COMMUNICATING ABORTION

HOW SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN COLOMBIA COMMUNICATE TO THE PUBLIC OPINION

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COMMUNICATING ABORTION

ABSTRACT

This degree project examines the question of how Colombian NGOs communicate sexual and reproductive rights issues to the public opinion, and how this has changed over time. The research is carried out through a case study of two Colombian organizations that work with sexual and reproductive rights, particularly the implementation of legal abortion.

The analysis parts from a gender perspective, understanding gender as a constitutive element of social relationships as well as a primary way of signifying relationships of power.

One of the main findings in the study is that the historical point of departure for this research, the LAICIA campaign that accompanied the strategic litigation that led to the partial legalization of abortion in Colombia in 2006, represents a paradigm shift in how communications were managed by civil society organizations in Colombia. Today, communications is seen as a strategic tool to help obtain a certain objective, and mobilize public opinion support, rather than as a way of convincing opponents to change their positions. LAICIA also changed the terms of the debate, introducing new parameters lifting out the issue from the traditional private sphere – delimited to a moral and religious issue, and into the public sphere, as an issue of general concern for society – not just for individual women.

Today, however, much of the communication efforts are directed at impeding backlashes rather than advancing positions, and communicating reactively rather than proactively. The two organizations studied have some convergences in their work with communications, in spite of certain ideological differences, and the impact of their communication efforts could be reinforced if these were coordinated to a greater extent between organizations.

Key words: gender, abortion, Colombia, civil society, sexual and reproductive rights, communication

1 Women's Link Worldwide and La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres
1 INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

Colombian society is highly conservative, with a right-wing/conservative congress\(^2\) and a markedly catholic population, with around 80-90% confessing to the religion. Although Colombia has a constitutional guarantee for the freedom of religion and the church is officially separated from the state, in practice the Catholic Church exercises an important political influence and it is a common sentiment that the state unofficially sanctions a privileged position for Catholicism, which was the official religion until the adoption of the 1991 Constitution (U.S. Department of State, 2009).

In this cultural context, sexual and reproductive rights issues are instantly met with resistance among the general public. That sexual education and contraceptives are immoral and threaten the family, and that abortion is simply murder, are widespread notions.

Nevertheless, there are some progressive public institutions, the most outstanding being the Constitutional Court that since the 1991 Constitution has gained a reputation both nationally and internationally for its progressive rulings, often in favor of minority rights. (Uprimny Yepes & García Villegas, 2004) One of these groundbreaking decisions was the ruling C-355/06 that on May 10th, 2006, legalized abortion in Colombia\(^3\) in three circumstances – when the pregnancy poses a risk to the life or health (physical or mental) of the woman; when it is a result of rape or incest; and when the fetus is diagnosed with grave malformations making life outside of the uterus unviable. The decision came after a high impact strategic litigation brought forward by the organization Women’s Link Worldwide, and presented by the lawyer Mónica Roa, program director of the organization.

Since the legalization eight years ago, several civil society organizations have been working on promoting the effective implementation of the legislation, trying to ensure that women’s rights are respected. Although the law is on their side, their work is met with strong resistance, in society as well as within the same public institutions that are supposed to guarantee the provision of this health service. Therefore, communication is –

\(^2\) Of the 102 seats in the Congress 2010-2014, 70 (69.6%) currently correspond to representatives from the five right-wing/conservative parties in the Congress (Partido Conservador, Partido de la U, Partido de Integración Nacional, Partido Cambio Radical and Movimiento MIRA)

\(^3\) Until 2006, abortion was completely prohibited in Colombia
or should be – a key component in the work of these organizations in order to generate a more favorable public opinion.

This study aims to analyze the communication of sexual and reproductive rights issues, in particular abortion, by these organizations to the public opinion in Colombia, parting from the main research question:

*How do Colombian NGOs communicate sexual and reproductive rights issues to the public opinion?*

I will conduct a case study of two Colombian organizations that work with sexual and reproductive rights, particularly the implementation of legal abortion, namely Women’s Link Worldwide⁴ and La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres⁵ (from hereon, La Mesa). I have chosen these organizations for being the two main NGOs that work with the issue on a national level that have been present and active in the country since before the legalization of abortion in 2006. They also both count on a person within their teams in charge of communications.

The selection criteria of having been present for the last decade becomes relevant in relation to my secondary research question: *How has the way Colombian NGOs communicate sexual and reproductive rights to the public opinion changed over time?*

In this research I take as a starting point the LAICIA⁶ project that preceded the court ruling that partially legalized abortion in Colombia. The project, with the objective of achieving the legalization of abortion in Colombia through Constitutional Court litigation, included an important communications element, aimed at generating a more favorable public opinion toward the issue.

I argue that LAICIA represents a milestone and a shift in paradigm of how sexual and reproductive rights organizations in Colombia manage communications. Therefore, the analysis parts from an exploration of how the LAICIA strategy was planned and executed, and then examines how the strategies for communications have changed over time until today, particularly in the two organizations that are subject of the case study. This includes

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⁴ An international human rights non-profit organization with offices in Colombia and Spain, striving to advance women’s rights through the implementation of international human rights standards and strategic work with the courts, including strategic litigation.

⁵ A collective of organizations and persons that work for women’s sexual and reproductive rights, in particular those related to maternity as a free choice, the free exercise of sexuality, and the total legalization of abortion.

⁶ Litigio de Alto Impacto: la Inconstitucionalidad del Aborto en Colombia (High Impact Litigation: the Unconstitutionality of Abortion in Colombia)
what they do individually in communication as well as how they articulate their communication efforts with other actors.

1.1 Means of Investigating the Problem

When studying how NGOs communicate to the public opinion, there are at least two possible approaches. One would be to look at the communication from the angle of the producers of the communication, the organizations. How do they formulate their messages – what do they include and what do they exclude and to whom do they communicate them? The other one would be to focus on the consumers of the communication, in this case the general public, for example by assessing the impact of the messages in the media. In this case, I have chosen the first option.

The analysis is constructed around indicators drawn from literature on communication best practices for civil society organizations, according to which I can assess the work of the organizations, using qualitative interviews as a primary method for gathering the empirical information.

The theme for the degree project is highly relevant for ComDev, not only for its focus on communication for social transformation, but also for the subject of the communication to be studied – sexual and reproductive rights – a key component on the international development agenda.

1.2 Scope and Outline

Regarding the research question, it is important to point out that the ‘how’ refers principally to the definition and content of the strategies of communication. I will focus on the identification of messages, audiences and relations with other actors in the elaboration of communication efforts. In other words, my research perspective focuses on the sender and the message rather than the receiver. Regarding the impact on the public opinion, it is not the primary aim of the study; however, it will be taken into account in the analysis from secondary sources, and also questions about mechanisms for measuring impact and perceived impact from the communication activities are posed in the interviews with the organizations. This way the issue of the impact on the receiver side will not be left completely unattended, but at the same time the research maintains its primary focus.

The publications used to construct some of the questions in the interview guide were Smart Chart 3.0 (Spitfire Strategies, 2013) and Successful Communication (Hovland, 2005).
This degree project is structured in six chapters, including this introduction. Following this first chapter, the theoretical and methodological framework is introduced. First, I present the theoretical point of departure exploring the concept of gender and its relation to sexual and reproductive rights, as well as its role in communications. The following three chapters contain the presentation of the results and the analysis based on the empirical and bibliographical research, structured thematically. Chapter three introduces the LAICIA project as a change of paradigm in how sexual and reproductive rights organizations in Colombia have worked with communications. I explore how the project’s communication strategies were elaborated and executed, and what impact they had in the organizations as well as on the public opinion. Chapter four analyzes how communication efforts have been articulated between actors, focusing on two types of alliances, the ones between the organizations and media, and the ones among different organizations. The last analytical results chapter, titled “An impact in an adverse context”, explores, with focus on today, how communication strategies and actions are elaborated and carried out in relation to the current context. Finally, chapter six consists in some concluding comments where I return to the initial research question to sum up the findings of the study.
2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I will introduce the theoretical and methodological framework that guides the research and analysis in this degree project. The first part of the chapter elaborates upon the theoretical gender perspective, parting from the developments of Joan Scott of gender as a constitutive element of social relationships and as a primary way of signifying relationships of power. This is then connected to the study of communication, establishing the link between these two academic fields. The second part of the chapter, the methodological framework, is introduced with an address of the feminist social research perspective, as a bridge between the two parts of the chapter. Then, I discuss my choice of research methods and their implications, as well as introduce the two main techniques applied in this research project: qualitative interviews and bibliographical review.

2.1 THEORETICAL POINT OF DEPARTURE: THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

A key point of departure in a research project dealing with the theme proposed here, is a theoretical gender perspective. Gender Studies is an academic field encompassing a wide variety of perspectives, focusing on the study of the power relations based on gender in society. For this research, I have used the conceptual definition of gender as elaborated by Joan Scott in the article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" (Scott, 1986), which is an academic milestone in gender studies.

