

HCIAS

Working Papers on Ibero-America

No. 15 | December 2024

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Truth Commission in Colombia and its digital strategy 2019-2022: The use of social media in peacebuilding

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Abstract: Operating in a context marked by political and media hostility as well as the continuation of the armed conflict, the Truth Commission in Colombia (Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, hereinafter TCC) faced an additional challenge that is unique to today's time: the challenge of operating in a context where social media and digital communication are essential aspects of communicating and influencing. This trend heightened with the COVID-19 pandemic when digital communication became even more widespread than before. This, and the influence that digital communication and social media can have on young people, made the digital strategy a key component of the TCC's communication general strategy. This article presents and analyzes the digital strategy that the TCC implemented during its mandate (2019-2022) to communicate its processes and products. The TCC's digital strategy was a key tool for peace building as it enabled the TCC to establish its legitimacy and prepare a divided society for the delivery of the commission's final report and recommendations.

Key words: Truth Commission, Colombia, Social media, Peacebuilding

DOI: 10.48629/hcias.2024.1.108671

1. Introduction

On October 2nd, 2016, Colombia shocked the world by voting "No" in the plebiscite for peace (Colombia R. N., n.d.). After four years of negotiation with the FARC-EP Guerrilla, the government asked Colombian society: Do you support the final agreement to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace? Surprisingly, the "No" won with 50.21% of the vote against the "Yes", which obtained 49.78% (Duran, 2016). An analysis of the Yes and No campaigns before the vote showed how decisive social networks were in influencing the final vote (Ruano Ybarra & Muñoz Burbano, 2019, p. 120). They acted as fast and effective channels where the "No" campaign used audience segmentation and microtargeting to provoke outrage around the agreement by using distorted information for each audience (Ruano Ybarra & Muñoz Burbano, 2019). The director of the No campaign Juan Carlos Vélez, a member of the Centro Democrático political party, stated in an interview with the newspaper *El País*: "the No campaign

was based on the power of social networks and on the recommendations of strategists from Brazil and Panama, who advised them to "stop explaining the agreements and focus on the message of outrage" (Vélez, 2016). The result of the plebiscite revealed an increasingly relevant phenomenon, the important role of the digital world of social networks in the construction of peace.

Despite the result of the plebiscite, the Colombian government managed to pass the Legislative Act 001 of 2017 by incorporating some changes suggested by the opposers to the peace agreement. This law formalized the peace agreement as a constitutional law and created a Transitional Justice (TJ) system in Colombia in 2016.

The Colombian TJ system is made up of three institutions. One of these is the Truth Clarification Commission (TCC), which has the mandate to clarify the truth about what happened in the armed conflict and deliver a final report with recommendations. Of the other

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two other institutions one is of a judicial nature, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) and the other is a humanitarian organisation, the Unit for Disappeared Victims of the Armed Conflict (UBPD). Together these three institutions form the Integral System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJRN). The TCC delivered its final report on June 28th, 2022. Amongst the functions of the TCC, Decree 588 of 2017 stipulated the implementation of a “pedagogic dissemination strategy and an active relationship with the media to report, during its operation, the advances and developments of all the functions of the TCC and ensure the greatest possible participation” (Decree 588, 2017, P. 8).

This article presents and analyzes the communication and dissemination strategy implemented by the TCC during its mandate (2019-2022). Furthermore, it analyses the digital elements of this strategy and generates parallels that can be applied to the process of legitimation, pedagogy and dissemination of non-judicial truth during peacebuilding initiatives.

Whilst there is a growing recognition of the relevance of social media platforms and their influence on peacebuilding and democracy efforts (Hirblinger A. T., 2023; Hirblinger E. a., 2023) (Sandvik KB, 2014) (Schirch, 2020) (Hofstetter, 2021), there is still little literature and research conducted on how institutions utilize social media as a tool to promote or hinder peace building in transitional justice contexts. The Colombian TCC is one of the first Commissions to fully embrace a digital communication strategy across several digital channels. As such, the Colombian peace agreement and the transitional justice system that follows this, constitutes an opportunity to understand the role of social networks in the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives through digital means. The Colombian case presents a unique and to date largely unexamined case - partly because of its novelty and because of the changing and dynamic nature of the digital world - from which we can draw valuable lessons for peace building in the modern world.

2. Methodology

This article explains and analyzes the digital strategy that was implemented by the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and

Non-Repetition (hereinafter TCC) in Colombia during its mandate (2019-2022) and was used to communicate its objectives, processes and products to the Colombian society. The main question of this article is: What digital communication strategy, targeted at peace building within the framework of the TJ system product of the 2016 peace agreement, did the TCC create and implement and why?

