

Case Study

CONNECTING THE CAUSES:

The Work of **Civil Society**
and **Independent Media** and
the Role of **Social Media Platforms.**



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Content

00.	Context	7
	Methodology	10
	Conceptual clarifications	12
01.	Findings	14
	1. Challenges of being on social media platforms	14
	1.1. Tone of organizations on digital platforms	15
	1.2. Content self-censures	17
	1.3. Blocking of features, account deletion, and decrease in visibility	18
	1.4. Limitations due to copyrighted content	20
	1.5. Rhythms of platform updates	21
	1.6. Low availability of resources	22
	1.7. Lack of consideration of CSOs by platforms	23
02.	Specific barriers of content advertising	25
	2.1. Obstacles with advertising categorization	25
	2.2. Skills and resources necessary for advertising	28
	2.3. Questions about the usefulness of advertising	29
	2.4. "Spoiling" the platform with advertising	30
	2.5. National reach limit	32
	2.6. Difficulties in the payment process	33
	2.7. Decrease in Paid Content Visibility	34
03.	Responses from Meta: Loneliness and Silence	36

04. **Coping and mitigation Strategies** **39**

4.1 Constant experimentation 40

4.2 Follow-up and exchange of experiences 42

4.3. Strategic use of paid content 43

4.4. Paid content as part of a communication strategy 44

05. **Paid advertisement experiment** **46**

5.1. Paid advertisement in the environment of a social leader and ‘content creator’ 48

5.2. Paid content in the context of a risk reduction project for the consumption of Psychoactive Substances 50

5.3. Paid content in the context of a social organization promoting and defending the rights of people with trans life experiences 53

5.4. Experiment findings 54

06. **Conclusions** **56**

6.1. Transparency 57

6.2. Consultation with civil society organizations regarding policy changes 57

6.3. Designing specific advertising policies for social actors 58

6.4. Access to company representatives other than business representatives 58

07. **References** **59**



00. Context

The internet enables the exchange of information and opinions and is accessible to anyone. Diverse individuals and groups can have influence and actively participate in debates through online forums and social media platforms. Progressively, the internet is becoming more accessible. The internet penetration rate in Colombia for mobile internet¹ in the first quarter of 2023 was 76.9 per 100 inhabitants, and for fixed internet², it was 51.3 per 100 households. Colombians spend 10 hours and 3 minutes daily using the internet. Of these, they spend 3 hours and 46 minutes on social media, ranking fourth in usage, after South Africa, the Philippines, and Brazil. The most used platforms are WhatsApp (94%), Facebook (91.7%), Instagram (84.4%), Facebook Messenger (73.8%), TikTok (69.5%), and X (50.8%)³.

Despite these figures, it's important to bear in mind that Colombia is a diverse country: factors such as gender, level of education, income, ethnicity, and geographic location affect connectivity, access to technology, and the ability to use it. Among these factors, it's also worth noting that platforms such as Facebook and Instagram do not use up or subtract from the data allowance of users' plans, which can lead them to be the sole access point to the internet for many individuals⁴.

Among the main reasons people use social media are "staying in touch with friends and family", "reading news stories", and finding "new content"⁵. Specifically, in terms of news consumption for 2022, the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report 2022 mentioned that in Colombia, 86% of people consume news through social media, and 14% pay for news online⁶. Additionally, news consumption via the internet is massive, with 86% of the population accessing it and 72% specifically opting for news consumption through social media.

¹Comisión de Regulación de Comunicaciones (CRC), (2023) [Data Flash 2023-015-Internet móvil](#)

²Comisión de Regulación de Comunicaciones (CRC), (2023) [Data Flash 2023-010-Internet fijo](#)

³Kepios, We are Social. (2022). [Digital 2022 Global Overview Report](#).

⁴Kepios, We are Social. (2022). [Digital 2022 Global Overview Report](#).

⁵Kepios, We are Social. (2023). [Digital 2022 Global Overview Report](#).

⁶Reuters Institute. (2022). [Digital News Report 2022: Colombia](#).

⁷Himmelboim, I. (2011). Civil Society and Online Political Discourse: The Network Structure of Unrestricted Discussions, Communication Research.

Social media platforms have become venues for significant events with direct repercussions on daily life and public discourse⁷. Civil society organizations (hereafter referred to as CSOs) have leveraged this new space facilitated by technology to generate new forms of collective action⁸, foster a sense of community, and connect with each other to initiate collective actions⁹. The social uses of the internet have fostered public debate and the articulation of issues: more voices are heard, and they can reach the public sphere¹⁰.

CSOs “seek to participate in public life through social mobilization, and in that sense, [ICT]¹¹ media become instruments for disseminating and legitimizing their social actions and political agendas”¹². Within these media, social media platforms represent an opportunity to reach more people, extend their message, and raise awareness of issues of general interest. The immediacy with which information is mobilized and the ease of massifying or popularizing content are also attractive to CSOs.

⁷Himmelboim, I. (2011). Civil Society and Online Political Discourse: The Network Structure of Unrestricted Discussions, *Communication Research*.

⁸In May 2021, for example, amid intense days of social protests, social media became a space for organizing demonstrations and sharing information about human rights, as well as for denouncing police abuse. At that time, civil society organizations called for platforms to ensure favorable conditions for access and participation in digital environments, taking into account the local context and ensuring that “content moderation mechanisms were relaxed to prevent the interruption of legitimate complaints that arise during protests”. (Fundación Karisma. (2021). [Fallas de internet, bloqueos de redes y censura de contenidos en protestas: Realidades y retos para el ejercicio de los derechos humanos en los contextos digitales](#).

⁹Chu, Y. W., & Tang, J. T. H. (2005). The Internet and civil society: Environmental and labour organizations in Hong Kong. *International Journal of Urban & Regional Research*, pág. 29.

¹⁰Itai Himmelboim, *ibid*.

¹¹Information and Communication Technologies.

¹²Montoya, C. (2009). [Medios de comunicación y organizaciones de la sociedad civil: fortaleciendo alianzas para la democracia y los derechos humanos en América Latina](#).

The role of organizations on digital platforms digital platforms play a relevant role by facilitating “knowledge, human resources, and social networks that contribute to reputation-building and the construction of trust and credibility [while also]... helping to move from information to social action through campaigns, programs, or awards”¹³. This type of participation can be termed “digital activism”, which refers to “the participation and organization of citizens using ICT to disseminate, promote, and defend various civil, political, social, and cultural causes, often seeking a particular goal related to the policies or decisions of authorities”¹⁴.

This digital activism is mediated by each platform’s own rules regarding uploadable content, content most attractive to audiences, or platforms’ restrictions on some topics of public interest¹⁵, account authentication processes, and the enforcement of copyright laws, at least. It’s also mediated by content moderation and curation practices to enforce their community standards.

This work is an initial exploration seeking to understand the challenges faced by social organizations and independent media in Colombia to disseminate their content related to their work on social media platforms. It’s the result of an approach to the discourse of some of them and is not intended to be generalized as a statement of the entire civil society of the country. This report aims to make visible the feelings of the interviewees in order to initiate discussions among various actors about digital activism.

¹³Montoya, C. (2009) [Medios de comunicación y organizaciones de la sociedad civil: fortaleciendo alianzas para la democracia y los derechos humanos en América Latina](#). p. 165

¹⁴Azuela, M & Tapia M. (2013). Construyendo Ciudadanía desde el Activismo Digital: Guía Práctica para multiplicar la incidencia en Políticas Públicas desde las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación, p. 11.

¹⁵An example could be mentioned regarding the handling of information related to Covid-19. <https://www.facebook.com/business/help/1123969894625935?id=434838534925385> (Consulted on January 20, 2024).

00.

Methodology

To achieve the objective proposed in this research exercise, a qualitative methodology was applied that included an approach to primary and secondary sources through the deployment of three components: A mapping of information, conducting interviews and a practical testing exercise to delve deeper. in the previous findings.

In that sense, it began with a search for documentary sources on some topics such as content moderation, the role of civil society on digital platforms and community standards on social networks, among others. This mapping allowed us to know in more detail what the panorama of these themes is, the relationship between them and their application to the Colombian context. Afterwards, a mapping was carried out of organizations, independent media and social content creators with a presence on different digital platforms and interest in transmitting their experiences of publishing content and paying for advertising.

Then, two research instruments were applied: first, semi-structured interviews with a flexible questionnaire that allowed participants to discuss their experiences with platforms throughout their work in different organizations. The second was an advertising, publication, and content tracking exercise with three social organizations to demonstrate barriers and impacts in the content advertising process on digital platforms.

As part of the interviews, eight civil society organizations, two independent media outlets and a leader who created social content whose work is related to community processes, local and national elections, content from NGOs and multilateral institutions participated. In their diversity of sizes and stakes, they have different scales with respect to their impact: some with national scope, others with emphasis on the rights of specific communities, others that are proposed as research or strategic litigation centers that work at a community and regional scale. By targeting different populations, their communication strategies and the levels of complexity and

size that define them are diverse. The interviews were carried out with the people in charge of the roles of coordination or direction of communications, press, digital strategies or creation, design and publication of content within each organization/medium interviewed. In some cases they were also made to the person in charge of managing the media.