Scott divides her definition in two parts, integrally connected but analytically distinct (Scott, 1986, p. 1067):

1. Gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes;
2. Gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.

Gender as a constitutive element of social relationships, suggests that it is through the anatomical differences between women and men that interpretations and symbols are constructed about what it means, and what social consequences it has, to be a man or a woman. Scott distinguishes four interrelated elements (Scott, 1986, pp. 1067-1069):

i. Symbolic element: Culturally available symbols that evoke multiple (and often contradictory) representations. One example is the symbolism, very present in Latin American societies, that links women with maternity.
ii. Normative element: Concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols that attempt to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities. These concepts are expressed in religious, educational, scientific, legal, and political doctrines and typically take the form of a fixed binary opposition, asserting the meaning of male and female, masculine and feminine.

iii. Institutional element: Politics as well as social institutions and organizations. This includes kinship but also the labor market, education, and politics, all part in the process of gender construction.

iv. Subjective element: The ways in which gendered identities are substantively constructed and relate their findings to a range of activities, social originations, and historically specific cultural representations, without always literally fulfilling the terms of their society’s prescriptions.

These elements are interrelated in the sense that they are interdependent, but each one is not just a reflection of the others. Regarding the second part of the definition, Scott holds that gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated. Changes in the organization of social relationships always correspond to changes in representations of power. The concepts of gender structure the perception and the organizations, both concretely and symbolically, of all social life, as a set of common references. Given that these references also establish the distributions of power, gender influences in the conception and construction of power itself. (Scott, 1986)

For a long time, in social theory, the so-called ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres have been treated like two independent and isolated spheres, which can be analyzed separately, something that feminist theory has been deconstructing. The main feminist criticism towards this perceived dichotomy has been of its blindness. That is, it is impossible to understand the ‘public’ sphere, without understanding that it has been constructed under the supposition of masculine superiority and domination, and that it presupposes female responsibility in the domestic sphere. However, the separation of the spheres is conceived as if it were to apply equally for all persons, a theoretical and legal legacy that has consequences even today. (Moller Okin, 1999)

The construction of rights-bearing persons is not carried out in private but in public, from where women traditionally have been excluded. Hence, law is conceptualized as male and public. (Olsen, 2000) Law, in turn, is the official guarantor of women’s right to abortion. Catharine MacKinnon argues in her book Toward a feminist theory of the state (1989), that abortion has been framed within the private sphere of the public-private division, as an
individual matter rather than a public one. As a consequence, it is difficult for women to claim this right to the public. This way, the laws and the abortion practices are inserted in the power relations that according to Scott are part of the very concept of gender.

While ‘woman’ is a concept used to categorize people that belong to a particular sex, it is for one not a unified and homogeneous analytical category, and further, a category that is given meaning through associations that are by no means applicable to all its members. This way, in the maternalist ideology rooted in a patriarchal-catholic culture predominant in much of Latin America, described by Lola G. Luna in her book on women’s movements in Latin America (2003), the role of maternity is assigned to women as their main social function. However, this woman-mother is not an ideal that any woman could reach, as this model is charged with patriarchal, racist and classist values. The “ideal mother” is not a single or lesbian woman (outside of the heteropatriarchal framework of the nuclear family), black or poor, as these women with difficulty incarnate maternity as it has been defined within this hegemonic model. The opposition against the legalization of abortion goes hand in hand with a sexist ideology that seeks to guarantee, reproduce and consolidate supposedly “natural” gender hierarchies. (Viveros, 2006)

2.1.1 COMMUNICATION AND GENDER

Media shape the social world. The media discourses are social practices that exercise power. As such, they can produce and reproduce unequal power relations through the way issues and persons are represented and positioned. (Couldry, 2012; van Dijk, 2009; Jäger & Maier, 2009; Wodak & Meyer, 2009) This way, written press has an informative as well as a persuasive function, projecting to its audiences a particular image of events, attending the interests of who produce the news or have access to media to constitute themselves in the center of interest. (Pérez Rodríguez, 2007) This role of the media has a close relationship to the gender perspective, as an important component of the gender system is that of power relations. The symbolic power that media exercise is not only found in what is reproduced and how, but also in which voices have access and which are excluded, or who is a subject and a voice, and who is an object and a news story material:

“Media manage the mental representations, and they do so through the control of beliefs, knowledge and stereotypes, on the one hand, and facilitating the access of authorized voices, on the other.”8 (Fernández Díaz, 2003, s. 7)

8 My translation. Spanish original: “Los medios manejan las representaciones mentales, y lo hacen mediante el control de creencias, conocimientos y estereotipos, por una parte, y facilitando el acceso a voces autorizadas, por otra.”
The Beijing Conference on Women organized in 1995 by the United Nations identified media as one of the critical areas of concern for the advancement of women’s equality and development. In its Platform for Action, section J 133, it is stated that:

“The lack of gender sensitivity in the media is evidenced by the failure to eliminate the gender-based stereotyping that can be found in the public and private, local, national and international media organizations. [...] the print and electronic media in most countries do not provide a balanced picture of women’s diverse lives and contributions to society in a changing world. In addition, violent and degrading of pornographic media products are also negatively affecting women and their participation in society. Programming that reinforces women’s traditional roles can be equally limiting.” (Made, 2000, ss. 29-30)

When it comes to the issue of abortion, this translates into very practical consequences. The terminology in the articles, and the images used to portray them, instantly contribute to the production and reproduction of symbolic meanings around the issue, that convey a certain position. The traditional term abortion, with its cultural connotations, or the legal term voluntary pregnancy interruption, which contains the important word voluntary. A pregnant woman is not the same thing as a mother, nor is an embrion or a fetus as a baby. When media publishes an article with a mother who does not want her unborn baby, illustrated by a 8-months pregnant belly, it is constructing a whole different set of symbolic and normative meanings that contribute to a certain configuration of power relations, than if the same article is about a woman, who as an active subject chooses to interrupt her pregnancy, illustrated by for example statistics on unwanted pregnancies or similar.

2.2 Methodology

This degree project is based on different methodological techniques, all with a qualitative focus. In this section I will present briefly the different methods applied in the research, but first I will reflect upon my role as a researcher, introducing the feminist social research perspective, and some of the potential problems that are important to make explicit and be aware of, in order to be able to adequately diminish them and their possible effects on the research and the analysis.

Research methods are the tools used to achieve a certain aim – a quest for knowledge. When creating a physical construction we may need a hammer, in order to achieve what we aim to create. We may also need more tools, like a saw and a screwdriver; otherwise

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9 Interrupción voluntaria del embarazo (IVE)
the construction will not be solid. The same goes for the construction of knowledge. We have an objective, but we need to find the right tools – methods – to get there. As the methods are the tools necessary to resolve a particular problem, the objective of the research exercise, it is important to have a well-defined research question before setting out to choose methods. These should correspond to the research question – not the other way around\textsuperscript{10}, although there is seldom only one way possible to answer a particular research question.

### 2.2.1 Feminist social research

Sexual and reproductive rights, particularly abortion, are core themes for the feminist organizations aiming at advancing women's positions in society. Therefore, studying how they communicate sexual and reproductive rights to the public opinion can very opportunistily be done through a feminist social research perspective.

A central issue to feminist social research is a critique and rejection of the traditional idea of the existence of a value-free research. Instead, it claims that all research is biased one way or the other, and that traditional social research has been gender-blind, analyzing and constructing the experiences of men and women from a patriarchal point of view. This is something feminist social research seeks to deconstruct, parting from the assumption that there are structural gender inequalities that need to be addressed. (Sarantakos, 2005; Stanley & Wise, 2002)

Furthermore, feminist social research does not see the researcher as a neutral actor, but rather the social conditions of the researcher (e.g. age, race, class) play a role in shaping the research process. This is therefore important to identify and make explicit to be able to critically examine the possible biases in the frameworks for understanding in which they may result. It is not possible to have a general theory of knowledge, if we ignore the social context of the subject of knowledge. Feminist social research can be seen as political in the sense that it commitment to changing the status of women in society. (Sarantakos, 2005; Stanley & Wise, 2002)

“This means that it not only documents aspects of reality; it also takes a personal, political and engaging stance to the world.” (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 54)

Feminist social research has not been exempt from criticism. The main critique has revolved around the perception that it in fact does not differ much from other non-

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\textsuperscript{10} For more details about the steps in a research process, see (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000), especially part one “Conceptualizing Communication Research”.
feminist research methods, and does not offer genuine scientific theories and methods. (Hussain & Zada Asad, 2012; Mayo & Cáceres, 2004) It may be somewhat true that it is not radically different from other stakes on research. For example in cultural studies research, experience plays a key role as well. (Pickering, 2008) However, more than as a method on its own, my aim is to apply a feminist social research perspective, and bear in mind its basic criteria when carrying out the research methods chosen.

It is important to reflect upon one’s own role and position as a researcher when conducting any form of research, and particularly social science such. This is a basic imperative in feminist social research, and this is particularly important in the conditions within which this research is carried out, especially regarding the risks of ethnocentricity in the analysis.

As a white, middle class, academically educated, European woman, I inevitably have a privileged position in the Colombian society, that could result intimidating in some research situation, as it could generate a sense of imbalance between the researcher and the participants in the research. However, in relation to the informants of the research, this potential risk is mitigated in two senses. First, the representatives of the organizations that I interviewed do also to a large extent belong to the same socioeconomic status as I, in the sense that they are all urban, academic, middle-class women. However, although some of them have studied abroad, they are all Colombian and I am European, in spite of having lived in Colombia for the last six and a half years. This leads to the second point. This will in a great degree be mitigated by the fact that not only have I lived in Colombia for a great part of my adult life, which gives me an ‘insider’ position in spite of being an ‘outsider’, but I have also worked closely with these issues and these organizations during the main part of my time in Colombia.