Using an empirical and qualitative methodological approach, this work is based on two semi-structured interviews with TCC expert analysts followed by an extensive digital literature review. Interviews took place between 2019 and 2022. Both interviews were conducted with individuals who worked directly with the TCC, one at national level (referred to as R1) and one at territorial level (referred to as R2). This allowed the author to obtain an inside perspective regarding how the dissemination and communication strategies of the TCC were constructed and carried out. Subsequent literature research allowed for the characterization and contextualization of both the general communication and dissemination strategy of the TCC, the elements of the strategy that focused on digital communication and their mechanism for generating institutional content. This article is a product of my doctoral research which focuses on the Colombian truth commission, specifically on the social dispute over the historical narrative of the armed conflict produced by the TCC.

3. Social media as an enabler of peace?

In one of the texts on the relationship between social media and peacebuilding, Hirblinger (2003) defines digital peacebuilding as interventions that are:

devised to discretely target what is understood as a distinct “space,” portrayed as “digital,” “cyber” or virtual,” and “online,” in contrast to “offline.” They are mainly concerned with aspects of “media,” “communication” and with responses to conflict that are of a behavioral nature, such as “campaigning,” “activism,” “education,” “diplomacy,” “storytelling” or “games.” Likewise, the phenomena that they aim to address are also largely viewed as being in—and the result of—the digital

sphere, such as “polarization,” “hate speech,” or “disinformation.” (P. 433)

This places digital peacebuilding initiatives in a contradictory terrain to the extent that the digital public sphere can be a scenario that produces violence. Hirblinger further argues that peacebuilding can not only be viewed from the digital lens but needs to include measures related to public policy such as social security, inclusion and equity (Hirblinger A. T., 2023, p. 434).

The British NGO International Alert similarly warns that “social media, in the context of peace and conflict, can be an enabler of political agency and a positive social connector, but it can also be a driver of polarization, hate speech and violence” (International Alert, 2020, p. 6). Mercy Corps studies social networks and their use in contexts of peace and conflict. They evaluate how social networks have been used to promote hate and violence and identifies a relationship between the digital world and voter manipulation (Mercy Corps, 2019). The work of Shahbaz and Funk (2019) addresses the issue of the increasingly high budgets of political campaigns and the manipulation of elections through digital technology and the problem of government surveillance of its citizens through social networks (Shahbaz Adrian & Funk Allie, 2019). Similarly, there are several texts that address the role that social networks had in the events with transformed the Middle East and North Africa region between 2010 and 2013 (Salem, 2011) (Khouja, 2014) (Soengas Pérez, 2013). In these cases, social networks played an essential role as a social tool for democratic change in the countries of the region.

4. The TCC and the challenging context in which it operated

Communication around truth commissions is extremely complex as truth commissions, by nature, usually operate in contexts of split societies where consensus can be minimal and certain parties feel wronged by others. Often, each party wants to see ‘their’ version of the truth reflected in the official narrative. This phenomenon is noted in the case of Colombia by one of the experts interviewed by the author: “the Truth Commission narrative is made up of “complex truths”, which confront the public with

dilemmas - more dilemmas than a judicial truth” (R1, 2021). What the interviewee is referring to is that the strategy implemented was very careful not to promote the idea of a single truth or an official truth. The peacebuilding strategy applied by the TCC was to promote a non-adversarial reconstruction of truth, hereby managing to construct a concept of truth that is not rigid and singular but dynamic and fluid. This, given that the truth is usually perceived as a static notion, increased the communication challenge faced by the TCC significantly.

In addition to this challenge, the TCC carried out its communication strategy in a particularly complex socio-political context marked by political and media hostility, a COVID-19 pandemic and the continuation of the armed conflict. The TCC launched its communication strategy in late 2019. The social confinement resulting from the pandemic in Colombia took effect from March 2020 to June 2022 (Duque, 2022). This had several consequences. Firstly, some of the traditional dissemination and communication strategies such as workshops, focus groups, rallies and events were unavailable to the TCC during this time period. As such, the TCC had to shift its communication strategy even more to the digital realm than it might have initially planned to do. Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic and particularly the periods of lock-down coincided with periods of extreme social isolation where people increasingly looked for social connection on online platforms. During social isolation, the use of virtual tools increased as forms of communication and interaction around the world. As such, the opportunity for influence and reach of a social media strategy also increased during this time (Stacy, 2023).

Most past truth commissions did not face the added challenge of having to create and implement a digital communication strategy, since most were created before 2010 (Hayner, 2001, p. 256) (Bakiner, 2016, p. 27). As social networks and digital communication only ramped up in 2012, truth commissions created prior to 2010 did not have to factor in their influence in their communication strategies. According to Bakiner (2022), truth commissions such as the ones in Canada (2008), Gambia (2017) and Brazil (2011) were some of the first to use social networks channels. But the Colombian Commission is the first to, in addition to having an official web platform, develop a social media

campaign across several channels: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok and YouTube (CAPAZ & Bakiner, 2022).

Additionally, the fact that whilst FARC had signed the peace treaty, several dissidences and other guerrilla groups such as the Ejército Popular de Liberación -National Liberation Army- (ELN) and the Autodefensas Unidas Gitanistas -United Gaitanist Self-Defense Forces-(AUG) that did not sign the agreement further complicated the political context in which the TCC had to operationalize its communication strategy.