Subsequently, this exploratory exercise continued with testing the scope and blockages of the guideline through payment for content advertising with three of the interlocutors who were part of the interviews. Exactly, information was sought on two issues: first, to investigate whether the fact that organizations advertised their own content increased their visibility on social networks, as well as the possibilities of blocking, or if obstacles were found due to violations of the advertising rules. of this type of content. To do this, advertisements were created in concert from six different products. The second issue was to compare the behavior of these contents with respect to some dimensions that appeared relevant in the interviews with actors.

To address this objective, testing on the scope and blocks of advertising was conducted with three of the interlocutors who participated in the first component of the research. This phase, as an exploratory experiment, consisted of creating ads in a concerted manner based on six different products. The goal was to compare their behavior regarding dimensions that emerged as relevant in the interviews with actors.

Considering that in this exploration different feelings regarding the platforms were collected, the participants requested the anonymity of their names and their organizations; Therefore, throughout this report numbers will be used to differentiate them and a reference will be made to their work focus. Details about the organizations interviewed can be found as annexes A and B.

The presentation of the results of this exploratory exercise is divided into five sections: In the first, the daily challenges that social organizations assume in their task of disseminating content on social media platforms are presented. The second includes all the barriers that organizations face when they publish specific content. In the third, the relationship between organizations and platforms is studied, especially with Meta and, in the fourth section, the adaptation practices of organizations are collected. Finally, the results of the posting exercise carried out with three organizations that also participated in the interviews are presented.

00.

Conceptual clarifications

When discussing content moderation, it will be understood as a broad process of applying community standards¹⁶ and imposing sanctions or penalties when content violates these standards. This process involves various techniques such as account blocking or deletion, information hiding or shadowbanning, and reducing reach, among others¹⁷.


Additionally, algorithms are mentioned as mechanisms designed for enforcing community standards that can acquire different recommendation functions and invisibly regulate the massive content on platforms. In different interviews, reference is also made to the types of content by platform. In this regard, reels are mentioned, which are short videos ranging from 15 to 90 seconds on Instagram, a tweet, which is a short post on X, and posts, which is another way of mentioning publications made on any platform.

During the interviews, the categorization of content when scheduling advertising was mentioned several times. This refers to the selection step required when configuring an advertisement, especially on Meta, of the theme that the publication or campaign is covering. The category options provided by the platform are: credit -offering credit cards, loans, or anything related to credit management-; employment -job offers or services-; housing -services for renting or buying housing-; and social issues, elections, or politics -candidates, elections, social issues-¹⁸. The latter, highlighted by several social organizations, is defined by Meta as:

¹⁶Fundación Karisma: [Pistolas contra celulares](#). Pág: 33

¹⁷Observacom: [Moderación Privada de contenidos en internet y su impacto en el periodismo](#). Pág: 11.

¹⁸Meta Business Help Center: [Choosing a special Ad Category](#).



“Advertisements made by, on behalf of, or about a candidate for public office, a political figure, a political party, or supporters of the outcome of an election for public office. Or about any electoral initiative, referendum, or vote, including ‘Get out and vote’ campaigns. Advertisements regulated as political advertising. About social issues wherever the ad is placed. Social issues are contentious topics that are intensely debated, may influence the outcome of an election, or relate to existing or proposed legislation. Advertisements about social issues seek to influence public opinion through discussions, debates, or advocacy for or against important issues, such as health and civil and social rights.”¹⁹

¹⁹Meta Business Help Center: [Choosing a special Ad Category.](#)



01. Findings

1. Challenges of Being on Social Media Platforms

All organizations understand that social media has become a powerful stage where disputes, consensus-building, and decision-making take place, but it also offers a population reach and inclusivity that was previously difficult to achieve²⁰. The objectives that social organizations have on platforms differ from those of individual users. CSOs represent an association related to a specific cause, meaning that the content they publish and the interactions they engage in are coordinated by multiple individuals and are guided by the organization's focus.

In the interviews, people from the organizations made their motivations explicit:

“So it is not only about telling what products or what projects the organization has, but also trying to build communication that is useful to the public about the information we produce, for example, with issues that are happening, we have been talking about missing people, we have supported to the Truth and Legacy Commission. (Interview No. 3 CINEP)

Organizations also acknowledge that fulfilling these motivations is not as straightforward as it might be for an individual user, especially when it comes to sensitive social issues such as abortion, responsible substance use, or violence, among others, which may be perceived as messages that violate the community standards of each platform.

“Many times, the community standards of social media are ambiguous or extend the limits of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights or simply are not designed for the Latin American context, much less for social protest. This significantly limits the possibilities of expression within the platforms.”²¹

²⁰The strike of 2021 was a demonstration of the potential of platforms as spaces for advocacy: “Social media, which in their everyday use are intended to be ‘family-friendly’ environments, suddenly during protests that turn violent and involve different actors, become stages for denouncing human rights violations and tensions and significant frustrations are created.” (Fundación Karisma: [Pistolas contra Celulares](#) Pág.: 33).

²¹Fundación Karisma: [Pistolas contra Celulares](#) Pág.: 33.

1.1. Tone of Organizations on Digital Platforms

In Colombia, digital activism has taken different forms: from particular accounts on social networks that are dedicated to supporting specific causes, to the physical mobilization of hundreds of people in response to current moments.

In the interviews, the organizations stated that their participation in digital platforms seeks to generate an impact through their content. An organization like Temblores, for example, which makes publications about police violence in protests, or the Foundation for Press Freedom which makes publications rejecting attacks on press freedom by public officials, have positioned themselves publicly and have acquired a character with the one that is recognized from the outside.

Thus, the tone used in publications is crucial for this positioning, as mentioned in some interviews:

“There are always fears that we are an organization that must appear serious, that has a very great responsibility, and well, it cannot just (...) do whatever it wants, so to speak, in digital terms. An influencer can do whatever they want, and that’s it, and their audience likes it, but as an organization, I feel that there are precautions, barriers that we cannot take lightly.”²²

Part of the legitimacy that these organizations and media outlets have achieved is based on the rigor of their content and the ways in which they communicate and conduct their work in digital media and platforms. However, this “seriousness”, as identified in several interviews, presents significant challenges when it comes to pursuing various strategies that could be more effective in expanding dissemination and interaction with content in general. One media outlet refers to these limitations as “ceilings” that they themselves cannot “cross”:

“I feel that we are interesting and try to be entertaining, but since we don’t provoke as much indignation and are rigorous, I think that’s a ceiling for us that we obviously don’t want to cross, and that means that several of the contents we produce never become completely viral”²³

These limits make it more difficult for organizations to experiment with different formats than those commonly used, even though they recognize that innovation is necessary when producing content, as mentioned by one of the interviewees dedicated to content creation:

²²Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

²³Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

“I think there is a bit of fear of experimenting, of delving deeper into the digital world, and they continue with very old-school things. So, for example, the super long editorial video can be scheduled, but we already know that due to the format, it won't do so well”.²⁴

On the other hand, the interviews highlighted that the formats favored by platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have a direct impact on how organizations communicate the content they work on, sometimes more than audience trends:

“I feel that the platforms set a very clear parameter in the narrative style we should have. So, we spend our time reading about how algorithms work, what is being boosted²⁵ the most, the type of content that works the best, and that doesn't just refer to the audiences, but really what the algorithm is giving more weight to. So, we've stopped doing carousels and infographics and started making videos in reel format (...) and in the end, they all have repercussions on the content, right? On the information you omit, on the amount you have to sacrifice.”²⁶

This influence of formats on communication also creates phenomena of aesthetic homogenization and, sometimes, of content in organizations that work on similar topics. In other words, graphic design trends are created in publications that make them very similar to each other. According to one of the organizations:

“If I work on an LGBT topic, almost everyone uses the same Canva template, the same rainbow, the same characters, I don't know what else. So, you don't know which organization that belongs to, you don't really know what they're trying to say, how they're trying to say it. So, it's like these kinds of things in terms of design and communication allow all that could be very powerful and cool about each social organization to be lost in the void. Because the same image remains everywhere, I see the same thing everywhere, so there's no interest either in reviewing that unless it's something very particular”.²⁷

The ways in which each organization responds to specific formats and how platform guidelines direct the possibilities of disseminating their messages towards common places also relate to other issues such as the availability of resources for communication strategies and the freedom they have to produce creatively speaking.

²⁴Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

²⁵In reference to expanding the reach of content within the metrics specific to the platforms.

²⁶Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

²⁷Interview No. 8. Community-based organization with national coverage.

1.2. Content self-censure

Another recurring issue mentioned in the interviews was the limitations on expression experienced by social organizations when making their posts on digital platforms. In the interviews, reference was made to the risk of having their content removed or its reach and visibility reduced for mentioning topics that algorithms consider to be violations of their community standards. In this regard, organizations sometimes adjust their language to what, based on their own experiences with content restrictions, is possible to publish on the platform without facing any consequences. One person mentioned: “We haven’t published some things due to self-censorship”²⁸.

Several cases were recounted. Here is one example:

“Last week, we were making a video about how political campaigns are financed and the last part was ‘That money can come from illegal sources’, so we put some lines of coke, which were actually flour, and I thought maybe it’s too explicit now. It doesn’t seem serious to me, because we are really talking about that, but we decided to remove it and finally looked for another way, more metaphorical than the concept of coke, because we know that otherwise our publication will be taken down. So, we have adjusted ourselves to certain things.”²⁹

The interviews also mentioned the lack of information from platforms regarding the sanctions for published content. When content is removed or subject to other types of penalties, organizations do not know which rule was violated or what the infringement consisted of:

“The platform never tells us why [we were warned about content demanded by users]. Not like ‘the content you posted is subject to hate speech,’ which could give you a little more information, but you almost have to guess why, and that’s where self-censorship starts to happen. This week when that happened to us, we were like, ‘well, we’re not going to write drugs anywhere,’ and if we want to write it, let’s say substances, let’s start with the old reliable of writing with numbers instead of letters, like we’re not going to be so challenging this week.”³⁰

According to media outlets and NGOs related to journalism interviewed, the dissemination of reporting exercises has also encountered these restrictions from Meta, especially when it comes to events related to armed conflict or violence.