Regarding the risks of ethnocentricity in the analysis, it is something worth taking into account. My interest for sexual and reproductive rights, in general, and abortion, in particular, awoke when I for the first time came to Latin America. Being Swedish, I grew up in a country where abortion is a long-since acquired right, practically unquestioned. Since 1975, abortion until pregnancy week 18 is a free medical service accessible to all women. The first country where I lived in Latin America was Chile where, as in Colombia before 2006, abortion is prohibited in all circumstances. Suddenly, I found myself confronted with a society and a legislation in which abortion was not considered a right, nor an issue concerning only the woman and her autonomous decision over her own reproduction. This cultural chock led me to examine my own postures on the issue, as well
as develop arguments for these. This research project is a part in this reflective exercise, translated to an academic level.

Having stated this, I think that my accumulated experience from working with these issues in Latin America, as well as over a decade of ongoing reflections have given me a more nuanced standpoint, moderating the initial reaction of a black-or-white analysis of these positions as simply underdeveloped, reactionary or outdated, towards a more comprehensive analysis of the complexities and cultural particularities that comprise the context regarding sexual and reproductive rights in Latin America and particularly Colombia.

2.2.2 Qualitative interviews

My primary method is qualitative interviews. These are conducted with the public relations and/or communication officials at the different NGOs, as well as other relevant representatives of the organization, and with a communication agency that participated in the elaboration of the LAICIA strategy and work specifically with civil society organizations. The following interviews were conducted:

<p>| Table 1: Interviews carried out during the research |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mónica Roa</td>
<td>Program director and lawyer that</td>
<td>Women’s Link</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>presented the lawsuit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalina Ruíz-Navarro</td>
<td>Former communicator</td>
<td>Worldwide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina Dueñas</td>
<td>Current communicator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolina Melo</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>La Mesa por la Vida y la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ximena Corrales</td>
<td>Communicator</td>
<td>Salud de las Mujeres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana María Ruiz</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Brújula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guillermo Cuellar</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Comunicaciones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The qualitative interviews conducted in this research were semi-structured, using a general interview guide with set questions, asking follow-up questions when necessary to go into further details regarding specific responses. An English translation of the interview guide is found in the appendix, although all interviews were conducted in Spanish. Aeron Davis outlines three potential challenges when conducting research through qualitative interviews, in his chapter *Investigating Cultural Producers* (2008). I

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11 For more information on qualitative interview techniques, see for example (Bryman, 2001; Turner, 2010)
will refer to them below and discuss how I have gone about each of them in my degree project investigation.

First is the selection of participants. Principally who and how many people should be interviewed. This is important to ensure some sort of representation regarding the chosen research topic. In this case the identification of potential participants was fairly easy, as it aims at studying how the organizations communicate externally, for which the logical choice is the persons in charge of communication at the respective organizations. To ensure some alternate views and a broader spectrum of visions, I interviewed at least two people at each organization. The second person being someone in a coordinating role, who does not necessarily specialize in communications but as a part of their role is expected to have an overview of all the activities, including communication, and a general vision of the organization’s core messages. Furthermore, I opted for interviewing Brújula Comunicaciones as it was the agency that helped structure the LACIA communication strategy.

The second challenge is that of making and maintaining contacts with participants. For this research project, it was not problematic, as I have worked closely with many of them. This confidence is key as the issues are sensitive and some of the organizations have security threats against them. What could potentially be problematic is a lack of information due precisely to our familiarity – a ‘you know this already so I don’t have to tell you’ approach in the interviews. I intended to avoid this through, if necessary, explaining the importance of hearing about it in their own words.

Thirdly, regarding the ongoing collection and analysis of interview material. As the data is generated throughout the research process, and ideas, themes and theory evolve in interaction with participants, each interview has research implications. This requires a constant adaptation and self-interrogation, returning periodically to the research hypothesis and aims to corroborate that the direction that the research is taking is aligned with these. In practice, this can be done through reviewing interview notes right after the interview has taken place, and transcribing as soon as possible, conducting a preliminary analysis of the interview results. This ongoing analysis permits for the adaptation of the instruments for the following interviews, and led to the change of structure of the analytical chapters several times during the research project.
2.2.3 Bibliographical review

Any research should build on bibliographical review, an essential point of departure that provides the initial understanding of a particular research topic, and more importantly, permits the identification of research questions that contribute to enhancing and expanding the body of academic production in the field. XXX in the book XXX defines literature review in the following way:

“The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished on the topic, which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfill certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed.”

(Hart, 1998, s. 13)

However, it is important to note, as does much of the literature on methodology\textsuperscript{12}, that the bibliographical review is not limited to a step in the beginning of a research process, but rather a continuous component of the research, including the analysis of the results. Therefore, the bibliographical review as a method fills two main functions for this research. First, it provides the initial theoretical and contextual point of departure. That is, an initial bibliographical review provides the necessary bases in terms of theory and context to be able to structure in detail a solid empirical research, in this case the interviews. Second, after gathering the empirical data, it provides the necessary analytical tools to interpret the results.

Within the structure of the degree project, the bibliographical review is integrated in the text, rather than being an independent chapter. This permits for a more comprehensive use, reflecting continuously upon the empirical data in the light of relevant literature.

\textsuperscript{12} See for example (Cronin, Ryan, & Coughlan, 2008; Hart, 1998; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, & Collins, 2012)
3. **LAICIA: A NEW COMMUNICATION PARADIGM**

The lawsuits\(^{13}\) presented by the lawyer Mónica Roa were part of a strategy called LAICIA\(^{14}\) coordinated by Women’s Link Worldwide. The goals of the strategy included not only achieving the legalization (total or partial) of abortion, but also to accompany this with actions to impact public opinion and public policies on the issue. The idea was to consolidate the transformation of the concept of abortion, so that it would go from being an individual and principally moral issue to being an issue of public health, gender equality and social justice, and insert it as such in the public agenda. (Gómez, 2006)

The positioning of abortion as a problem of public health, gender equality and social justice, was based on facts on the magnitude of and the devastating consequences clandestine abortion had in the country. For example, the estimation was that approximately 300,000\(^{15}\) clandestine abortions were practiced annually in the country while it was illegal, and almost one of four of all Colombian women have had at least one induced abortion. (Zamudio, Rubiano, & Wartenberg, 1999)

A study by the Public Health Vigilance System, SIVIGILA, cited in the lawsuits, shows that abortion held a third place among maternal mortality causes in Colombia between 1992 and 1996, representing 16% of maternal deaths\(^{16}\). (Roa, 2005a; Roa, 2005b) An even greater number of women suffer yearly severe consequences on their health due to insecure abortion practices, such as the extraction of the uterus, the fallopian tubes and/or the ovaries, or inflammation in the fallopian tubes that elevates the risk of infertility and ectopic pregnancies in the future, ectopic pregnancies being one of the most frequent causes of death if no immediate treatment possibilities are available. (Ministerio de la Protección Social, 2007)

Regarding abortion as an issue of gender equality, the lawsuits were largely based on legal argumentation on women’s rights, founded in national and international human rights legislation, arguing the complete abortion prohibition as a violation of women’s human

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\(^{13}\) Two lawsuits were presented, the first on April 14\(^{th}\) 2005 and the second that led to the partial legalization of abortion, on December 12\(^{th}\) 2005.

\(^{14}\) *Litigio de Alto Impacto: la Inconstitucionalidad del Aborto en Colombia* (High Impact Litigation: the Unconstitutionality of Abortion in Colombia)

\(^{15}\) There are different estimates, but 300,000 was one of the most frequently mentioned numbers at the time, also in official documents as for example (Ministerio de la Protección Social, 2007). For a reference to different methods of measuring clandestine abortion rates, see for example (Carbajal, 2007)

\(^{16}\) After toxemia (35%) and complications during labor and birth (25%)
rights. Furthermore, the prohibition of abortion is closely linked to cultural norms underpinning gender inequality, such as the over-valuation of maternity, recognizing women for their reproductive capacities over any other social functions. This construction of a cultural imaginary of women as first and foremost mothers, and with their own subjectivity and autonomy in the background legitimizes anti-abortion social practices and/or legislation (Luna, 2003). Therefore, the accessibility to abortion does not only depend on the legal framework, but also of the political will and priority given to the issue, and the possibility of women to construct themselves as autonomous subjects.  

Finally, the illegality of abortion also comes with an important social inequality dimension. Clandestine abortion rates are high, but its practice is almost never penalized. Therefore, although socially tolerated to some degree, the legal prohibition covers a different price for different social sectors, as the access to a safe procedure is not guaranteed by the public health system and is possible only for those who count on the economic resources and the information necessary. These social inequalities are also reflected in maternal mortality rates that show the uneven distribution between regions and different women depending on their socioeconomic status.  

3.1 The elaboration of the LAICIA communication strategy

For the communication component of the LAICIA project, Women’s Link Worldwide contacted the then recently constituted communication agency Brújula Comunicaciones, focused on the social sector “we work communication strategies for ideas, not for brands”.