Lastly, given that the TCC was created in the context of the 2016 peace agreement which did not receive the majority of the votes in the public plebiscite (Colombia R. N., n.d.), it lacked a legitimate justification in the eyes of many. This opened up the TCC's final report to strong criticism and attacks from its opposers (Cortés, 2020) (Roux, 2018). A sector of the security forces, business sectors such as cattle ranchers, the FARC's sexual victim cooperative called Rosa Blanca, and members of the Democratic Center party showed a role in opposing the process of clarifying the truth carried out by the Commission. These opponents argued that the loss of the plebiscite deemed the TCC to be illegitimate and systematically accused the members of the TCC of ideological bias (Cardozo Ruidiaz, 2024). A clear example of this lack of support from the government was the absence of President Iván Duque at every act of the commission to which he was invited (Las dos Orillas, 2018) (EL Tiempo, 2022).

5. Communication objectives and strategies

The TCC's digital strategy was built based on Decree 588 to communicate the TCC's processes and products with Colombian society as well as to neutralize potential attacks. Given the challenging context in which the TCC was operating, in the public document *Methodological Guidelines* of 2019, the 11 commissioners state that they understood the TCC's "communications as a process that goes beyond a simple record of its activities". They wanted a process "which will generate communication tools and give public life to stories and narratives that raise awareness and impact the population, to transform the gaze of the indifferent and contradictory and to summon the country to this exercise of truth and coexistence"

(TCC C. C., 2019, p. 39). This text makes it clear that the commissioners knew in advance that the institution would have opponents. It also stipulated the need for a communication strategy that takes "into account the different audiences: supporters, indifferent and opponents" and the creation of a communications team to manage the "relationship with the mass media, large and small, national and local, on radio, television and the web." (TCC C. C., 2019, p. 39).

The communications team was made up of the coordinator of the communication strategy, the press officer of the TCC, and the leader of the digital team (R1, 2021). This team oversaw the design and dissemination of the different content (TCC C. C., 2019, p. 39). They also created a strategy based on the TCC's mandate (TCC C. C., 2019, pp. 12,13,14) that corresponded to the four objectives of the TCC: 1. clarification, 2. recognition (of victims and those responsible), 3. coexistence and 4. the non - repetition of the violent past (TCC C. C., 2019, p. 12). According to one of the interviewees, the aim of the communication strategy was to "*promote in the minds and hearts of Colombians the importance of political ethical truth as a necessary condition (...) to advance in a future without armed conflict and to be able to challenge Colombian society based on dilemmas that we must elucidate so that the tragedy suffered does not happen again*" (R1, 2021). The communication strategy was designed to speak to the hearts and minds of society. It did not consist in promoting one truth but rather focused on giving the truth social and political relevance. This can be explained by various factors. Firstly, because the final report of the TCC was only published in 2022, almost three years after the TCC launched its communication strategy. As such, at the time when the TCC launched its communication strategy, there were no final findings, or 'final truths' to promote. Furthermore, as the TCC could not produce partial findings, the material used to promote its work was the processes that it employed at the local level (such as number of people interviewed, number of reports received, etc.). Secondly, it was understood from the beginning by the Commissioners, that the TCC's mandate did not consist of reconstructing the truth from one side or from the vision of one group, but instead consisted of listening to the multiple people involved in the war, especially the victims. The latter approach was adopted as the focus of

the TCC was reconciliation and coexistence by including the voices of all the parties involved. As such, the concept of “one truth” was contrary to the TCCs mandate. To do this, those in charge saw the need to anchor the notion of truth by focusing on the future, giving rise to one of the slogans used by the organization: “*There is a future if there is truth*” (R2, 2022). The narrative of the truth was focused on promoting the idea that without this ethical-political truth there could be no future.

The TCC’s communication strategy consisted of four communicative objectives: *institutional/organize, corporate, inform* and *mobilize* (R1, 2021). The *institutional/organize* objective was managed by the pedagogy group of the TCC and involved internal communication within the TCC. This included mechanisms to promote assertive communication between the different work teams at the national and local levels as well as with the commissioners. The *corporate aspect* was related to *branding*. That is, positioning the TCC brand “*as the largest and most complex investigation that has been done*” on the Colombian conflict. This involved making the Commission and its work known to Colombian society by using traditional media such as the press and radio for paid advertising in addition to organic advertising, strategy that focus on creating valuable content, engaging with the audience, and leveraging various -organic- channels to attract and retain attention. Which was produced and disseminated on the official platform of the TCC and its social media accounts. This objective of the communication strategy constituted a challenge for the TCC from the beginning of the process, as one person interviewed mentions: “*the reality is that the commission is not known as much as it should be and that has been an objective since day zero. And that goes hand in hand with promoting public opinion debates to influence public opinion, using traditional media, but also digital media*” (R1, 2021). Until the beginning of 2021, the Commission had only partially achieved this objective. The *informative* objective was focused on constructing and assembling content in the media, more related to staying in the focus of attention. “*It is difficult to be on the media agenda all the time being an extrajudicial entity. It is important to maintain the strategic moments (...) more or less every 15 days we are having a peak of information*” (R1, 2021). These peaks of information correspond to events that have

a national impact such as the contributions to the truth that former paramilitary chief Salvatore Mancuso and former guerrilla leader Rodrigo Londoño carried out on March 18, 2021. Or the contribution of former president Juan Manuel Santos on June 11th of that same year. The last of the objectives of the TCC’s communication strategy was *mobilize*. This focused on building a network of allies to carry the legacy of the Commission “*and promote it within the next ten years*” (R1, 2021).