²⁸Interview No. 6. Community media outlet.

²⁹Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national cover²⁶Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

³⁰Interview No. 5. National campaign.

“The cases we hear about journalists having their content taken down, there have been several, they have had acts of censorship and the issue. They have had to deal directly with Meta and it hasn’t been easy, so for example, they took down content because the headline had a word like ‘blood’ or ‘paramilitary,’ or ‘armed group,’ for those kinds of things, sometimes they took down the content.”³¹

Content sanctions occur even when organizations have gone through the accreditation process as civil society organizations. Some of them perceive that going through that process seems to increase content control: “Recognizing yourself as an organization before Meta brings other challenges and even another series of blocks that lead to self-censorship”³².

Another person mentioned:

“When you get into this category of organization and do everything the platform tells you, in the end, it’s still subject to validation of what the platform considers politically correct within that category of social content.”³³

In any case, the verification process also involves the submission of personal, sensitive, and internal data that concerns some organizations:

“It is important to say that the fact that they ask you for so many documents to prove that you are an organization also implies that you expose yourself on the same platform, right? Because you upload IDs, you upload addresses, you upload chamber of commerce documents.”³⁴

1.3. Blocking of features, account deletion, and decrease in visibility

On the other hand, one of the constant fears that organizations and media outlets have is that their accounts will be permanently blocked or deleted. These fears originate from experiences of alerts on the platforms. One organization mentions “block buzzes” referring to feature blocks and the decrease in the visibility of stories at certain times. They understand that the variation in platform functionality is an implicit notification from Facebook and Instagram that they are doing something against the platform’s operating logic.

³¹Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

³²Interview No. 5. National campaign.

³³Interview No. 5. National campaign.

³⁴Interview No. 5. National campaign.

“The platform doesn’t always notify you, it doesn’t tell you like, ‘Hey, you’re doing this wrong,’ but it starts sending you what I would call buzzes of blocking, suddenly you can’t do a live broadcast. We started a campaign (...) and suddenly they started blocking our actions, so we couldn’t do a live broadcast. At one point, I remember telling my peers, ‘it’s like a black box, this social media, because we couldn’t see stories and then they also started to take us out of the traffic of the stories that our audience sees. We were left there stuck in a remote place on the platform where you exist, but you can’t do anything, we couldn’t comment, we lasted several days like that but we weren’t blocked. So, I tell you that we were getting these buzzes like warnings, like ‘calm down, we’re going to block you and if you don’t understand then look at this, you won’t be able to do this anymore.’”³⁵

In addition to these “buzzes”, another organization mentioned that they have perceived the hiding of their content despite maintaining their profiles as they always had. According to the interviewees, the visibility decreases noticeably without any explanation.

“Shadowbanning sometimes makes us very suspicious of what might be happening, because the drop in interactions or performance of publications is significant, and even though we try not to let the profile sleep, we have seen on several occasions that there is a big drop in the visibility and interactivity of some publications.”³⁶

Several organizations also identified that for platforms there are words that cannot be mentioned, because when they use them, there are restrictions on content or a drop in the metrics of certain publications that contain them.

“We know that there are many words that are blocked by the platform, but sometimes they are words that we use in the context of our work. So, for example, when we talk about sexual orientation or gender identity, just putting the word ‘sex’ in the category, for example, if we say ‘on the ID card, the sex category...’ sometimes we feel that just that alone can significantly reduce visibility.”³⁷

This phenomenon was pointed out as something that happens more frequently on the TikTok platform, which is not owned by Meta. However, the experience of this platform is relevant because, as at least three of the interviews emphasized, Instagram is basing several of its latest advances and updates on TikTok.

³⁵ Interview No. 5. National campaign.

³⁶ Interview No. 8. A community-based organization with national coverage.

³⁷ Interview No. 8. A community-based organization with national coverage.

1.4. Limitations due to copyrighted content

Another barrier that constantly arises in the interviews is the sanctions imposed by the platforms for the use of copyrighted content, particularly soundtracks and songs. The publication of pieces containing songs leads directly to posts being blocked or deleted, regardless of whether their use is non-commercial or the context of the publication³⁸.

“Instagram does not recognize the right to quote, so sometimes we quote something, for example, we are using the song ‘Poisoned Fish’ as a soundtrack not for commercial purposes, but because by quoting that song we can do an investigation on mercury and we have to be super careful and add other layers of rhythms and use only a very small fragment so that they don’t take it down. I sometimes feel that it’s just that, it’s like the machine hears it and takes it down and doesn’t care about the context, doesn’t care if you’re analyzing the song.”³⁹

The possibility of using certain content, which may be free for most users, is conditioned on authentication by Instagram and Facebook as a social organization. This imposes restrictions on content creation. Considering the pressure for innovative or trending posts, another organization mentioned:

“Our pages, both on Facebook and Instagram, are categorized as social organizations and that doesn’t allow us to use anything related to copyright, not a song, not a video, not mentions, so we feel that there are many barriers for us to really reach other people.”⁴⁰

Restrictions on the use of copyrighted content not only have implications for the specific publication in which it is used, but can also mean the disappearance of dozens of past publications, as described by another digital content manager about the migration of a profile between categories⁴¹:

³⁸Automated detection of copyrighted content in these contexts has been investigated before. It was found that it does not consider various aspects such as content already in the public domain that can be freely used and the use of material from the original authors themselves. Additionally, the explanation provided by the platforms is not sufficient to understand why a copyright infringement is being committed. (Fundación Karisma: Detección automática de derechos de autor: Una herramienta de desigualdad).

³⁹Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

⁴⁰Interview No. 8. A community-based organization with national coverage.

⁴¹Instagram has three types of profiles: personal, creator, and business. https://creators.instagram.com/?locale=es_ES (Consulted on January 20, 2024).

“When you have a creator profile and you switch it to a business profile, the benefits of each one are totally different. So, we were going to make that change to the business profile and since it was a creator profile and had trendy audios in some videos, when we switched it to a business profile several of those contents were lost because the platform took them down for not having permission to use these audios, and they were taken down, I mean, they didn’t even just remove the audio, they took them down and they were erased.”⁴²

1.5. Rhythms of platform updates

The speed at which the interface and tools of Meta’s platforms change was a problem pointed out by the communications teams of the organizations. The explanation that arises is the lack of information about it and the difficulties of adapting to these updates in a short time.

“I feel that there is a widespread discomfort because of all the times that Meta’s interface changes. Now it’s the meta Business Suite and it almost feels like starting over. Each one of the things, you already knew where they were, in the ad section, you already knew where the statistics were, you already knew how to compare the metrics. Now, in this eagerness to always be improving, they do very strange things (...) you don’t understand who they apply to, or how they work, and they also do them in parts, so every day there’s a new innovation.”⁴³

The internal changes in the platforms are happening at a speed that surpasses organizations and has involved restructuring the daily work of the people who work in the communication teams. This generates a certain degree of uncertainty⁴⁴, especially because the organizations stated that there is no support from the platforms. At this point, organizations highlighted the private nature of the platforms:

“Saying that we are going to transform or change is difficult when we have to adapt to algorithms that the platforms are changing every month and they do it because they are companies that are benefiting from it. If someone catches on to the algorithm already, well then their business ends.”⁴⁵

⁴² Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

⁴³ Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

⁴⁴ That uncertainty has been investigated before, termed as “broad regimes of instability,” which compel content creators to constantly devise formulas to avoid the punishment of invisibility. (Brooke Erin Duffy, Annika Pinch, Shruti Sannon, and Megan Sawey: The Nested Precarities of Creative Labor on Social Media. *Social Media + Society* 2021 7:2. P. 8).

⁴⁵ Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.

1.6. Low availability of resources

Budgetary limitations are a common barrier for the organizations and media outlets interviewed. Although social media provides a relatively inexpensive means to reach a global audience, social organizations often lack the financial resources needed to implement advertising campaigns. This can affect the ability of these organizations to amplify their message and reach a wider audience. Financial resources are necessary for organizations to design a communication line for social media, produce and design the pieces to be published, and support the operation of the platforms and the payment of advertising⁴⁶. This last issue will be addressed in the following chapter.

Having a constant income intended for social media presence is difficult considering that civil society organizations in Colombia have diversified sources of funding ranging from international cooperation to state or even private sources, and that, generally, they are divided by specific projects that do not include communication items. The interviewees highlighted the lack of resources and mentioned:

“Financing is always a topic in organizations and for the level of content rhythms and the diversity of media and platforms there are, it is very difficult to keep up. At the moment we have approximately eight different social media accounts and the ideal thing is that we have some periodicity, also that different objectives are established for each of the platforms. In practice, that is work, it is time, and it is a lot of effort that for an organization is very difficult to cover.”⁴⁷

This effort is more difficult for small organizations, which fund their work based on contributions:

“We have never had enough resources to have a permanent work team, so, really, our way of operating has been with a voluntary team (...) we don't have someone constantly like a media manager who is constantly publishing, but rather we distribute that task among ourselves.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ All groups and their members face costs associated with producing a content line”. Schradie, J. The Digital Activism Gap: How Class and Costs Shape Online Collective Action, Social Problems. P. 53

⁴⁷ Interview No. 2. Civil society organization with national coverage.