Mónica Roa from Women’s Link Worldwide describes how the first steps were taken:

“When we were starting LAICIA with Claudia, we were looking for someone in communications, and someone gave us the phone number to Brújula. And we called and we had to hang up because we realized that we had no idea what we were going to say to them. The idea that [communications] had to be a part, was very clear from the beginning, what was not so clear was what that translated to in practice. I think that with Brújula there was a lot of learning together from the beginning, of how these kinds of communication strategies are made articulating them with other strategies, in this case one of litigation.” (Interview with Mónica Roa, Women’s Link Worldwide)

Ana María Ruíz and Guillermo Cuellar, manager and director respectively of Brújula

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17 This line of reasoning is also found in the lawsuit presented by Mónica Roa on December 12th 2005, under the subtitle Igualdad, in section 5 Motivaciones de la violación, and in the lawsuit from April 14th 2005, in the section 3 Derecho a la igualdad y a estar libre de discriminación (artículo 13 y 43 C.P.) (Roa, 2005a; Roa, 2005b)

18 See for example (Ministerio de la Protección Social, 2007) or (Profamilia, 2011)

19 Interview with Ana María Ruíz and Guillermo Cuellar from Brújula Comunicaciones
Comunicaciones explain the logic behind formulating a strategy that positioned abortion in the terms referenced above, in a highly conservative and Catholic social context:

“The point is the character of the issue. If the character of abortion, the abortion debate, is a legal perspective, then the ones that oppose it will have to oppose it from the legal perspective. [...] This is why we always said that it is not a moral issue, and when Mónica started the process we said ‘never ever let yourself be placed in a debate in front of a priest. Never. Nor in a moral theme.’ The discussion of abortion is not a moral theme. The strategy was, and this was won, that we needed the debate to pass from a moral line with certain authorized authors, to a legal line with several authors. This does not happen because the moral line disappears, the church will push, permanently, but as we consistently don’t play their game, the debate will turn legal. And this was achieved in Colombia. That is, it was achieved that the debate turned fundamentally legal or on health, of course with agents like the church that will always be pushing.” (Interview with Ana María Ruiz and Guillermo Cuellar, Brújula Comunicaciones)

The proposed objective of the communication strategy was to “Implement a communication strategy that accompany, impulse and promote spaces for divulgence of the legal action, always looking for opportunities for dissemination and generating communicative movements according to the circumstances”. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008, p. 81) In order to do this, four phases were initially planned during the process of the lawsuit:

1. **Increasing awareness**: previous to the lawsuit in order to establish alliances, increase awareness among journalists and elaborating materials and press folders.
2. **Launch**: during the presentation of the lawsuit in order to keep up the attention to the process.
3. **Maintenance**: maintaining the issue in the media agenda by generating peaks of information, and preparing for the possible scenarios after the ruling.
4. **Post-ruling**: Management of an adequate position facing the public opinion in any scenario. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008)

Each of these phases had several components: i) key messages (basic arguments and answers to difficult questions), ii) training of spokespersons (previous to relations with the press, including training of expert allies such as doctors and judges, in different approaches), iii) database (complete list of key Colombian journalists for the issue, categorized according to different needs or approaches), iv) press folders (documentation with informative and formative arguments for journalists – including medical arguments, public health statistics, international law, women’s human rights, Colombian legal precedents, the arguments in the lawsuit, and a press release about the lawsuit), v)
monitoring (tracking of the publications on the project and related issues to analyze achievements and difficulties in terms of impact), and vi) follow-up meetings (periodic meetings to evaluate the work in communications. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008)

The first and second phase were carried out as initially planned, whereas during phase three and four, the control over the issue in the media was no longer in the hands of Women’s Link Worldwide and their strategic allies in the LAICIA project, which meant having to respond to sometimes unforeseen circumstances. Women’s Link Worldwide, however, held the important advantage of having envisioned the strategy and its different moments ahead.

It can be argued that LAICIA changed the paradigm on how these issues were communicated to the public opinion:

“At least LAICIA is the first widely known exercise of understanding the work in sexual and reproductive rights from the perspective of the audience and not the activist. [...] We said that it is not about what we want to say; it is about what people need to hear to understand. [...] Human rights are solutions. Correct solutions, but if you don’t show the problem they resolve you end up in activism. You have to show what the issue is that they resolve. So then, the first effort was to say ‘ok, we are not going to sit down and design a sort of campaign with the message that we consider to be correct, we are going to talk about what is strategic in order to get the audiences that we need to listen and discuss. And I am sorry but this is not an issue of rights in the first place, it’s an issue of the situation that can be resolved regarding rights.’ And that’s how it was established. That is why the most predominant message that we managed in the whole LAICIA scheme was that women are dying. You can think what you want, be the most catholic person in the world, but 70 dead women a year, nobody can agree with that.” (Interview with Ana María Ruiz and Guillermo Cuellar)

Not only did the types of messages transmitted change in LAICIA compared to how the debate had traditionally been configured, but also the intended audiences. Traditionally, the public debate on sexual and reproductive rights in general, and abortion in particular had been one of extremes, of the ones in favor (the women’s movement) and the ones against (the conservative sectors of society, in particular the church), where neither of the sides would end up convincing the other side. For LAICIA, the intended public was the one in between the two positions. The strategy for working with the audiences had two fundamental axes, favorability and influence. The idea was to achieve results simultaneously by on the one hand manage to shift the ones with middle positions, that is, the general public, a little bit more towards favorability, and on the other hand raise the profile and the influence in the public debate of those on the far favorable side:
“While the debate has been in black or white, in either you agree or you disagree, without nuances, and without validating all the possibilities of positions in the middle, it has been very bad for the movement in general. [...] When we talk not about being in favor or against, all or nothing, but in some circumstances, in which circumstances, what we do is offer people more options to agree on something. Not with all or nothing but agree on something, and I think that allows for adding up more people to the process.” (Interview with Mónica Roa, Women’s Link Worldwide)

With this way of thinking, of not convincing the opposition but rather the undecided masses, and of introducing a spectrum of more ‘moderate’ positions in the debate, LAICIA was a first in social movements in Colombia, and groundbreaking also on the continent. Women’s Link Worldwide as well as Brújula Comunicaciones have since trained other social movements around Latin America in how to elaborate communication strategies as integral components within larger social change strategies.

### 3.2 The impact of LAICIA

Whereas it is clear that LAICIA was groundbreaking regarding how organizations had been managing communications up until then, it is important to assess whether this shift in approach also implied some change in terms of impact on the public opinion.

According to Women’s Link Worldwide, in a brochure citing information from several opinion polls in different media, their strategy had an important impact:

“[…] in May 2005, just a month after having presented the lawsuit, 85% of the Colombian population was against any kind of liberalization of abortion; in March 2006, before the court issued its definitive ruling, for the first time in the history of the country, the support for the liberalization of abortion in the proposed circumstances reached majority, 54%; once the ruling was issued, support raised to almost 65%, and came to its maximum of 85% in the following August, when a public hospital practiced the first legal abortion on an 11-year old minor raped by her stepfather.”20 (Women’s Link Worldwide, 2007)

Other studies that have been made on the positioning of the issue in the press, confirm that effectively abortion became an issue on the public agenda during the time of the court ruling. However, this could of course have been the case even without a communication strategy like LAICIA, as a possible liberalization of abortion legislation in a country like Colombia is a ‘hot topic’, and likely to catch the attention of media anyway. According to a study on the effects of the abortion liberalization, between 2000 and 2004, abortion was mentioned six times in the news, whereas during the first four months of the LAICIA

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20 My translation from Spanish
COMMUNICATING ABORTION
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project, the issue was brought up thirteen times in media, and in several of these, arguments designed as a part of the communication strategy were used. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008) In another study, with a comparative press analysis on the issue of abortion between two different time periods, it is evident that the treatment of the issue of abortion in the Colombian press has shifted toward more favorable positions on the one hand, and from a strong emphasis on ethical and religious aspects on the other.


Source: Own elaboration based on (Dalén, 2011)


Source: Own elaboration based on (Dalén, 2011)

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\(^{21}\) Favorable – articles that express predominantly positions in favor of a legalization of abortion. Unfavorable – articles that express predominantly positions against a legalization of abortion. Neutral – articles that do not express an explicit position either in favor or against. Mixed – articles that present arguments both in favor and against.

\(^{22}\) Ethical-religious – articles that have a main emphasis on abortion as a moral or religious issue. Medical – articles that have a main emphasis on the medical or health aspects of abortion. Legal-political – articles that have a main emphasis on legal and political aspects of abortion. Sociological and testimonial – articles that have a main emphasis on abortion from the experiential perspective of women. Informative – articles that appear to cite textually-personal and institutional declarations.
Again, it is important to point out that a shift taken place over four decades by no means can be attributed only to a campaign that lasted just over a year. It is nevertheless interesting to note that during the years immediately following the partial liberalization of abortion and the LAICIA campaign, the thematic emphasis pushed by LAICIA represent an important portion of the press material, whereas the ethical-religious aspect, mainly represented by the church, decreased in importance. Brújula Comunicaciones coincide, and hold that this change is permanent rather than circumstantial:

“It is very difficult to think that the public scenario would go back to what it was before 2004. I think that it is already gained ground. [...] It is possible to speak about these issues that were forbidden. It is possible to take a stand, and it is possible to do it without getting burnt. But above all, the sources to speak about the issue are no longer limited only to the hierarchs of the church, which was always, always the case in this country for these issues. ‘Who talks about that? Someone is promoting it, who is opposed, here you have your priest’. Always, always.” (Interview with Ana María Ruiz and Guillermo Cuellar, Brújula Comunicaciones)

Furthermore, the organizations working with sexual and reproductive rights in Colombia have changed the way they manage communications:

“There is a clear difference from when we started 10 years ago and today, and it is that the organizations are more and more aware of the necessity of thinking about communications, of making communications part of their entire planning exercise. Ten years ago this was not the case. But they have also modified the vision of public communication. This will sound ugly, but they have toned down the activism, they have toned down the convincing of the right way. That was the predominant communication exercise 10 years ago. That is, 10 years ago the NGOs in general supposed that their external communication labor consisted in disseminating what they knew was right to the people who didn’t. And when these people learnt, the social mobilization would start. This is clearly not the case.” (Interview with Ana María Ruiz and Guillermo Cuellar, Brújula Comunicaciones)

LAICIA was the project within which the lawsuits that finally led to the partial liberalization of abortion in Colombia were presented. This project included a communication strategy as a significant component aimed at liberalizing abortion not only legally, but also culturally. It represented a new paradigm in how communication was used by civil society in Colombia in social change processes, and contributed to a shift in the public agenda on sexual and reproductive rights and abortion. In the next chapter, I will analyze how this project, elaborated by one organization in a context of a broad women’s movement, was received and in what way communication efforts are articulated today with media and with other organizations.
4 Articulation and Alineation

LAICIA built on the work of women’s movements in Colombia since the 1970’s, with positioning legal abortion within the scope of women’s rights. Therefore, even though LAICIA can be seen as a historic milestone, it was based on important precedents, and actors that had been visible in the debate before Mónica Roa and Women’s Link Worldwide came into the picture. In this sense, although the LAICIA strategy was elaborated principally by Women’s Link Worldwide and Brújula Comunicaciones, the adherence of others to the campaign was a key component. In this chapter, I will present how this articulation between different actors took form, and how it has developed until today. I will focus on two types of alliances, on the one hand with the media, the channel through which the messages from the organizations are transmitted, and on the other hand between organizations and with other strategic allies in the cause.