6. Audience insight and the TCCs communication strategy

Both in traditional and digital marketing it is understood that the segmentation of audiences is a key factor for success (Kotler & Armstrong, , 2020) (Kotler, Hermawan , & Hooi, 2019). This was no different in the case of Colombia. A key building block of the communication strategy was audience insight. For this, AVINA Foundation (AVINA, s.f.) was hired by the TCC to understand the different audiences and classify these by the degree of closeness they had with the TCC process. Diagnostic audience studies helped develop more specific strategies, as mentioned by one person interviewed: “*we did not invent it, but what the audience studies have told us (...) they tell us, people are beginning to be interested in the truth of the conflict in the extent that they see it as a way for the future to be better, not in the extent that you want to understand the past. Because generally, one does not want to understand the past per se (...) instead, it is interesting in the extent that it feels that this is a condition for the future where there is no more war*” (R1, 2021).

The AVINA foundation classified the TCC’s audiences as *sympathizers, the indifferent and contradictors*. Subsequently they segmented the TCC’s audience even further into six groups, according to their degree of closeness with the Commission: *informed, dreamers, apathetic, confused, incredulous* and *skeptical* (R1, 2021). Each of these audiences was associated with a position vis-à-vis the TCC and was assigned a general characteristic that defined them qualitatively. According to one person interviewed, for the *informed* the TCC was “*a great opportunity to recognize the true history of the armed conflict as long as it is diverse and neutral*”. The *dreamers* on the other hand

perceived the TCC “*as the only entity that can give the victims the place they deserve in the history of the country*” (R1, 2021). The members of these two groups were considered to be the closest to the TCC. They were viewed as its allies and those who supported its work and were made up not only of international and national institutions but of ordinary people who “*believe so much in the work of Transitional Justice and the Truth Commission that they are willing to take the content of the Commission and the result of the report as their own. They are going to be key in the social support that the TCC’s report should have later*” (R1, 2021).

Then there were the *apathetic* who according to one person interviewed were defined as asking themselves questions such as: “*let’s see what happens with those Commissioners who earn more than the president of a company*” (R1, 2021). The *apathetic* were grouped together with the *confused* who according to an interviewee asked themselves questions such as: “*I don’t understand why they are going to give the guerrillas only five years in prison*” (R1, 2021). These two audiences were characterized by people who did not understand the reason for the TCC’s existence. Although they did not oppose the process, they did not “*put on the Commission’s shirt*” (R1, 2021) and they had a lot of questions around the process.

The last group consisted of those that were the ‘furthest away’ from the Commission. On the one hand, the audience of the *unbelievers*, for whom “*the Commission is a puppet of the FARC-EP and a façade of the peace agreement*” (R1, 2021) and on the other hand the *sceptics* were those that believed that “*everything to do with the peace process is allowing socialism to enter the country*” (R1, 2021). The *Centro Democrático political party*, *Asociación de oficiales retirados del Ejército* (National Association of Retired Officers of the National Army) and the *Federación Colombiana de ganaderos* (Colombian Federation of Livestock Ranchers) were the institutions that publicly attacked the truth commission, ignoring its legitimacy and accusing its members of ideological bias (Cardozo Ruidiaz, 2024).

In addition to the audience diagnostic and in collaboration with Lever group (Lever, n.d.), the AVINA foundation also conducted a focus group study on the relationship that Colombians have

with the truth (CAPAZ & Corredor, 2022). They used the methodology of the popular French marketing consultant, Gilbert Rapaille (1941), which employs theories from ethology, such as the first imprint of Konrad Lorenz (1903-1989) and the attachment theory of John Bowlby (1907-1990). This process made it possible to establish that Colombians relate the truth with what the TCC communication team coined as “*astute mischievousness*”. To illustrate this relationship, the communication team assigned one of the twelve Jungian archetypes of the collective unconscious to this relationship: the Joker. The phrase used to condense this relationship was “*use both truth and deception to survive in an environment of war*”. The communications coordinator of the TCC further supports this saying that: “one knows, journalists know, that in a war environment telling the truth costs you your life” (CAPAZ & Corredor, 2022). One of the objectives of the AVINA & Lever study was to determine the type of memory and primary emotions that participants associated with the truth. The study revealed that the main emotions with which Colombians associate truth are “fear, punishment and pain” (CAPAZ & Corredor, 2022). Although the negative emotions had more weight in the results in the study, the truth also has some positive emotions associated with it. These were “facing reality”, and “family unification” (CAPAZ & Corredor, 2022). According to the results of the focus group study, the relationship that Colombians have with the truth is a relationship of cunning mischief where the truth is multifaceted like a joker. For many Colombians, the truth is intimately related to negative emotions due to the repercussions that telling the truth may have in our conflictive social context. The insights from this study were revealing for the communication team, since it showed the complexity of the clarification efforts and the challenge that Colombians face as a society when faced with the truth.