⁴⁸ Interview No. 6. Community media outlet.

Understanding platform updates are procedures in which they have had to rely on external advice or support:

“It has not only been the human effort, the time, the paperwork, connecting so that the platform can validate things like a trade register, telephone number, but also the outsourcing that this implies, which is also reflected in an economic resource.”⁴⁹

1.7. Lack of consideration of CSOs by platforms

It is clear that there is a diversity of actors participating in digital platforms, and organizations are just one part of the myriad of sectors represented there. However, organizations have mentioned a lack of interest on the part of platforms in understanding their role within them. This was expressed by one of the interviewees:

“Being on Instagram is like knowing you’re going to be the kid they leave stranded over there. They’re never going to pay attention to you. The tool won’t pull things for you. It will pull store themes and a bunch of tools to help entrepreneurs. I feel that, I don’t know if it happens to the media, maybe so, but to organizations, I think even more so, and it’s that our content isn’t as welcome on Instagram.”⁵⁰

This is evidenced by small samples, but according to the interviewed individuals, they are indicative of the intentions of this specific platform. For example, the categories under which short videos, reels, are classified:

“When you post a reel, you can add themes and there isn’t any theme that could even remotely be related to what we do, so we wonder: should I put it under ‘health and beauty’? But there’s nothing, there’s not even like media or news, and that also speaks of a clear directive that Instagram has (...) I don’t think they forgot to add the category, but they’re not interested in promoting this type of content. Because the themes you can choose, I suppose they are also chosen so that it reaches certain people, so we have felt that barrier, Instagram won’t give you organic reach for the type of information you disseminate.”⁵¹

⁴⁹Interview No. 5. National campaign.

⁵⁰Interview No. 2. Civil society organization with national coverage.

⁵¹Interview No. 2. Civil society organization with national coverage.

All organizations emphasized the problematic nature of content categorization on Meta platforms, and some mentioned that these difficulties increase on Google.

“In the categories for reels, there are never social themes, which are the ones we and other organizations produce. We don’t have political themes, the themes are too aimed at Instagrammers (...) I put ‘Relationship with oneself’.”⁵²

“These categories, for example, reels, are very much designed, I think, for private companies or brands, but not for social organizations, and that’s not it, so I mark those categories when I upload reels randomly: healthy living, visual arts...”⁵³

The lack of thematic recognition by Instagram is compounded by organizations’ perception that platforms do not apply the same standards to all content disseminated within them. In other words, community guidelines are not applied to all content in the same way. As expressed by one of the interviewees:

“Something happens with the ‘live’ videos, and it’s that content that is explicitly censorable goes viral. Example: people with content that may be sexual, morbid things, especially the weirdest videos are videos of little girls dancing. I mean, that’s very random. So there’s the question, well, that’s not censorable, but when we talk about activism or human rights, it is censorable?”⁵⁴

⁵²Interview No. 3. National coverage think tank.

⁵³Interview No. 8. A community-based organization with national coverage.

⁵⁴Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.

02. Specific barriers of content advertising

Advertising on social media is useful for organizations to promote something specific and to reach audiences that are very difficult to reach organically. Not all organizations interviewed advertise, and of those that do, not all do so consistently. Additionally, the interviews found narratives that coincide in finding barriers at different stages of the advertising process due to its nature as social organizations.

2.1. Obstacles with advertising categorization

The advertising process requires categorization of the content to be disseminated. At this step, the person planning the advertising is asked what type of content will be published. For social organizations, the only category that fits the content they publish is social or political content⁵⁵, which is generally the option they choose. However, the organizations participating in this research have faced negative consequences when choosing that category.

Among the mentioned consequences is the decrease in visibility mentioned earlier, which is exacerbated when it comes to paid content. One organization stated, for example:

“I know I’m going to publish content that talks about social, political issues, whatever, and if I don’t check the box for ‘it’s a social, political issue,’ it automatically takes it down, I mean, it says this content is not allowed according to the rules. So

⁵⁵ https://www.facebook.com/business/help/298000447747885&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1706988607620637&usg=AOvVaw02A_g3hEdvE6bEzSO5NrYX. (Consulted on January 20, 2024).

when I do it again and choose the option ‘this is social content,’ I do think that also limits the platform’s reach a bit. The algorithm plays a supremely important role here because I think it mainly reaches people who are focused or who have social, political issues on their “timeline”. But it generally doesn’t reach other audiences that we would like to reach.”⁵⁶

Advertisements have also been rejected without apparent reason: “There are several ads that haven’t been accepted, but there’s also no clear reason for them to deny them”⁵⁷

“We had to activate this issue of social ads because there was a time when, of course, we tried to pay for ads and it was rejected. It said: ‘This is a social issue related to elections, politics.’ So that was another thing, a while ago we had to register as an organization in order to advertise social issues that are basically what we deal with.”⁵⁸

The social and political content category has sometimes been interpreted as electoral content, which has greater restrictions. Another organization had difficulties in paying for advertising about their content in the electoral context:

“The biggest limitation we’ve had with Facebook is that during election periods we can hardly advertise anything, because everything is assumed to be campaign or political content and that’s what we cover. So it’s funny that we can’t advertise about that, because it’s basically what our content is about and it’s not because we’re campaigning for any candidate. Besides, it seems very strange to me because candidates spend millions on their digital campaigns on Facebook and they haven’t allowed us to advertise many of the things we wanted.”⁵⁹

Organizations also mentioned problems with other categories other than social and political content within the advertising process, such as the LGBT category, which meant not having the promised reach:

“There’s no category for sexual orientations, gender identities, but almost everything is LGBT community, it reaches a lot of people who have no idea what their particular interest in trans people is and sometimes we work on very specific issues.”⁶⁰

⁵⁶Interview No. 4. Civil society organization with national coverage.

⁵⁷Interview No. 2. Civil society organization with national coverage.

⁵⁸ Interview No. 3. National coverage think tank.

⁵⁹ Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

⁶⁰ Interview No. 8. A community-based organization with national coverage.

The restriction of specific words necessary to communicate the work of organizations was also mentioned in relation to advertising. This happened with words like “COVID” or “trans” on Instagram:

“When we were doing the one about mental health for transgender people, because it had the word ‘COVID’ we couldn’t advertise it. In some cases, for example, using the word ‘trans’ during times of protest also caused us (not in terms of advertising but also in general posts) many difficulties (...) It’s very complicated to talk openly about sexual and reproductive health, also about prevention mechanisms, for example, in HIV, you have to think very carefully about the words and everything, because we feel that this could end up in a big ban”.⁶¹

One organization referred to the difficulty with words also occurring in the Google search service:

“Google is very complex because globally there is an issue with birth control, we can’t talk about in vitro fertilization, for example, it’s a word that completely blocks it and this is complex because if we want to promote an in vitro fertilization service, it doesn’t let us. So the same thing was happening with HPV, until we already did the verification registration, as a health service provider and it allowed it, however, it still has certain restrictions with certain words, so it is much more complex on Google than on Meta.”⁶²

The organizations stated that the word restriction, which does not take into account its context, ignores the social pedagogy work carried out on the platforms, which is precisely one of the reasons for their presence there. Another relevant case mentioned was the following:

“We try to educate users or the audience about the importance of condom use, but it has also been a challenge because the algorithm does not understand what education is or does not differentiate what we want to do, which is to educate, and simply turns it into a purely sexual topic and blocks us. There we have had a much bigger barrier because we cannot say condom, we cannot say contraceptive, we cannot even sometimes talk about lubricant. So, the language we can use is increasingly limited, and it is much more complex.”⁶³

All the experiences reported discourage advertising. This, in turn, causes the projected reach for their specific content to decrease considerably: “When you know that they can ban or take it down, then you have to change the narrative and they don’t generate the greatest impact or the impact that one expects”.⁶⁴

⁶¹Interview No. 8. A community-based organization with national coverage.

⁶² Interview No. 11. Healthcare service provider.

⁶³ Interview No. 11. Healthcare service provider.

⁶⁴ Interview No. 4. Civil society organization with national coverage.

2.2. Skills and resources necessary for advertising

Previously mentioned was the difficulty organizations face in acquiring resources specifically directed at communication strategies on social media, having a budget for advertising is even more complex. The stories from the interviews agree that paying for advertisements is something that social organizations do sporadically when they can afford it and it is strictly necessary:

“Yes, we have done it [paid advertising], but it has been from some projects we have had, mainly to increase visibility. Last year we didn’t do it because none of the projects we had planned to advertise or generate greater visibility, so almost all the growth we have had in the last year has been more organic.”⁶⁵

Advertising also entails an investment in knowledge about the platforms because, as mentioned in the interviews, the process is not that simple. Therefore, it is necessary to have experts who carry out the advertising process: “People who know how to use segmentation and advertising tools more tend to be in the more commercial areas, so for content issues, those are skills that we do not have so developed”. Similarly, “Many social organizations do not have the economic capacity to hire communication experts who master these topics. That’s why there are companies dedicated solely to advertising, to managing advertising. You hire them and say ‘how much do you charge me, even if I have to pay extra for that task of doing the ads’. The communication teams of many social organizations work with volunteers or with people who are just starting out in their professional experience precisely because of the budgets they have”.⁶⁷

Likewise:

“Many social organizations do not have the economic capacity to hire communications people who master these topics. That’s why there are already companies dedicated only to advertising, to managing advertising. You hire and say ‘how much do you charge me, even if I have to pay the additional fee for the work of making the guidelines.’ The communications teams of many social organizations work either

⁶⁵Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

⁶⁶ Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

⁶⁷ Interview No. 8. A community-based organization with national coverage.

with volunteers or with people who are beginning their professional experience precisely because of the budgets they have.” (Interview No. 8. Community-based organization with national coverage.)

his, in turn, is related to the phenomenon that was explained in the section on the pace of platform updates: The speed with which Meta changes the ways in which advertising is made is a problem that discourages this exercise if it is taken into account that, for organizations, making guidelines is not a constant practice. Several of the people responsible for managing advertising in the organizations stated that every time they go to advertise they find a different platform because the interface has changed. And these are not necessarily intuitive processes.