4.1 Media relations

During the initial phases of LAICA, a detailed mapping was made of media outlets and journalists, categorizing level of influence, approaches, coverage (local or national), etc., and press folders were handed out to journalists, as well as contact details to Mónica Roa and Viviana Waisman of Women’s Link Worldwide, Miguel Ronderos (medical doctor), Isabel Ortiz (women’s rights activist) and Sandra Mazo (from the organization Catholics for a Free Choice), who were all previously trained as spokespersons. From the launch of the press folders until January 2006, the lawsuit and the court process was mentioned in 35 opinion columns in El Tiempo, 157 opinion columns in other publications, 7 editorials in El Tiempo and 17 in other publications, 86 newscasts, 24 front pages, and in 5 references as person of the year. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008) This was all part of a media strategy elaborated by professionals and that had financing, however, the actual media display and the numbers of mentions were all an effect of a well-planned impact strategy, and in no instance due to having paid money for being mentioned in editorials. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008; Interview with Mónica Roa)

[23] The first intent to legalize abortion in Colombia was a bill presented to the Congress in 1975 by senator Iván Lópex. The Colombian feminist movement, through the first National Women’s Gathering (Encuentro Nacional Feminista) in 1978 decided to support the international campaign for the right to abortion. See for example (Barraza Morelle, 2009; La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres, 2009; Viveros, 1999)


[25] Colombia’s largest newspaper with national circulation
During this time there were close strategic relationships with journalists, which was reflected in the arguments presented and the sources used. However, during the years immediately after the liberalization of the abortion legislation, the most visible voices were reduced to two persons, which were frequently called upon by media as representatives of the Colombian women's movement; Mónica Roa from Women's Link Worldwide and Florence Thomas, who both already had well-established relations with media. In the case of Florence Thomas, although she is a founding member of La Mesa, one of the organizations that are the subject of study in this investigation, she was most frequently cited for her individual merits as a feminist author and columnist, without explicit reference to La Mesa as an organization. (Dalén, 2011) It seems as though the different organizations of the Colombian women's movement, in spite of their historic trajectory in these issues were unable to use the moment to position themselves as principal referents for media in these issues.

Carolina Dueñas, the current communicator at Women’s Link Worldwide, relates that the organization has managed to maintain these tight bounds with some media today:

“Women’s Link has a solid relationship with for example El Espectador. El Espectador, for its journalistic and ideological profile, let’s say that it takes in a lot of the issues we work with, and also with individual journalists that have come to know the work of Women's Link through the court ruling and then have kept following what we do. So there are close relations to journalists, whom we can call and say ‘we have this theme,’ and they have of course all the freedom to decide if they take it or not. But for example with El Espectador it is very common that they embrace our themes.” (Interview with Carolina Dueñas, Women's Link Worldwide)

La Mesa, on the other hand, has a less continuous relationship with media. Ximena Correal, the communicator at La Mesa explains that a problem with maintaining these relations is the high rotation of journalists, that is, once a relationship is established, the person is replaced by another and the effort is somewhat lost. Additionally, La Mesa is not considered a primary source by media:

“In media, the barriers are in the sources. The sources are essentially official. I don’t even see Women’s Link there. And they are international and all. They are there, clearly, but it is neither substantial nor representative. In media they turn to the official. This happened to us in RCN, the girl interviewed...

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26 A feminist activist, ex professor at the National University and founding member of La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres. She is the author of several books and has a standing opinion column in El Tiempo where she writes from a feminist perspective.

27 The second largest newspaper in Colombia with national circulation

28 One of Colombia’s largest media networks, within television and radio.
Carolina, and then she told us that 'they haven’t let me publish it because I don’t have an official source, just you’. There are barriers, ‘who is La Mesa, for you to appear in media?’ is a little bit what they are saying to us.” (Interview with Ximena Correal, La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres)

Women’s Link Worldwide has the positioning of themselves as references in established media as one of their primary goals within their work with communications, and have elaborated and implemented strategies for doing so. Meanwhile, La Mesa is less clear about its strategic relations to media. On the one hand, Ximena expresses the necessity to establish and maintain some relations to media, but on the other hand the positioning of La Mesa as a primary source in issues related to sexual and reproductive rights is not defined as an explicit objective, nor are there systematic actions taken in that sense.

Catalina Ruiz-Navarro, former communicator at Women’s Link Worldwide, points out that an obstacle in the relations to media and the communication of sexual and reproductive rights to the public opinion, besides from how and what type of messages are formulated, which will be elaborated upon further in the next chapter, is how the relationships of the civil society organizations with the media are managed:

“Sometimes they [the organizations] are rude, or sometimes they are not available, they don’t answer the phone... In Colombia media start at 5am, they call you on the phone, and if you are a spokesperson and they call you at 5am and you don’t give Caracol29 an interview, they won’t call you ever again. Because they can’t trust you. If you give the journalist the wrong information, they won’t trust you again. So then you see that many women that participate in this are never called. Because they don’t answer the phone, because they give the wrong information, because they give the information and then they complain... They forget that for example news production is a 15-minute, half an hour thing and that’s it. It’s not ‘I’ll call you tomorrow and tomorrow I’ll give you the interview’. That cannot be done. That is one of the biggest mistakes there are, from the organizations.” (Interview with Catalina Ruiz-Navarro, Women’s Link Worldwide)

Many women’s organizations in Colombia, including La Mesa, function as collectives, where decisions are taken through consensus. While this has important democratic fundamentals, it could potentially reduce the possibility for organizations like La Mesa to respond with statements in media on certain issues on the premises and within the timeframes demanded by media.

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29 One of Colombia’s largest media networks, within television and radio.
4.2 Other Organizations and Allies

LAICIA was based on the premises that broad alliances were a key strategic element, not only for the communication component, but also to generate other types of support, including amicus curiae-interventions to the court. Within the women's movement, La Mesa was at that time identified as a principal ally, and were presented to the project at an early stage and were constantly updated with privileged information in order to be able to take action and respond to media requests when necessary. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008)

However, although all key organizations within the Colombian women's movement working with sexual and reproductive rights were informed previously about LAICIA, and invited to participate in the strategy, it was not an invitation to negotiate its contents and its premises. Furthermore, it was an explicit strategy by Women's Link Worldwide to include wide sectors of society and present a somewhat 'moderate' rhetoric in order to win over the masses. This implied a distancing from some of the more traditionally radical postures of the feminist movement, including avoiding to cite documentation produced by women's organizations in the press folder materials, and including very few civil society women in their list of experts available for media (the three included in a long list were referred to as women's rights experts). Moreover, the women's movement was never publically cited as a key ally in press conferences and material. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008)

This strategy arose from the necessity to de-polarize the debate and win over a critical mass of the public opinion, and thus avoid a too close association with the feminist movement, perceived in some sectors of Colombian society as too radical and conflictive, which could possibly obstruct the achievement of the goals proposed. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008) However, such a strategy did not come without costs. Put bluntly, a young30 Harvard-schooled lawyer, with no significant trajectory in the Colombian feminist movement, comes out of nowhere and steals the spotlight, achieving something that the movement had spent the last four decades fighting for. It was not received with standing ovations in all sectors. Therefore, some of the organizations belonging to the more radical fractions withdrew their support from LAICIA, arguing that the project corresponded to a very limited view of the liberalization of abortion within the feminist agenda, privileging tactical interests over strategic ones, in giving more importance to the achievement of a minimal legal reform instead of fighting for the transformation of the way maternity is

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30 By the time the court issued its ruling, legalizing abortion, Mónica had just turned 30 years.
socially assumed and understood. The more liberal and academic feminist fractions in general withheld their support to LAICA arguing that given the elitist political scenario and the democratic restrictions of the country, having Mónica Roa appear as a ‘free agent’, speaking the political language of the elites, was the only way of really achieving any advances. (Jaramillo Sierra & Alfonso Sierra, 2008)

This partial fractionalization of a civil society movement in front of a cause that they all fundamentally supported, albeit from different perspectives, can have led to women’s organizations losing potential media attention and influence in the years that have followed the court ruling, where information has been crucial for the implementation of the legislation.