Based on the audience insight, the TCC decided to implement a communication strategy designed to appeal to the collective unconscious and would tap into the insight of *astute mischievousness*. This meant developing a communication strategy akin to a marketing strategy, designed to “sell” the process and products of the TCC to the general population based on rigid audience insight and tailoring this to different audience segments using a variety of communication channels. Said strategy was diversified and used mass media

to reach public opinion, used analogous actions, such as ritual readings or collective readings of testimonies for social mobilization, and lastly, they used digital platforms to increase their reach, educate, communicate and disseminate (CAPAZ & Corredor, 2022).

7. Digital components of the communication strategy

Acknowledging the important role of digitalization in the current context, the Colombian Transitional Justice organizations began using Facebook and other platforms in 2019 to publicize their work and to prioritize the recognition of victims (Jasmin, Guntrum, Cerrillo, & Bujara, 2024, p. 26). In the case of the TCC, a digital communication team was created. This team was based in Bogotá and was tasked with creating lines of action for the digital strategy that corresponded to the objectives set by the general strategy.

Targeted outreach of the TCC's Digital Strategy

Lines of action were centered on the audiences identified by AVINA. For the *informed* and *dreamers*, the digital strategy aimed at emotionally involving and retaining them and to give them tools so that they could promote the legacy of the TCC.

Generating curiosity constituted one of main lines of strategic action at the digital level for this audience. The objective was to emotionally involve the *apathetic*, the people whose position was *"I might agree but I don't care"* (R1, 2021), and to explain to the *confused* who, more than not supporting the commission because of a political ideology did not do so out of ignorance. Audience studies focused on young people demonstrated that many young people fell into these two audience groups. More than a position against the Commission, what prevailed at the territorial level was a lack of knowledge about the organization and its work. As young people were a key target demography for the digital strategy, attracting and emotionally involving the *apathetic* and explaining to the *confused* was considered a priority of the digital strategy (R1, 2021). One interviewee mentions *"this is the most important focus of the digital strategy (...) what we have to achieve is to arouse curiosity, arouse interest. To the extent that we manage to arouse that*

interest, curiosity will eventually be able to move them. Because for many people who do not necessarily support the Commission, they do this more because of ignorance than because of political ideology" (R1, 2021). The digital content that was generated for the apathetic and confused was very agile and of an explanatory pedagogical type. With the confused *"explaining is the responsibility of pedagogy too. It is being able to say, well, this happened like this, this did not happen, let's say this is denying. It is very important to address denialism"* (R1, 2021).

Finally, for the *unbelievers* and *skeptics*, the TCC adopted a strategy of neutralizing attacks and denying fake news. For these audiences the TCC's digital strategy did not propose large-scale actions since it was considered that this would *"generate discussions that in the end generally do not generate a change of any kind, especially on Twitter, which is the network where this happens the most, the attacks come from Twitter"* (R1, 2021). In strategic terms, deterring *disbelievers* was comparatively less important than engaging the prioritized target audiences, the *apathetic* and *confused*.

The digital team was clear that *"we want to speak to the whole country but we have to prioritize. We have to use some tools and formats for some, other tools and formats for others. So that is the planning part. The conceptual part is the strategic guidelines on the digital communication of the commission."* (R1, 2021). To segment the audiences for the digital strategy even further, the six AVINA audience groups were combined with age variables and socioeconomic status. As a result, nine target audiences (see table 1) were established by the digital team. The main purpose of this segmentation was to use it as a guide for the publication of content on social networks and to optimize both paid and organic digital advertising. This selection gave priority to victims from all over the country.

This official clustering prioritized four of these nine groups for the digital strategy: 1) the victims, 2) higher education students, 3) students still attending school, and 4) journalists and columnists, editors and academics, leaders, political elites, and businessmen. The main reason for this prioritization can be found in the age ranges. It is assumed that people who use social networks in their daily lives are found in the age range between 15 - 40. This segmentation

allowed the digital publishing group to make the best use of their limited resources and ensured that they did not make the mistake of generating useless content that did not contribute to the objectives of the strategy (such as trying to persuade *unbelievers* or getting involved in explanatory debates on microblogging platforms such as Twitter).