“The continuous updating of the guideline interface is ‘a pebble in the shoe’. If advertising were as easy as publishing, believe me we would be advertising. But it is very discouraging, because you no longer have time to think about the pattern, during that time you focus on understanding the Goal.” (Interview No. 8. Community-based organization with national coverage.)

Likewise, in several interviews, people expressed that, despite being in charge of this task within the organization, they had to resort to tutorials, videos on other platforms or even close contacts who understood the process to guide them.

2.3. Questions about the usefulness of advertising

Social organizations express that advertising under these conditions implies a waste of effort, which is not reflected in a long-term growth of their audience. This scenario raises reflections for community media, which work with few resources in places far from the country’s urban centers and aim for content appropriation:

“In terms of metrics, it helped us a lot to have a ‘live’ with 3000 views, 5000-7000 views, even if 98% of those people did not watch 10 minutes of the ‘live’, but people really don’t stay. They didn’t see everything, they didn’t even see 3 seconds”.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Interview No. 3. National coverage think tank.

“It’s a bit of a false illusion of growth and that’s also a reflection of why you make an effort like that, so that a lot of people read you, or so that a lot of people replicate your content. Well, that’s a mental mirage”.⁶⁹

As mentioned before, Facebook and Instagram penalize users who do not classify their content within the existing categories. When comparing content categorized as social or political against content from other categories, organizations perceive a difference in the visibility level of the first category:

“I have seen in metrics the difference between paid content that is general compared to paid content under the category of political, social issues (...) on Facebook, every time you are going to give it an attribute that is either political, social (there are different attributes) it will always segment you much more than usual. Even without manually segmenting the audience when you set up the advertising. So, it is a barrier, without a doubt”.⁷⁰

These feelings of dissatisfaction have led organizations to seek strategies such as paying for advertising outside of what Meta offers and hiring replicators⁷¹ or content creators to have those “boosts” that Facebook or Instagram’s official advertising offers. One of the interviewees also stated that many of these content creators also have a negative opinion of Meta’s advertising: “they all said the same thing: ‘it doesn’t make sense’, it’s extremely expensive and doesn’t guarantee you reach, period”.⁷²

2.4. “Spoiling” the platform with advertising

In several interviews, it was mentioned that advertising content worked for the fulfillment of the objectives of organizations or media for a limited time, but they noticed that after using it several times, the reach decreased without finding an explanation, as if their audience had changed.

⁶⁹Interview No. 6. Community media outlet.

⁷⁰ Interview No. 4. Civil society organization with national coverage.

⁷¹ In this context, they refer to accounts that can expand the audience of certain content through their specific digital communities or their impact on certain types of populations.

⁷² Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.

“In general, advertising has not worked for us. It’s not what we do most, it’s not what we bet on the most. It worked with this format for a while, but we also feel that it’s a vicious circle, you put something in and it feels like if you don’t increase the amount next time, it will work less.”)

For cases of more or less continuous periods of advertising payment, there is another problem regarding the interaction of organic content and paid content identified by the research actors. In the words of one of them, advertising “spoils” the platform, which has consequences in the daily life of the account that is paying for it. The consequences are the increase in the minimum prices of the advertisements and results in the metrics that content managers identify as strange:

“You spoil the social media by paying for advertising and then what is not advertised does not have as much deployment as what is advertised (...) Then it was difficult, you had to row a lot to get interactions, to get people to connect with the content, even though it’s the same type of content, even though you think about things, you make the captions in such a way, and try different things (...) Facebook tells you ‘hey you forgot to pay, why aren’t you giving me money?’ and then the metrics go down”.⁷³

“The more you pay the platform and let them know you have the resources to pay, the minimum payment that your client increases because it says like, ‘this account has how to pay me’ and the algorithm starts to understand it that way”.⁷⁴

Advertising payment can also have negative consequences on the performance of organic content that was not advertised. This further discourages advertising for organizations that have experienced this situation and have conducted these analyses. Some organizations even delved further into their explorations to suspect different behaviors from the platforms to force users to continue paying for advertising. In an interview with someone with extensive experience in advertising in contexts other than social organizations, they stated:

⁷³Interview No. 3. National coverage think tank.

⁷⁴ Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

“Sometimes I infer that Meta inflated numbers because the interactions are minimal, so I thought: this is very strange, because at that moment I could see it more often and it was constant to be advertising (...) one didn’t know if sometimes there was a real conversion or if sometimes it was Meta, for example, you advertised interaction and the interaction was very random, you got messages from strange accounts, like you saw the profile of the user, the photo was a gray user photo with the silhouette of another lighter gray. And it was like ‘hello’, ‘hello’, ‘hello’, ‘hello’, many like that and I replied to continue the conversation and nobody replied”.⁷⁵

The interviews highlight many questions about these behaviors, which also cannot be resolved because there is no clarity regarding the actual functioning of the platforms.

2.5. National reach limit

Another barrier mentioned by one of the organizations was the exclusively national reach limit that advertising on Meta has for topics under the social content category. Within this category, it is not possible to take the organization’s campaigns beyond Colombia since it only limits segmentation options within the country. This has a negative impact on certain topics that are potentially of interest to audiences in other parts of the world.

“It only gives you reach within your geography, say Colombia. Under that umbrella of identifying that message as part of a social initiative, we cannot convey the message, for example, to Ecuador through advertising”.⁷⁶

“You cannot advertise your message to places outside your geography, so you cannot take messages to Peru, Ecuador, the United States to reach further. We want to make content in English, but then what happens? that someone in the country has to accept our content and that goes as advertising, so those things start to become complex”.⁷⁷

⁷⁵Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

⁷⁶ Interview No. 5. National campaign.

⁷⁷ Interview No. 4. Civil society organization with national coverage.

For this purpose, the only option they have seen as viable is to have allied organizations in these countries that act as peer replicators of that content, which are equally verified. However, the issue of paying for advertising specifically presents other types of difficulties for the actors who mentioned this possibility.

2.6. Difficulties in the payment process

Each platform has a procedure for paying for advertising. In the case of Facebook and Instagram, limitations were identified with the ways in which it is possible to make money transfers with implications for organizations. Generally, it is possible to make the transaction with a credit card. For organizations, this represents the need to have a credit card in the name of the organization, a condition that is almost impossible to achieve, especially for grassroots organizations. The adopted solution is for one of the people in the organization to assume the payment with their personal credit card, a situation that affects the tax situation of the person who lends their card.

In the experience of one of the organizations, the name of the head of press -who paid for the advertisements with their personal card- appeared in each of the paid publications as “advertisement paid by...” followed by the person’s own name:

“As the leader of the line or the team, I had to authenticate my data, and give the option of (because I am also the one who does the advertising) ‘This is a political advertisement’. So the advertisement came out as ‘ORGANIZATION NAME paid for MY NAME’ (...) when you advertise and advertise, political ads, social ads, etc. The option it gives you is like who is advertising. So, as I already have my authentication registered, I have to give it to myself as a person because it is not possible from the organization”.⁷⁸

Other organizations had this problem too:

“A colleague has to pay for the advertisement with her personal credit card, there is no other way. Being legally constituted does not mean having a credit card. We cannot access a credit card to pay five dollars twice a month for this. The expenses are greater than the benefit (...) one of the poor fools has to use their card and then face the hassle of paying back that person what they spent...”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Interview No. 4. Civil society organization with national coverage.

⁷⁹ Interview No. 6. Community media outlet.

“The bank does not allow us to have a credit card and many of the solutions for that is to have a credit card. Or have an account linked to PayPal or something like that that allows you to make the payment. But it doesn’t let us, so we ended up linking my account to Nequi⁸⁰ to the card and we made the payment through that, but to report that in the projects it was as if they had given me the money so that generated a lot of problems with the funders and for my income tax declaration.”⁸¹

Furthermore, considering that the financial resources of organizations come from diversified sources, advertising expenses must be justified in external audits, which makes justifying an expense even more complicated if an official invoice is not available.

“As far as I know, we are having problems in accounting with the Meta invoice because it is not an electronic invoice. But it sends you a receipt and that receipt says it has its offices in England. So I have been asked ‘and the electronic invoice?’ but there isn’t any⁸²”.

2.7. Decrease in Paid Content Visibility

Connected to the previous point, the issues encountered by organizations and media regarding the paid content process are not only visible in the rejections when submitting content for ads but also in the visibility effects of the content that does manage to pass Meta’s filters.