As of today, although forces are joined occasionally both organizations studied hold that there is no continuous work together with other organizations in the same field, nor is there a common strategy in their communications.

“It depends on the scenario and the circumstances. There are themes were the organizations that work for sexual and reproductive rights converge and then we do it together. For example debates in the Congress. There we form alliances. Or processes that interest us, for example the reelection of the _Procurador_31. There are other things that originate from La Mesa, but we turn to other organizations for support in the dissemination.” (Interview with Carolina Melo, La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres)

“Moreover, I think that there are many things to communicate within the theme of abortion in general and sexual and reproductive rights. So then it seems useful to me that there are different messages.” (Interview with Mónica Roa, Women’s Link Worldwide)

Women’s Link Worldwide defines the building of alliances as one of their main methods of work when it comes to the creation of new legal standards (together with the legal and the communications strategies). However, these alliances are not necessarily tied to the communications activities, they are rather aimed at complementing different kinds of expertise in order to make the objective in common a reality. Ximena Correal of La Mesa narrates:

“There is more articulation on an international than on a national level […] If we want to influence in media, it is very difficult to go alone as Mesa. How nice it would be to be able to connect with others who are also working on the

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31 This position does not have an equivalent in English, but can be roughly translated as Inspector General, and is the highest responsible for the guarantee of human rights and the vigilance and sanctioning of public servants. The position is currently held by Alejandro Ordóñez who represents a highly conservative right-wing and religious agenda, and has repeatedly tried to restrict access to legal abortion. He was reelected by the Congress for a second four-year term in 2012.
issue. And how nice it would be to be able to get to for example Barranquilla, Cartagena. But for that we need time, people, more alliances.” (Interview with Ximena Correal, La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres)

The team from Brújula Comunicaciones sees this lack of coordination between Colombian organizations as a problem and a potential risk:

“I think that it would be strategically important to look for a way to work together. A common line of action in communications. Which does not mean that all have to accept the communication piece or the campaign, no. But what was won presenting publically an issue in a determined way, with many voices, which was what was done through LAICIA and after LAICIA, can be broken when the efforts are focused on individual defense, and when that individual defense captures all the spaces and the time and the resources. [...] There is strong pressure and up until now individual efforts have been made, the organizations have done what they have had to do in terms of defending themselves, but I think there are concrete actions by the opposition that deserve thinking collectively about what to do.” (Interview with Ana María Ruiz and Guillermo Cuellar, Brújula Comunicaciones)

The organizations differ to some extent in ideology, where Women’s Link Worldwide take a more ‘moderate’ or ‘conciliatory’ stance, to put it some way, towards the more conservative and powerful sectors of society, whereas La Mesa hold a more traditional and in some ways radical feminist position. These differences seem to lead to each organization formulating their own communication strategy and taking actions individually, or in separate networks of actors. In the next chapter, I will analyze how the organizations’ communication strategies look today to identify synergies and differences between them.
5. AN IMPACT IN AN ADVERSE CONTEXT

An important difference in the context can be identified when comparing the period of the constitutional court ruling almost a decade ago with today. LAICIA was a paradigm shift; communications was approached differently than how civil society had traditionally done. This implied that the opposition side was caught ‘off-guard’, and allowed for the sexual and reproductive rights organizations to set the agenda and introduce their arguments and perspectives into the debate. Today, the situation is different. This chapter explores how communication strategies and actions are elaborated and carried out in relation to the current context.

5.1 BACKLASH: COMMUNICATING REACTIVELY

Whereas the organizations a decade ago were able to catch the opposition somewhat ‘off-guard’, the situation is another today:

“I hold that with LAICIA we caught them a little sleepy. They didn’t see it coming, the dimension of what was coming. They didn’t see it. When they saw it, they moved. And unfortunately partly due to them moving is what we see in the rest of the continent. They have also modified their public scheme.” (Interview with Ana María Ruiz and Guillermo Cuellar, Brújula Comunicaciones)

Mónica Roa describes the situation after the initial success this way:

“It is important to take into account what the backlash will be. I say that this is a pendulum. These political things always work as a pendulum, so then if you push it hard, it will come back. And the work is to, as you know that it will come this way, try not to let it catch you distracted.” (Interview with Mónica Roa, Women’s Link Worldwide)

This way, the legal change is the means, but not the end, to achieve a right. Legislation can be an instrument in a process of cultural changes, but while a legal text can be changed from one day to another, the cultural transformations required for its full acceptance can take much longer, especially in a polemic and complex issue as legalization of abortion. All interviewees agree that one of the main obstacles that the organizations have faced since the court ruling is the guarantee of the effective implementation of the partial legalization in practice.

According to a recent study by the Guttmacher Institute, in 2008, two years after the legalization, only 322 legal abortion procedures were performed in Colombia. The estimate for clandestine abortions is around 400,400 abortions annually, which means
that legal abortions represent only 0.08% of the total number of abortions in the country. (Prada, Singh, Remez, & Villareal, 2011) Although it is likely that the number of legal abortions is sub-registered, due to deficient information systems and lack of coordination between authorities, the proportions nevertheless reveal the existence of obstacles in the access to legal abortion. Recent studies mention the lack of knowledge and information about the legal framework, and the requirements for accessing abortion, among women as well as among the different responsible authorities and institutions as one of the main barriers. Others include resistance from health personnel, moral and religious objections, excessive and unnecessary administrative procedures, and lack of available health services. (Chaparro, García, Guzmán, Rojas, & Sandoval, 2013; Dalén, 2013)

Thus, the court ruling was the first step, but the real challenge is to make sure that what is written in legal documents is also materialized in practice. In this task, communication is key to make sure that correct information about these rights is widely accessible. Both the representatives from Women’s Link Worldwide and from La Mesa state in their interviews that one of the main objectives of their areas of communication is to disseminate information about the rights to access legal abortion in the country.

La Mesa, for example, issued a campaign in 2010 called ¡Estás en posición de decidir! (You are in a position to decide), including a webpage32, street publicity in busstops and on walls, and messages in social media including Facebook, Twitter and Youtube33. This has been one of the main communication campaigns by Colombian civil society aimed at informing the general public about how to access legal abortion.

Nevertheless, all interviewees agree that the space to work proactively in communications with these issues, and to move positions forward, has shrunk:

“The first thing is that we always have to part from what the opposition is doing. How are they attacking, how are they moving? Alleviating and restraining their assaults has demanded a lot of time and work of the organizations. Time that could have been dedicated to work for example with impacting a change of perceptions. A change of culture regarding these issues. But there is no time. All the time we have to be defending ourselves. Since 2006 there has not been anything else but fighting for the access to be real and broad, or defending ourselves against attacks.” (Interview with Ana María Ruiz and Guillermo Cuellar, Brújula Comunicaciones)

32 www.estasenposiciondedecidir.com (the page does no longer exist)
33 Videos can be seen on La Mesa’s Youtube-channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/laMesaporlaVida/videos
Although both organizations state that they do not want to debate with the church and the conservative opposition activists, the political circumstances and the agenda often force them to direct their efforts at impeding setbacks rather than advancing.

During the second semester of 2011, the Conservative Party presented a bill to Congress that aimed at changing the article 11 of the Colombian Constitution, adding the text in bold, thus prohibiting both abortion and euthanasia:

“El derecho a la vida es inviolable and will receive equal protection from the fertilization until the natural death. There will not be capital punishment.”34 (Congress of Colombia, 2011)

This was the first time since the court ruling in 2006 that there was a serious attempt at reversing the legalization of abortion, rather than obstructing its implementation, and facing this imminent threat, several organizations, among them La Mesa and Women's Link Worldwide, joined efforts in trying to impede the situation. These actions included opinion pieces in media, written both by members of the different organizations of the alliance, as well as by influential media connections, and lobbying with congress representatives. The bill was finally voted down in the Senate’s first commission by 9 votes against and 7 votes in favor. (Congreso Visible, 2011) Although this process turned out successfully, and managed to civil society as well as influential persons in media and in politics, it was an alliance that did not lead to a continuous work together between the organizations, beyond the immediate need for impeding a concrete setback.

The next threat for a backlash came in 2012 with the possibility of re-election of the Procurador35. In 2009, Alejandro Ordóñez, representing a highly conservative right-wing and religious agenda, was elected for the office. In spite of winning votes by promising to respect women’s and LGBT rights, during his first four-year term, he repeatedly tried to restrict access to legal abortion. Facing a probable re-election of Ordóñez for a second four-year term, Women’s Link Worldwide initiated a campaign called Procura36. The objective of the campaign was to seek to educate and monitor the selection process for the new Procurador. The campaign had a webpage37, and was carried out in social media38.

34 My translation. Spanish original: "El derecho a la vida es inviolable y recibirá igual protección desde la fecundación hasta la muerte natural. No habrá pena de muerte”
35 This position does not have an equivalent in English, but can be roughly translated as Inspector General, and is the highest responsible for the guarantee of human rights and the vigilance and sanctioning of public servants.
36 The name of the campaign is a play on words in Spanish, making an allusion to the name of the authority (Procuraduría General de la Nación) using the verb procurar (make sure) in its imperative form.
37 www.procuracolombia.com (The page no longer exists)
encouraging people to sign an open letter directed at the President, the Supreme Court, and the Council of State, the three bodies responsible for appointing one candidate each for the election. Furthermore, people published photos of themselves on Facebook and Twitter holding up posters with the words procura... (make sure) and a request for some minimum qualities or actions the nominated candidates should have or take. A majority of these messages were related to freedom of religion and the separation of church and state, or to sexual and reproductive rights and LGBT rights. The campaign received over 4000 photos that were compiled in a video\textsuperscript{39} that was sent together with the open letter.