Digital Content and its sourcing

Because the TCC only published one final report at the end of its mandate, the content for the digital strategy had to be taken from the processes in the official distribution of the TCC in 11 macro-territories (TCC C. C., s.f.). Local processes (like public events of the TCC) were used by the TCC for two reasons. On the one hand, they satisfied the victims' rights to the truth, dignity and recognition, and on the other hand, they were a source of audiovisual content for the TCC. This content was published on digital platforms to raise awareness about past actions amongst society and create legitimacy and expectations for the delivery of the final report on June 28, 2022. According to a TCC expert interviewed, material on public acknowledgment events and social dialogue processes with communities, statistical data on the clarification process (e.g.: number of interviewees, reports received) and stories of resistance to the conflict were collected by the 11 macro-territories (and one international hub that was in-charge of Colombians living outside their country) and sent to the digital team in Bogotá. The digital team would edit the material to ensure that it met the TCC's objectives and quality expectations, a process referred to by the people interviewed as 'quality control'. Once the team had completed the quality control, the content was pushed out to the public via the TCCs social media channels.

The quality control had a technical component, checking aspects such as control of image, sound and copyright (signed consents for the use and reproduction of the material). The group also reviewed the *concept* of the content and placed it in one of the four communication objectives. This process was described by a person interviewed as: *"at a conceptual level what I do is that I look at what comes from the region and analyze in what communication priority it is framed. If it is not framed we have to*

start talking with the macro-territory to (...) give it that sense of belonging within the strategy" (R1, 2021). The quality control process shows the functioning not only of the strategy at the national level but exposes another part of the general strategy of the commission; the need to establish assertive communication at the internal level. The agreements between the national team in Bogotá and the micro-territorial communicators on the inputs, the formats, the quality and alignment with the stated objectives was a constant exercise of seeking consensus between the central (national) and the territorial (local) communication elements of the TCC.

Although Decree 588 established some methodological guidelines, these are general and there is no reference to the strategies and tools that the teams must adopt to communicate. It is the teams with their coordinating leaders who build and implement these strategies based not only on the audience segmentation and insights but also on their experience and knowledge. During the first half of 2019, the priority of the digital editing team was to homogenize the variety of products sent by the macro-territories as each territory had a communications team with different ideas of process and format. The objective was to standardize the content and create audiovisual products that are immediately identified with the TCC. One interviewee mentions: *"When I entered it was my job to unify the content because very different things arrived. (...) I needed to make the audience feel that a product of the Magdalena Medio (one of the 11 macro-territories) and a product of the Caribe are not just products of the region, they are products of the truth commission"* (R1, 2021). However, the team in charge quickly noticed that this standardization process was counterproductive. It is the geographical and cultural characteristics of the different regions of Colombia, their diversity and differences that make this process difficult. Since the contexts and audiences both throughout Colombia and in terms of who the TCC was trying to reach, were so diverse and multicultural, a standardized 'look and feel' meant that the public was not engaging with the content released by the TCC. This in turn meant that the TCC would not be able to reach its communication objectives (generating curiosity, explaining, etc.). Furthermore a standardized approach was not in-line with the territorial focus of the TCC itself. As one interviewee states: *"in*

Socio-Cultural Condition	Ages	Audience type
Victims from all over the country	All ages	Informed and dreamers
Student population (Professional and technological level of all the country countryside and city)	Between 16 and 23 years	Informed, dreamers, apathetic, confused.
Ethnic groups from all over the country	Between 18 and 40 years old	Informers, dreamers and apathetic
College students (Countryside and city)	Between 8 and 15 years old	Dreamers and apathetic
Farmers	Between 18 to 40 years old	Informed and dreamers
Activists and social leaders who support peace agreements and TJ	Between 18 and 35 years old	Informed and dreamers
Journalists, columnists, editors and academics, opinion leaders, political elites, businessmen	All ages	Informed, dreamers, apathetic, confused and unbelieving.
Artists	Between 18 and 40 years old	Informed and dreamers
Civil society organizations	NA	Informed and dreamers

Table 1 Segmentation of audiences of the Truth Commission in Colombia.
 Source: Own elaboration based on information provided in an interview with an expert analyst of the TCC June 2021.

the end, we concluded that it didn't make much sense, to generate that unity in the formats and the languages because, in the end, the country we are talking to doesn't respond to that logic of unity, (...) what happens really with the country is that we have such great diversity in every sense that perhaps we should be more coordinated with that diverse nature of the country" (R1, 2021).

As such, the reality of the context in which the TCC operates, often forced teams to adopt and improve their methodology, a phenomenon that I

call "methodological elasticity" (Cardozo Ruidiaz, 2022). In this particular case, methodological elasticity had to be applied in a post-production work setting (shifting from an approach where uniqueness of content was discouraged to an approach where each territory speaks from its diversity). Ultimately, the TCC found a middle ground - the diversity in the content was recognized but an institutional stamp was also printed on the audiovisual language to identify the content with the TCC. Not eliminating diversity of content through post-production also

freed up the time of the small Bogota based digital team of the TCC as they no longer had to engage in tedious editing work for material sent by 11 macro-territories. This strategy was applied to all the content produced by the TCC, its digital formats, podcast, and videos.