A common sentiment among the interviewed individuals was the feeling that intentional decreases in visibility occur with the paid content, and again, this has been a reason to stop paying consistently. As expressed by several individuals: “Recognizing yourself under certain platform configurations also begins to limit the content or especially the reach.”⁸³

En palabras de otra organización:

⁸⁰ Nequi: The application allows transactions between cell phones and obtaining a digital card.

⁸¹ Interview No. 8. A community-based organization with national coverage.

⁸² Interview No. 3. National coverage think tank.

⁸³ Interview No. 5. National campaign.

“Simply by pressing the button that this is a social political content, you’re already doing it. I mean, you’re already giving it a red flag right from the start. Not even when reviewing the content, because that’s before you start loading the content, I mean, before uploading the content, you’re already saying like ‘hey, well, yes, segment more and close the audience more because I’m going to make social paid content.”⁸⁴

In one of the cases, it was mentioned that one of the paid advertisements in an organization led to the total restriction of the advertisement from that profile since the platform interpreted the invitation to a debate event as a promotion of drug consumption and imposed a total restriction on the organization’s advertising from one of its interfaces: “The advertising that we were doing for this event was scheduled, but inviting people to connect and be part of the event and the platform used these advertisements as a promotion of consumer sale. (Interview No. 5. Campaign with national coverage).

It is important to clarify that organizations usually make an effort to choose very well the content they decide to publish. Not only because they involve an investment of a scarce resource, but because they do the exercise of filtering content that can cause complications in the daily operation of their accounts on the platforms. That is, organizations do not pay for content that they already know has problems or restrictions in the organic functioning of the platforms.

⁸⁴ Interview No. 4. Civil society organization with national coverage.

03.

Responses from Meta: Loneliness and Silence

The outlined panorama leaves feelings of dissatisfaction and many questions about the functioning of the platforms. In the interviews, individuals expressed that from their roles as representatives of organizations and independent media, they have tried on several occasions to contact Facebook and Instagram support. However, the responses have been described as delayed, insufficient, or non-existent. In some cases, the complaints about the support they have had are due to the difficulty of having their complaints processed in an automated manner. As described by one of them:

“Meta is like that referee who tells you that you’re doing something wrong, but doesn’t tell you why you’re doing it wrong. That’s a difficulty that I see in the issue of ads for organizations and I think in general. And it’s that the platform tells you ‘you’re not complying with the policies’.”⁸⁵

According to them, in the midst of these attempts to find some response, they found that: “We would send the explanation and the response times do not exist, they are too long or they are still super automated, so they don’t really understand what the arguments are.”⁸⁶

This reduces the expectations of finding efficient support or a response to several of their complaints, and often, as described, it creates a feeling of

⁸⁵ Interview No. 5. National campaign.

⁸⁶ Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

loneliness and silence that forces them to continue with their work despite unfair removals or problems on the platform. One of the interviews referred to it as:

“There is a feeling of abandonment as at the mercy of content creators without knowing what to do because I’m speaking against a wall that I’m not going to achieve anything with. And many times, I think it generates fatigue to fight, so we resign ourselves, they took it down, we lost the work, and well, let’s move on.”⁸⁷

The situation does not improve when support is sought from organizations that are paying for ads at the time they face the problem or when the inconvenience specifically refers to paid content:

“Trying to talk to someone from Meta is difficult, it’s like there is no one, and when someone or a Bot or whatever answers you, the response is still very open and you really don’t know how to act (...) The service the platform gives you is not personalized, they don’t say ‘Hey, and you’re doing this and we understand you’re an NGO’ or something like that, which would be the service one expects because ultimately you’re paying, I mean, no one is giving you anything for free.”⁸⁸

In one case, the support did not improve, even when one of the organizations that has a direct link with Meta -and that frequently resorts to ads- tried to contact the company to respond to an issue they had with paid content:

“Even there, having that closeness, having contacts, it is super difficult to achieve something and it takes a long time. And we have that contact, I don’t know what would happen with a media outlet from Guaviare, for example, that wants to do something, well, it ends up with a predetermined response from someone in India or a ‘robot’.”⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Interview No. 1. Independent media outlet with national coverage.

⁸⁸ Interview No. 5. National campaign.

⁸⁹ Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

On the other hand, one of the interviewees who had experience in advertising agencies, recounted that in one of the agencies they did have much more direct links with Meta, justified by the platform due to the amount of ads they paid for. This did give them a privileged opportunity to receive more concrete advice on them and to solve problems that arose. She recounted that, even with these privileges, the contact was not so constant:

“In the agency where I worked, there was a direct advisor from Meta who assisted us in cases of problems because they were very big brands. So I know there are things that are dealt with by someone, I don’t really know how to tell you if it’s a specific person or not, but there are already some more concrete pieces of advice (...) that person was, I think, in Puerto Rico. We met from time to time and he helped us, but he wasn’t always available; he only helped us process some things.”⁹⁰

It is also worth mentioning that the instance Meta has for cases that need review by external peers, known as the Oversight Board, was only mentioned once during the interviews. Its mention arose as a hypothetical and future response from one of the interviewed communication leaders who expressed that, in the absence of a response, these issues would have to be taken there at some point.

“We have considered, now I forget the name of this independent body that I think was born in 2018, which Meta set up to appeal processes with which they do not agree, in that that is our last instance, it is still a long and complex path (...) you can even stay there for a year, two years, three years, I don’t know, waiting for them to answer you. I mean, when they answer you, they will ask you for evidence and almost, in a legal process, I mean, it’s absurd.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ Interview No. 9. National civil society organization.

⁹¹ Interview No. 5. National campaign.



04. 

Coping and mitigation Strategies

In the midst of this context, organizations have developed their own strategies so as not to be forced to abandon digital platforms since they are very aware that currently it is very important to bet on their presence in these spaces.

The way in which they have built these strategies has been “by trying to see where the wall is. (Interview No. 3. Think tank with national coverage). As mentioned in one of the interviews, that is, without any planning and looking for answers that they cannot find anywhere else, something that the Reuters Institute had called “[platform bricolage](#)” for organizations throughout the Global South. . Thus, the actors who were part of this exploration exercise have their own repertoires of actions to continue working within these digital worlds without losing their direction.

The repeated question regarding the content that was going to be produced was: how do we communicate this? At least six of the organizations interviewed had this question as a constant reflection to guide them in the experimentations they were doing at the graphic level or content production for social platforms, Meta included. Thus, different tactics emerged from each organization and person responsible for communications. Although some could be classified as artisanal or empirical, they formed informal knowledge exchange networks that occurred in the midst of communities and work trajectories in environments other than civil society. One of the main strategies that emerged from the research is expanded upon below.

4.1 Constant Experimentation

Given the lack of clarity from the platforms regarding their functioning and content moderation, many organizations have chosen to constantly experiment with graphic lines, content, publication times, among others, on social media and digital environments. This has allowed them to reap interesting results in terms of visibility, growth, or interaction, which they have seen translated into impacting public opinion and strengthening their positions regarding the various issues they work on.

One of the areas where this experimentation has occurred is in the graphic design of content. Thus, organizations that were accustomed years ago to publishing long documents in the form of press releases have migrated to digital logics with more visual languages and greater capacity to be communicated to an audience that is constantly changing.

“This has to be in some way disruptive, but not only from the discourse but also from the way we are showing ourselves, in the graphics, in the colors (...) always at the forefront of what is being done in terms of content, exploring.” “This has to be in some way disruptive, but not only from the discourse but also from the way we are showing ourselves, in the graphics, in the colors (...) always at the forefront of what is being done in terms of content, exploring.”⁹²

More consistent and useful graphic lines that arise from different reflections on the communicability of content have been accompanied by trial and error processes in sound and audiovisual production, adapting to the demands of format migration in ways that are perceived to be aligned with their missionality. Within more consolidated organizations, more and more actions are taken to meet the need for the generation of new contents that are innovative and accepted by the platforms.

There have also been interesting games regarding trends on the same networks, in the combinations of information and complaints with different forms of entertainment. Without this meaning in most cases following trends while neglecting their work on platforms, several organizations have designed ways to shape their content towards formats and methodologies

⁹²Interview No. 5. National campaign.

that engage and challenge their audience, activating the information they construct in ways that interact with the dynamics they inhabit, with all its gray areas. One of these strategies was expressed by a content creator:

“These platforms are created as entertainment platforms. So if I come home at night to relax and see my phone, the last thing I want is to see a serious person talking to me about armed conflict data; I don’t know, so it’s like that was another challenge, maybe those topics are not so attractive, they are even heavy, and they are not designed for the platform, new ways have to be invented”.⁹³

There is also experimentation with the content order, that is, anchorages that can be made between publications with more reach to have a greater impact. One example mentioned was: “I need to move a video in a story, I know I have to upload a selfie afterwards because it’s something that people react to, and that starts to give it reach”⁹⁴. On the other hand, in the midst of the presented need to expand communication strategies, by the strongest organizations on networks, possibilities of attracting audiences with face-to-face strategies also stand out:

“We have to play with what we have at our disposal. I think there is also a reflection that we have made lately and it is also the digital channels that are important to replicate messages, to make them reach further. But we cannot forget the physical presence and the physical message that can be given to people, because that is another way that I think can grow and it is like getting closer to people, as it was done before on the street, a little bit doing that activism too.”⁹⁵

⁹³ Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.

⁹⁴ Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.

⁹⁵ Interview No. 5. National campaign.