The structure of the Procura-campaign was very similar to that of LAICIA, in that it was a campaign design and led by Women’s Link Worldwide to which other organizations and persons could adhere, but it was not conceived in coordination with other organizations, nor was it previously consented with them.

Although Alejandro Ordóñez was finally appointed as a candidate by the Supreme Court, and re-elected by congress to second term, the campaign managed, according to its organizers to awaken an interest among citizens committed to participation, and as never before, citizens intervened in the debate to demand respect for democratic and pluralist principles.\textsuperscript{40}

While both the actions in relation to the Conservative Party bill, and the Procura-campaign, can be argued to have had positive impacts – in the first case the defeat of the bill, and in the second the increased awareness among the general public – it is evident that a large part of the efforts are reactive rather than proactive, and respond to an agenda set by other actors, now by the sexual and reproductive rights organizations, and in the terms of these other actors.

\textbf{5.2 The individual communication strategies}

Both organizations have communication among their priorities. In both La Mesa and Women’s Link Worldwide, communication is a cross-cutting theme to all their activities. However, the way communication is managed as a strategy differs between the organizations. In the case of Women’s Link Worldwide, they do not manage an overriding communication strategy, although they do have some general objectives identified, such as

\textsuperscript{38} Principally Facebook, Twitter, Youtube and Vimeo

\textsuperscript{39} The video can be seen at: http://vimeo.com/47203407

\textsuperscript{40} See the campaign page on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Procura-Colombia/ (posts on November 28th, 2012)
5. Communicating abortion

5.1 An impact in an adverse context

Disseminating the work of the organization; raise awareness through informing about the right to legal abortion; generate a favorable public opinion, etc. Their communication strategies depend largely on individual projects with specific objectives:

“For each project, we think in first place about whether there is a lot or a little emphasis on communications. Then, if there is need to create a big communications strategy, obviously it will depend on what we want to achieve, who we want to reach, what we should say. According to the line of work, it is managed according to the projects that arise. There is no general rule, no formula, because everything depends on how communications is understood as a support for the legal strategy, the legal objective.” (Interview with Carolina Dueñas, Women’s Link Worldwide)

La Mesa on the other hand has a general communication strategy, however it is somewhat outdated as it was created over four years ago, and both the coordinator and the communicator expressed in their interviews the need for updating it to the current context. The way particular communication activities are designed differs from Women’s Link Worldwide, due to the organizational structure of La Mesa:

“La Mesa is a collective, and the area of communications passes through the consensus as all other decisions. In these collective decisions, taken by the communications committee, the horizon and the messages are defined. Then, together with the communicator, we seek to define the best tools or means that work to guarantee that the messages are transmitted. The communicator is the link between the collectively defined policies and the necessity to make it operative.” (Interview with Carolina Melo, La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres)

In this context, it is important to analyze how the individual strategies are carried out in the different organizations – that is what types of messages have they identified as strategic and what are the audiences that they are communicating them to.

5.2.1 The messages

Both Women’s Link Worldwide and La Mesa, have identified key messages to transmit in their communication actions. When it comes to La Mesa, the coordinator Carolina Melo states that their approach has changed over the last years:

“Before, we used a very neutral, friendly and polite tone. The communication pieces that were designed had that tone. But then we became aware that people are more touched by the emotional component that the antis use alot.

41 La Mesa is a collective of organizations and individuals with trajectories in the defense of women’s sexual and reproductive rights. These members are all volunteers and are the ones that take the strategic decisions for the organization. There are five employees, one coordinator, two lawyers, one communicator and one administrator, and these are responsible for the operative activities resulting from the strategies lined out.
So then we decided to go for that.” (Interview with Carolina Melo, La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres)

She exemplifies with two campaigns from La Mesa, the first one being the campaign mentioned above, *Estás en posición de decidir* (you are in a position to decide) from 2010, and the second one being *Se aborta por una razón y no por falta de razón* (abortion is done for a reason, not for lack of reason) from 2012. Both campaigns had roughly the same format – street publicity, social media presence, etc. – however, the types of messages differ. Carolina points out in the interview that while the first had a much ‘warmer’ tone, with messages related to the freedom to decide, and with an image very little related to the specific issue, the second had a much more direct and emotional approach, putting faces on the issue and showing concrete undignified situations that justify legal abortion. These two campaigns on a more massive scale, illustrate the shift from one approach to another.

Images 1 and 2: Campaign image from *Estás en posición de decidir* (left) and one of the campaign images from *Se aborta por una razón, no por falta de razón* (right)

Both organizations define among their key messages the information and awareness-raising of legal abortion as a right. This includes the dissemination of the legalization of abortion to the general public, that is, making sure that people know that abortion is legal
in Colombia under three circumstances. Furthermore, it includes information about how and where to exercise this right, that is, the requisites and the procedures to access a legal abortion. In this, both organizations coincide; however, the representatives of La Mesa made emphasis of the message of the absolute autonomy of women and the right to motherhood as a free choice. This type of rhetoric corresponds to the traditional women's movement discourses where the center of the issue is women's rights to sexual and reproductive autonomy, a rhetoric from which Women’s Link Worldwide to a certain extent distanced themselves through the type of messages and arguments used in LAICIA. Although the representatives of Women’s Link Worldwide interviewed for this research held that the messages vary from one project or campaign to another, as they are defined in relation to its specific objectives, in general the messages used all have a technical-legal focus rather than an ideological one.

These differences in messages reflect the ideological differences between both organizations. Women’s Link Worldwide work with a wide range of gender equality issues, but describe their work in sexual and reproductive rights the following way on their webpage:

“Sexual and reproductive rights include the human right of every person to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and reproduction. The exercise of these rights is underpinned by the autonomy of the person to make decisions and the real and effective access to sexual and reproductive health services necessary in order to make these rights effective in reality. In accordance with this perspective, Women’s Link Worldwide takes on projects which seek to guarantee and protect the exercise of sexual and reproductive rights in different parts of the world.” (Women's Link Worldwide)

La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres describe themselves like this on their webpage:

"La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres is a collective of organizations and persons that from their knowledge and experience work for the sexual and reproductive rights of women, in particular those related to the free option to maternity, free exercise of sexuality and the total legalization of abortion.” (La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres)

Women’s Link Worldwide give a definition of sexual and reproductive rights in line with international institutional standpoints and legal criteria and outline their work in close association with these. La Mesa on the other hand takes on a feminist stance, parting not

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42 See for example the International Conference on Population and Development - ICPD - Programme of Action, chapter VII on Reproductive rights and reproductive health.
from certain legal guarantees and the effective implementation of these, but rather from a
transformation of the cultural significance of women, related to the social imaginary of
womanhood as motherhood, and sexuality as a means of reproduction rather than of
pleasure for women. Furthermore, while Women’s Link Worldwide never advocate for a
wider legalization of abortion, but focus only on the effective implementation of the
existing legislation, La Mesa explicitly includes a complete legalization as their goal.

5.2.2 The audiences

The types of messages transmitted is closely related to what audiences these are directed
to. In the case of La Mesa, they identify women as their main audience, and Carolina Melo
specifies:

“Fundamentally women in reproductive age of social stratums 2, 3 and 4,\(^{43}\)
The reason is that in the lowest stratum the access to media is more limited,
especially digital media, and that gives the religious positions a greater
influence. It is much more difficult to question them, they are very solid. With
social stratums 5 and 6 it is the other way around. It is a sector that has a lot of
access to information. And they have a cultural capital that permits them to
have more flexible or different positions. And they have the economic
resources that makes it easier for them to make decisions based on them. The
middle classes are on the border between these two. Here we can provide
more tools that encourage the capacity to transform imaginaries.” (Interview
with Carolina Melo, La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres)

They also include civil servants, particularly from the judiciary branch, and health
professionals among their audiences. Women’s Link Worldwide identify audiences after
specific mapping exercises for every project or campaign, depending on the objectives,
however, the public opinion in general, including women, as well as the authorities
responsible for the implementation of the judicial decisions, make up their basic audience.

When it comes to audiences, both organizations express difficulties in managing a
language that is accessible enough for people without any expertise to understand,
without compromising the need for technical and legal precision in the information:

“When possible we try to talk in non-legal terms, about the work that we do. It
is very common among lawyers to talk with a lot of technical terms. So how
translate that into everyday language that permits any woman or any person
to understand in an easy way what Women’s Link do. That is a challenge. It’s

\(^{43}\)In Colombia, all neighborhoods are divided into social stratums between 1 and 6, according to their income
level. Stratum 1 is the lowest income and stratum 6 the highest. The access to technologies, such as the
internet, is highly unequally distributed along stratums. According to a study from 2012, only 37% of the
stratum 1-population had access to the internet, while the portion of the stratum 6-population was 89%.
(Rojas, 2012)
more like a criteria than a specific message, and it is a challenge.” (Interview with Carolina Dueñas, Women’s Link Worldwide)

The variations in how the audiences are defined reflect the differences in the profiles of the organizations’ work, but also the ideological differences mentioned in the previous section. La Mesa works with guaranteeing the implementation of the abortion legislation on an institutional level, through monitoring and advocacy activities directed at authorities, but also on an individual level through legal advice and assistance with cases. Women’s Link Worldwide works with strategic legal action to advance gender equality, which means that they do not attend individual women, unless it is a case used for strategic litigation in national or international courts.