The internal organization of the digital editing team included weekly press committees led by the press officer of the TCC and attended by the communicator of every macro-territory. At these weekly meetings, it was decided which content would be disseminated in that week. The content was prioritized by analyzing the media potential of the material and whether it had national relevance.

One interviewed expert from the territory mentions the challenging communication process between local and national levels when she refers to the real challenge as being the establishment of a two-way communication line:

...there is always a wrong tendency to think that Colombia is Bogotá. But no, the nation is the territories and this is where the worst violence happened. So how do we take [the content] to the national media to create a flow of information between the national and local level? (R2, 2022)

This denotes, in addition to tensions between the center-periphery groups, ways of establishing the required balance between the national and territorial teams. A process that recognizes an agency based on the knowledge of the local contexts of the territorial teams.

A consensus was required on the weekly content decision, a strategy aimed at reducing tensions between the national headquarters team and territorial communication teams. Following this meeting, the material was sent to the national communication and outreach team, which, through the digital publishing department, adapted the content to the different platforms.

Once the content was selected, the channels and timing for the dissemination of the material were chosen by the team in Bogotá. Depending on the material, the formats and platforms were chosen (Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, Instagram, YouTube). To ensure that the communicators in the territories agreed with the content published by the TCC, the central team was in constant

contact with the communicators in the territories for this last part of the process. One person interviewed gives an example of how content was selected for the first Truth Encounter of the TCC: "*Mi cuerpo dice la verdad*" (my body tells the truth), held in 2019 in the city of Cartagena. In addition to the material documenting the activities themselves the communications team received a 'context document' before each event (R2, 2022) from the Research and Knowledge Management Department team and the Commissioner in Charge. This document was analyzed by the communications team to identify the priority narratives. One person interviewed describes this process as follows:

what we do is that we take that document that generally has I don't know 20 to 30 pages, sometimes more. We start to break it down within the logic of the communication strategy, that is, within the logic that not all that information is useful for digital communication. In this case then what I do is I dissected it and prioritize the narratives that seem most important to me. For example in the kidnapping case we decided that the most important narrative, the umbrella narrative, is that kidnapping is a crime against love. From that idea that it is an idea that also appeals to emotionality, we begin to build the contents. (R1, 2021)

This part of the process highlights how narratives are constructed and prioritized with the aim of raising awareness in society.

Other input used to generate content by the digital team was the Mission Information System software (SIM), where the TCC centralized all their information. Although most of the information contained in this database was classified, the team had the opportunity to access it. It was used for the creation of multimedia formats where facts and figures were made visible. Access to the SIM software was essential for communicating the commission's process, for example in the number of testimonies and reports received, the actors who these were received from and data relating specific crimes such as kidnapping, forced disappearances and sexual violence.

In addition to the multimedia formats, the digital team used newsletters and playground-type short video formats, which were made with

explanatory information about the TCC process. These were characterized by prominent texts, low music, and voiceovers with a standardized duration of two minutes.

8. Social networks: objectives, publics and tactics

Facebook worked transversally in the digital strategy of the TCC. It was a generic tool that served, in the same way, to *“teach, inform and emotionally involve”* (R1, 2021). The team’s target audience on Facebook were the *“Millennials* (between 23 and 34 years old) and *Generation X* (35 to 34 years old). The communication objective for this platform was informative and pedagogical. The tactics used were to educate on the central issues of the TCC, report on the day-to-day progress and contribute to the execution of the mandate using news, stories, and communications. An interviewee described the TCCs Facebook strategy as: *“to move with timeless stories that emphasize resistance [to the conflict]”* (R1, 2021).

Unlike Facebook, Twitter was only used to fuel public debates and to position the TCC on the public agenda. The tactic used by the digital team was to remain attentive to the trends of the platform in search of openings to feed the debates and strongly mobilize influencers (followers) within Twitter as a form of external support.

Instagram, whose users are commonly millennials between 18 and 24 years old, was a platform used primarily to inform and emotionally engage. Like for Facebook, the tactic for Instagram was the creation of short stories without the need to locate them in a period of time. The narrative was focused on highlighting the resistance to the conflict by the communities in the territories, peaceful coexistence and recognition of the dignity of the victims. In terms of reach, this was the digital platform with which the TCC was able to reach most people. Unlike the other two institutions of Transitional Justice in Colombia, the Truth Commission is a producer of stories and Instagram was ideal for this type of content because it is based on stories, reels and pictures (R1, 2021). Stories from the macro-territorial and reports at the local level were prioritized for this platform.

For Tik Tok, the main communication objective was to educate, since its main users are centennials (between 13 and 20 years old). The tactic for Tik Tok used reels to explain what the TCC was, how it worked and what the central themes of the TCC were. It posed questions and stated dilemmas calling for reflection in a youthful and entertaining language. Tik Tok content was very short, using short phrases with background music.