4.2 Follow-up and Exchange of Experiences

To engage in constant experimentation, research on platforms and continuous monitoring of what is happening with the content of each organization on networks is necessary. Constantly evaluating the formats that are gaining more reach, the words or tactics with which there are blockages by the platforms, is essential to come to understand the functionalities of the algorithms and their successive transformations. This exercise is vital for certain organizations and media to synchronize and adapt the investment of their resources to align their efforts for the benefit of reach or interaction. For example,

“Something happens with Instagram: the algorithm is not the same for everyone and it is changing all the time. For example, for me, it has never been a problem for me to say words like ‘youth’, but I know someone who works with content creation and their Instagram videos have been taken down for using the word ‘youth’. So it’s like that content moderation also depends on the algorithm that the account has. How do you know what algorithm you have? That is not known, I mean, people are exploring all the time, exploring.”⁹⁶

It has been fundamental to exchange experiences among organizations, among communication managers, and among independent content creators. Relating what happens to them in their day-to-day work with platforms has allowed some organizations to situate themselves in the specific workings of the platforms and open up possibilities for embarking on more informed paths individually. This is an exercise that does not happen so often, due to the same occupations of the organizations, it is difficult for all of them to meet, however, particular cases were mentioned that demonstrate that this exchange is possible from careful monitoring of platform metrics.

⁹⁶ Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.

4.3. Strategic use of paid content

As mentioned in previous sections, some organizations expressed their disbelief in paying for ads as an automatic way to achieve objectives. For this reason, organizations have preferred to resort to a more concrete use of it, reserving it for very specific cases where they have already perceived that it works.

When a paid content is blocked or rejected by the platforms, many simply re-upload it with a different design or by changing words they consider might be the possible reasons for rejection. “Delete it and re-upload it by removing either the subtitles or removing words, sometimes videos are filtered, but then they are taken down, or what the platforms do is mute it.”⁹⁷

In other cases, when possible, they play with the social content category -previously mentioned as problematic- and the limits it has when verifying content as effectively related to these topics:

“We have to play not to put that tag on the message, I mean, sacrifice that tag to be able to target a larger audience, (...) If we want to reach a little further, if we want to take the content beyond our geography, then we have to play not to do it with that category because we don’t have anyone elsewhere who we can tell, yes, look, join our network and accept that content. It’s a bit complex, but I think it’s also about learning to play with what you have and seeing how this is also consolidating.”⁹⁸

In specific cases of ads restriction of a profile, related campaigns or pages that the organization has are used to leverage the blocked profile. Thus, there were occasions where campaigns were migrated from one profile to another due to the impossibility of keep doing so from where it had been planned, even if the other profile had a theme that was not entirely related to the one of the publications.

⁹⁷ Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.

⁹⁸ Interview No. 5. National campaign.

4.4. Paid content as part of a communication strategy

Several organizations emphasized that the decision to pay for ads or not must be articulated as part of a strong and well-constructed communication strategy, since this is what ultimately determines the paths taken to achieve an objective in digital environments:

“Having paid content and doing digital ads, especially in communication issues in social organizations, is just a tactic, which cannot be seen as a great strategy.”⁹⁹

This argument was reinforced from another interview:

“That ad fee is not the only thing that helps you move content, but rather that the investment in that content, from the team, from the designer, if it’s the person who writes them, how they write them, how we think about them, is reflected in the reach that those organic contents have. (...) we don’t advertise all the content, we do so for very specific content.”¹⁰⁰

The actions within communication strategies were described as a give and take to respond to the fluid trends in network consumption but also to the changing policies of the platforms where content is being published. The term “playing” with the content was often used to be able to understand from there what works and what doesn’t so much.

“Identifying that one had to start playing with words and not say, for example, armed conflict, I mean, gesturing it, that the lips can be seen or putting it with numbers, putting abortion with a ‘4’, the platform also begins to identify it, so it’s all about ‘How do we start talking about these topics?’ In another institution where I worked, there was a clearer strategy, and it is how we think about strategies to be able to talk about these topics, not censor ourselves, and that the message is clear, that has always been the biggest challenge.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Interview No. 4. Civil society organization with national coverage.

¹⁰⁰ Interview No. 5. National campaign.

¹⁰¹ Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.

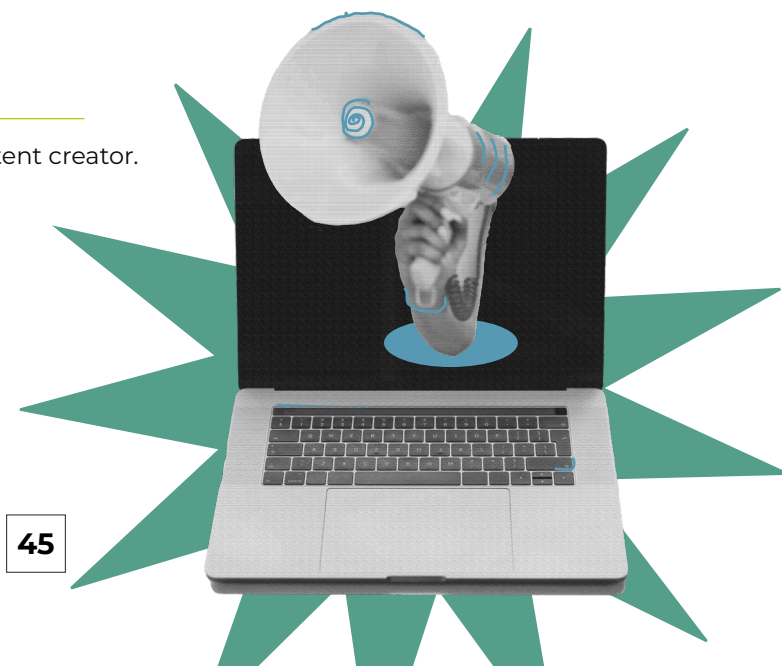
One of the common lines of these mentioned experiments has been to play with the different articulations of the work of organizations, whether in defense of human rights or strategic litigation, with other people outside the organization who are dedicated to projects on social media. Here, replicators, campaign *champions*, and independent content creators are of great importance

Categories such as social marketing or info activism have also emerged to describe these new perspectives and strategies for communication. Just as notions inscribed within professions have lost relevance for some contexts, such as the search for journalistic neutrality:

“With this content creation, what the platforms say is ‘We need to connect with people, with a face, with a person who speaks in a very specific way, with a very specific and dynamic style. So here it is important that content creator, that person who specifically connects with the audience and is telling people something very specific. And that implies opinions. I mean, an organization cannot expect to find an objective content creator because if they mobilize what they mobilize, it’s because they mobilize it with their opinion.’¹⁰²

Thus, in this field of “content creation” by new roles of disseminators and creators, significant challenges have arisen for communication in general and the dissemination of content. Challenges that some of the actors use to argue that changes are necessary in the way organizations and the professionals involved in them think about formats, tones, and strategies to communicate content related to social and political issues, mediated by social platforms.

¹⁰²Interview No. 10. Female Social leader and content creator.



05.**Paid****advertisement
experiment**

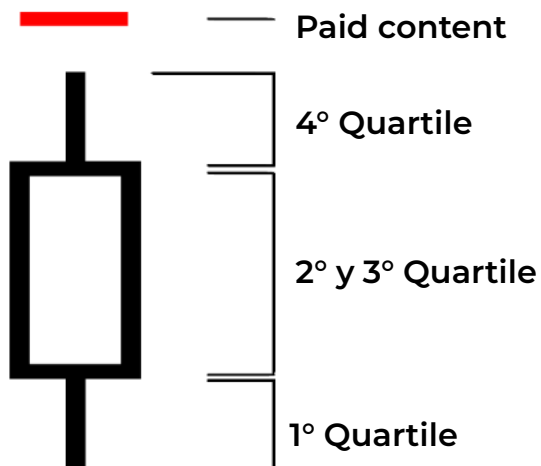
The specific posts that were projected also underwent significant changes, since (considering the time of development of this methodology) it was necessary to adapt the comparison of posts to the content that the interlocutors already had prepared in their different agendas.

As a result of the negotiation process, three interlocutors who were part of the first component were chosen. In the order in which they accepted their participation:

- a. Camila Gil (@laamicamilagil), a content creator from Medellin who has worked with multiple civil society organizations, foundations, and companies on social content.
- b. Échele Cabeza (“Échele Cabeza cuando se dé en la cabeza” by ATS, Social Technical Action Corporation), a project that seeks to generate and disseminate information on Psychoactive Substances for risk and harm reduction.
- c. GAAT Foundation (Grupo de Acción y Apoyo a personas Trans Foundation), a grassroots social organization working for the promotion and defense of the rights and full citizenship of people with Trans Life Experiences.

Six ads were planned for Instagram, two of which were also planned to be paid simultaneously on Facebook. Of these, one post was not paid for due to internal timing issues at the GAAT Foundation compared to the schedule planned for this testing. The ad dates ranged from November 13th to 30th, 2023.

For the performance analysis of the ads, a baseline was developed for comparison with specific metrics. This was developed using the public statistics of the last 20 posts on the respective Instagram profiles, excluding pinned posts and posts that were ads. For the content creator, the last reels were chosen, as this was the paid publication format and the metric was views. For the other two profiles, the last posts in the default window and the metric of likes were chosen. This information was organized through a visualization of candlestick or Japanese candlestick charts, allowing for a visual comparison between the performance of paid content versus an approximation of organic performance metrics with a distribution in quartiles.



