as a consultant in DistritoTec, the Urban Planning division of Tecnológico de Monterrey (México) and as Helpdesk Manager of the Open Contracting Data Standard of the Open Contracting Partnership operated by the Center for Sustainable Development (Paraguay). María Esther spends most of her time in between Monterrey, Mexico and Vancouver, Canada.