Therefore, the audience of La Mesa is more specifically oriented to women, as they are the primary rights-bearers, and the actions of La Mesa are ultimately aimed at their empowerment as autonomous subjects. Meanwhile, Women’s Link Worldwide focus on guaranteeing women’s rights through transforming the legal panorama. Both approaches are aimed at altering the organization of gender relationships by means of which power is articulated, but whereas La Mesa concentrates on the symbolic and normative elements of these social relationships, Women’s Link Worldwide are centered primarily on the normative and institutional ones. Where they coincide, in messages as well as in audiences, is in the normative arena, that is, recalling the definition by Scott from chapter two in this degree project, the concepts that set forth interpretations of the meanings of the symbols attempting to limit and contain their metaphoric possibilities. In this case, when it comes to communication, through influencing the concepts transmitted by media to the public opinion, for example linking the issue of abortion to legal issues of human rights rather than to religion and morale.

5.2.3 THE IMPACT

Finally, it is important to take into account whether all the actions taken have an impact or not. The purpose here is not to assess the possible impact of the actions of the organizations in terms of communication, but rather to analyze what types of mechanisms, if any, the organizations use to measure their impact, and if these have any incidence in the re-formulation of future strategies.

Both organizations were asked in the interviews whether they have any established mechanisms for measuring impact, and also about their perceptions about the impact of their communication actions.
There has been no continuous systematic monitoring in Colombia carried out by any organization about the media coverage on abortion that permits a historical comparison from the legalization until today, although some individual efforts have been made. During LAICIA and the first years after the legalization, Women’s Link Worldwide conducted press monitoring together with Brújula Comunicaciones. The organization Humanas managed a press archive on abortion from mid-2008 until October 2010. The thesis *Abortion in Colombia: Legal changes and social transformations* (Dalén, 2011) includes an analysis of national press from 2006 until 2009. La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres has conducted monitoring of the press since January 2013. These different archives do not use a joint selection or classification criteria, which means that they are not directly comparable, besides the fact that there is a time-gap between the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2013 when no monitoring was made. It is therefore difficult to objectively assess the impact the different organizations have in media, without first carrying out the actual gathering of the information.

When it comes to Women’s Link Worldwide, they currently monitor their press releases and specific actions to assess what impact it has in the media, for example whether it appeared in the press and how it was presented. For specific issues monitoring is also made to map the media language and sources, in order to elaborate an adequate strategy. According to the former communicator at Women’s Link Worldwide, Catalina Ruíz-Navarro, this is not a common practice among all organizations that work on these issues:

“For example, at one of the consultancies that Women’s Link did in Argentina on abortion, they went to do the consultancy to several women’s groups. And they were ‘of course, we talk about abortion, everything is very good, wonderful...’. And we did the mapping and what we found was that none of these organizations were even cited in the media. They weren’t their sources. […] But many of the organizations that do social work are not conscious of how they appear in the media, nor of how they see them.” (Interview with Catalina Ruíz-Navarro, Women’s Link Worldwide)

As mentioned above, La Mesa has monitored Colombian press since January 2013, which was when the current communicator Ximena Cuellar assumed the position. The press monitoring aims at identifying tendencies and arguments in favor and against legal abortion, with the principal objective of identifying common elements and thus obtaining input for political advocacy. (Correal, 2014)
According to the monitoring of the press in 2013, La Mesa was consulted twice as a source in the total of 191 pieces studied\(^{45}\), in both occasions through one of the spokespersons Ana Cristina González, in relation to the release of a study by Guttmacher Institute\(^{46}\). (Correal, 2014) This reflects, besides from La Mesa not being a primary source for the media on the issue in spite of the organizations’ trajectory and vast experience, something that Ximena expressed in the interview, related to media’s interest in numbers and hard facts rather than ideological stances:

“What I did at that time was to propose stories to them because we had numbers. So then I thought that this is a way to approach them with something that we have to say that could be interesting to them. That is not a tedious or feminist discourse to them, because that is also how they can see it. And at times they have told me ‘it’s a doctrinaire discourse of your agenda’, or ‘it is just for women, where are the men?’.” (Interview with Ximena Correal, La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres)

In sum, all interviewees agree that over the course of what is almost a decade since LAICIA was launched, the panorama has changed, greatly thanks to strategic efforts to make sexual and reproductive rights, in particular legal abortion, an issue on the public agenda, transforming the terms of the debate. However, after the initial, fairly well documented, impact of LAICIA, no real long-term systematic monitoring has been made to help orienting new strategies and map those of the opponents to be able to respond more effectively. Thus, the real impact of today’s communication actions is very difficult to assess accurately.

\(^{45}\) The monitoring includes ten online news sites: El Espectador, El Tiempo, Revista Semana, and La Silla Vacía as national media, and El País, El Colombiano, La Nación, El Heraldo, and El Universal as regional media, and additionally the newsletter from the Procuraduría General de la Nación.

\(^{46}\) "The Cost of Postabortion Care and Legal Abortion In Colombia"
6 Concluding Comments

In this degree project, I have examined the question of how Colombian NGOs communicate sexual and reproductive rights issues to the public opinion, and how this has changed over time. This has been analyzed through a case study of two Colombian organizations that work with sexual and reproductive rights, particularly the implementation of legal abortion – Women's Link Worldwide and La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres.

The analysis parts from a gender perspective, understanding gender as a constitutive element of social relationships as well as a primary way of signifying relationships of power. In being a socially constructed, and constructive, element, its transformation is possible. In a process of re-signifying the gendered perceptions and organizations of social structures, communication can be an important tool. When it comes to abortion in a country like Colombia, a legal change might imply a formal decriminalization, but not necessarily a cultural legalization. Efforts are needed to transform the legal tools into social practices.

These two organizations, based in Bogotá, work with making gender equality a reality. In some ways they complement each other in that they concentrate their efforts partly in different spheres. While Women's Link Worldwide focus on modifying the institutional framework that provides the formal guarantees for the implementation of women’s rights, La Mesa centers on empowering the women to demand access to their rights. Both approaches are necessary in order to effectively transform the gendered distribution of power in society.

The LAICIA campaign, organized by Women's Link Worldwide, and adhered to by many organizations, among them La Mesa, is the historical point of departure in this research. I argue that it represents a shift in paradigm in how communications were managed by civil society organizations in Colombia, in particular those working with sexual and reproductive rights, before and after this campaign. Today, communications is seen as a strategic tool to help obtain a certain objective, and mobilize public opinion support, rather than as a way of convincing opponents to change their positions. LAICIA also changed the terms of the debate, introducing new parameters lifting out the issue from the traditional private sphere – delimited to a moral and religious issue, and into the public sphere, as an issue of general concern for society – not just for individual women.
The political panorama in Colombia is different today compared to the time of LAICIA, and the conservative opposition to sexual and reproductive rights is to some extent more powerful and certainly better organized when it comes to communications. This has led to the organizations losing some of their head start gained through LAICIA. Therefore, nowadays much of the communication efforts are directed at impeding backlashes rather than advancing positions, and communicating reactively rather than proactively.

This is accentuated by the fact that there is little coordination when it comes to communications between the organizations in Colombia that work on these issues, beyond circumstantial alliances when facing concrete risks. While it is true that the organizations focus their work differently and to some extent have certain ideological differences, there are some evident convergences between them. One such is the information to women and the general public about their rights, and to public servants and medical staff about their duties. There is no evident strategic advantage for each organization to carry out separate information work, when their impact could be much more substantial if the efforts were joined together, both between the two organizations studied in this research, as well as in a more systematic way with organizations in other regions of the country.

Another area where it could have more effect to work together is the time-consuming task of monitoring. It should be in the interest of both organizations to regularly and uniformly monitor these issues in media, in order to evaluate the efforts carried out, and plan future activities. As media monitoring demands considerable amount of time and effort, but is a key strategic input, it could be beneficial for all to define some common criteria and establish a common database and then for example divide the media sources between the organizations, including organizations from other regions monitoring local media.

While the legalization of abortion in Colombia has been the subject of study to quite some academic production – in particular on the strategies for achieving the legalization and the obstacles in its practical implementation - there is very little, if anything, written about the public opinion on the issue. Sporadically, some newspapers publish opinion polls, but the only existing large-scale study is the *National Survey of Demography and Health* (Profamilia, 2011), representative for Colombian women ages 15 to 49 and published every five years. In its 2010 issue it included questions about knowledge and opinion about legal abortion. However, it would be worthwhile studying in more detail how these issues are perceived by the general public – not only for academic purposes, but also in order for the organizations to create more precise communication strategies.


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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

[Introduction of me and the research project. Asking permission to record the interview and cite with name]

1. Can you tell me a little bit about [the organization] and how you work?
   a. What kind of work does the organization do in relation to communications?
   b. How important is the work in communications compared to the other work that the organization does?
   c. How are the decisions made about the work regarding communications?

2. Can you tell me a little bit about your role in the organization and what you do in relation to communications?
   a. How much influence do you have in the decisions that are made regarding communications?

3. Does the organization have a communication strategy?
   a. If yes – could you tell me about it?
   b. If no – why not?

4. Do you have identified audiences for your communication and messages?

5. Do you have defined messages?
   a. What type of messages do you transmit?
   b. Are there any messages that you do not want to transmit?

6. How do you assess the level of success of your work in communications? Do you have any mechanisms for measuring impact?

7. Do you work together in communications with any other organizations that work with these issues?

8. What are the main problems that you encounter in communicating these issues to the public opinion? How do you address these problems?

9. How do you see the future for these issues and what are your aspirations?