9. Crossmedia

The digital team used a cross-media strategy for the most significant events and contributions to the truth during its mandate. In this marketing strategy the same message is adapted to different channels to optimize its impact (R1, 2021). Decisions regarding the messaging and content for each channel were made by analyzing the content and the audiences to whom they were speaking. An example of this was the event where former president and Nobel Peace Prize winner Juan Manuel Santos contributed to the peace by speaking about the extrajudicial executions that took place when he was the Minister of Defense of Colombia. One of the interviewees uses this event to showcase the selection of narratives: *“we can pay attention to (the former president) or to his ask for forgiveness for ‘false positives’ (this is the name given to extrajudicial executions of civilians in the Colombian context)¹. We can also pay attention to the victims and the stories of the ‘false positives’ and the mothers who were left looking for their children or we can pay attention to the context of what happened, when did it happen? As a step? During which presidency period did it happen? It is in these processes where the contents become cross-media* (R1, 2021). In these scenarios, the digital team decides to put a different focus on each media piece, depending on the audience. In the case of Santo’s contribution to the truth the TCC’s website featured a press-release for informational purposes. Twitter (now X) was also used for informational purposes but only to announce that Santos was going to be speaking to the TCC. For TikTok and Instagram

1 “False positives”: this is how the extrajudicial executions of youths are called to be passed off as casualties in combat by members of the public force. Many of these crimes were committed when Juan Manuel Santos was Minister of Defense.

an interviewee describes:

At TikTok, we decided not to mention Santos anywhere and to make a fully explanatory video of the 'false positives' and the impact that this had had on mothers. That worked very well, because of course, they're not telling me to go see anything and I think that's very important with young people (...) Tik Tok's audience wants to be informed (...) on Instagram the event of Juan Manuel Santos was a combination of focusing on the story but mentioning Santos (...) the emphasis was placed on the victims and the impacts of the events. (R1, 2021)

10. Results and impacts

As a way of measuring the results and impacts of its communication strategy, the TCC used web analytics. The number of user interactions with the report page was taken as an indicator of success. The figures for July to October 2022 were 621,767 users with an average session duration of 3.29 minutes per session. These numbers show high user traffic. However the page had a bounce rate of 55.83%, which means that more than half of the users who visit the page left without interacting with it. Those who stay expend more than 3 min per session, which meant that they are reading or listening to the TCC products. (CAPAZ & Corredor, 2022).

The TCC also measured press mentions. From June to August 2022, the TCC reports 9,000 mentions of the TCC in the national press. That is to say, during the two months after the delivery of the report, the TCC had more mentions in the press than in all of 2021 with 10,000 mentions. The peaks of these mentions occurred in the months of June and July 2022 due to the delivery of the final report (CAPAZ & Corredor, 2022).

The delivery of the final report generated a national expectations that were reflected on social media platforms. Between June 28 and July 3, 2022, the hashtag #HayFuturoSiHayVerdad had 85 million impressions and the TCC was trending from June 28 to 30, 2022 (CAPAZ & Corredor, 2022).

However, whilst these numbers may be positive

in terms of media reach and whilst web analytical data such as digital interactions, clicks, likes and mentions in the mass media can be good measures of social interest in the TCC, they can hardly be indicators of social impact in terms of peacebuilding in the territories. To measure this, a deeper analysis is necessary that determines the extent to which the media strategy is impacting behaviour change.

11. Conclusion

Digital media was used by the TCC as one of the key strategies to communicate with the Colombian public and bring them along a peacebuilding journey as per its mandate. The TCC digital strategy, whilst obeying the logic of digital marketing, was the first Truth Commission to adopt elements of corporate marketing techniques (such as branding, audience segmentation, and targeting) to reach its objectives. The segmentation and diagnosis of the TCCs audiences was decisive not only for the creation and implementation of a target digital communication strategy but was also key for managing a communication strategy with limited resources. The TCC's partnership with organisations like AVINA demonstrates a recognition of the TCC's limitations where the outsourcing of some logistical and administrative processes such as surveys, diagnostics, data storage, were key for the operability of the field staff.

The TCC's communication strategies for both digital and traditional media were based on the observation and study of the socio-political context. As a result of this, instead of focusing on defending itself from the attacks of skeptics or trying to convince the incredulous, the strategy focused on teaching, informing and creating interest amongst those that were not engaged because of a lack of knowledge or because of outstanding questions.

The digital strategy employed by the TCC especially targeted youth as this audience group, more than having a lack of moral consensus about the narrative of the violent past, demonstrated a high level of ignorance and low interest in the work of the TCC and were avid users of social media.

Throughout the process of implementing the

digital strategy the TCC's communication team underwent several learnings such as moving away from the homogenization of content to formats that allowed for the expression of multicultural and territorial differences.

In terms of results and impacts of the digital communication strategies, web analytics show a high digital interaction of users with the content generated. However, more elements of analysis would be needed to relate such interactions with actions that effectively change social behavior and contribute to the transition from armed conflict to peace.

With the increase in social media users and the increased influence that social media has on political processes and peace building initiatives, the learnings and experiences from the TCC's digital strategy provide valuable learnings for future Truth Commission communication strategies.

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e-ISSN 2749-5132