The charts are organized as follows:

This means that the box contains the range where 50% of the posts are located, according to their metric (number of views or likes in each case). The upper black line shows the top 25% of posts with the best performance, and the lower black line denotes the range where the content with the lowest performance is located. The red horizontal line determines the performance of the paid content.

Due to the exploratory and nested nature of this testing and the non-representative nature of the sample, the findings are presented for discussion. Given the distances between the profiles of the interlocutors, this discussion is done separately for each of them, and it is after this case analysis that general reflections are presented.

5.1. Paid advertisement in the environment of a social leader and ‘content creator’

Camila Gil is a digital activist and “content creator” who has worked in coordination with social organizations, foundations, and companies on pedagogical, social, and electoral content. Her main platforms are Instagram and Tiktok, reaching 10,600 followers on the former, and her content is usually focused on the city of Medellin and Antioquia.

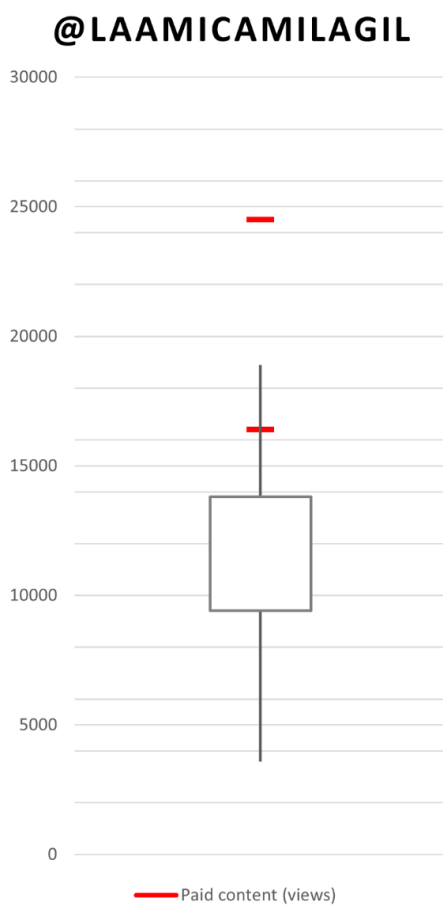
The paid contents were two videos in reel format. The [first](#), a video resulting from an “info activism laboratory” in La Loma, San Cristóbal, articulated to a community process in the city of Medellin and to the IOM. This was published in collaboration with three allied accounts. The [second](#), a humanitarian denunciation of the situation in the department of Putumayo, published in collaboration with one of the same accounts as the first publication.

Both advertisements were made with the following parameters: with the objective of More profile visits, for an amount of \$87,251 COP (including VAT) distributed over six days, segmented for ages 18-40 years, geolocated in Antioquia, and with the interests of: humanities, Empowerment, Community issues, Non-profit organizations, Non-governmental organization, Social movement, Volunteering, Activism, Charitable organizations, and six other related interests.

When choosing the category of Social issues, elections, or politics, which was one of the variables to be experimented with, there was an alert that said, “For now, you can only advertise about social issues, elections, or politics on Instagram from a Facebook advertising account.”

Within the video upload process, there was a differentiation between the paid content and the content that could have been published organically. A filter was applied prior to the paid content to produce the video without copyrighted songs, as this would be an issue. There was also a preliminary review of the language used in the narration of the different shots, looking for “flaggable” or “censorable” content.

It is relevant to note that there was a fear when publishing the second video, as it was considered at one point that it could have unintended consequences if advertisement was paid. These consequences were based on the possibility that the content could be blocked by the platform, and even if it wasn't, it could lead to increased visibility that could result in complaints about the content from users, which could in turn lead to problems with content moderation. However, it was decided to proceed with the process.



The comparative results of the paid advertisements¹⁰³ regarding the metrics of organic content views¹⁰⁴ were:

The black line represents the total range of the view metrics of the last 20 reels published, in this case without any paid; the box represents the second and third quartiles of these same data; and finally, the red lines represent the results obtained in the views of the paid content.

In Camila's perception, the ads are valued as successful. On the one hand, it "trained" the platform to show her relevant paid content for her work, from other grassroots organizations and community processes. On the other hand, it gave her a reach that resulted in invitations to projects in her line of work.

¹⁰³ Cut-off date: November 20, 2023, at 14:00.

¹⁰⁴ Instagram defines "plays" as follows: "Number of times your reel starts playing or looping after an impression has already been counted. It's defined as plays of at least 1 millisecond. Loops are counted after the initial play in the same reel section".

Ad No. 1 generated content visibility 2.18 times more than the average views of recent reels (217.6%), and ad No. 2 generated visibility 1.46 times more than the same average (145.7%). Both ads generated an increase in content visibility, but the difference between the two results indicates that there are no guarantees regarding the extent of the “boost” that ads represents. It is relevant to underline that the video with less reach was the one related to a denunciation of a humanitarian situation. This one did not exceed the threshold of what this profile can achieve in organic terms, according to the baseline.

5.2. Paid content in the context of a risk reduction project for the consumption of Psychoactive Substances

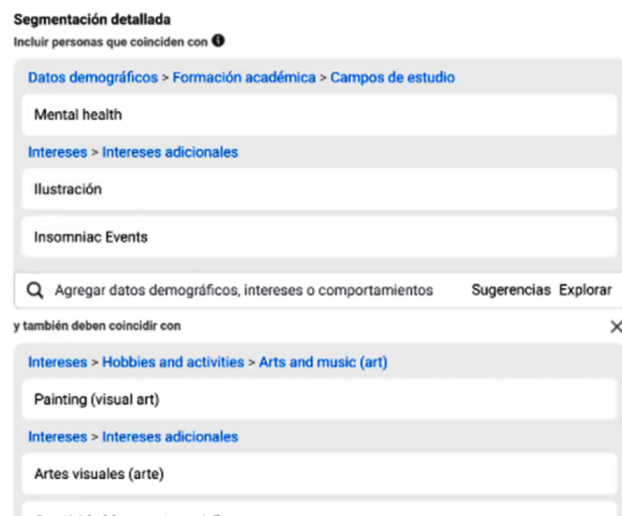
“Échele Cabeza cuando se dé en la cabeza” is one of the campaigns of the Social Technical Action Corporation - ATS, on risk and harm reduction in the consumption of psychoactive substances, which seeks to “generate and disseminate information about Psychoactive Substances (SPA) for risk and harm reduction, aimed at promoting and strengthening the decision-making and response capacity of vulnerable and non-vulnerable young people to consumption, as well as generating self-care practices towards non-problematic users of SPA”.¹⁰⁵

The first publication was a [carousel](#) titled Can I stay on the trip? How does drug use affect your mental health?, published on November 9, 2023, and paid on the 16th of the same month. This first publication contained the terms “drugs” and “psychoactive substances”, which the organization has identified as potentially problematic in terms of content moderation. The payment was done in the Ads Manager for Instagram and Facebook.

When choosing the category of Social issues, elections, or politics, the platform requested a double verification of the account. Although the Échele Cabeza profile had recently been verified as an account, it demanded “a copy of a valid official identification document”. It was decided to create the ad as a general one and not as an ad within that category. The organization stated that it was unaware of the changes that the paid content would imply with the new verification that the account had, since it had been less than two weeks.

¹⁰⁵ Échele Cabeza’s Website. “¿Quiénes somos?”. <https://www.echelecabeza.com/que-es-echele-cabeza>

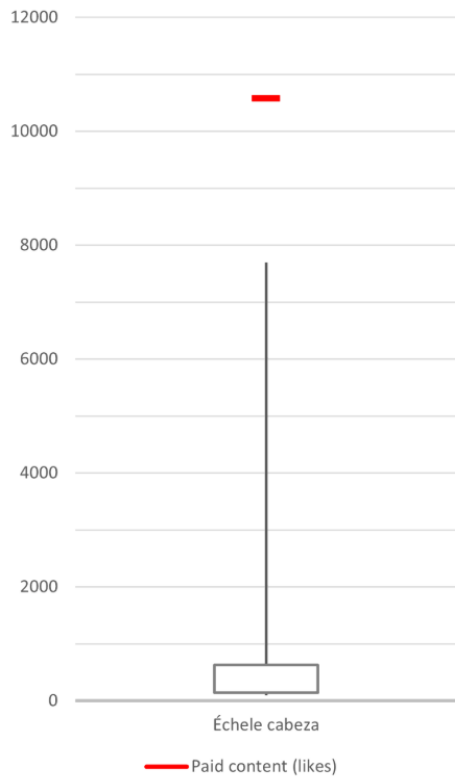
The ad was budgeted at an estimated \$15,000 COP per day, for five days. It was paid for by credit card. The campaign objective was Traffic. The estimated reach was 3,900 to 11,000 per day, and the estimated link clicks per day were 63 to 191. The audience was selected for adults up to 45 years old, for Colombia. The custom audience of “EC Instagram Lookalike” was chosen, where, according to the organization’s description, Meta consolidates profiles with which the publication could interact. Interest categories were also chosen that were not directly related to the specific topic of the publication or the profile itself, to increase the chances of expanding the audience. This was an automatic choice by the ad platform, supposedly based on the metrics of the profiles that interact with Échele Cabeza’s organic publications and past ads. The platform yielded the following:



The ad was not in review when published, but was approved immediately. Regarding this, the organization explained that the initial approval is much more about form than content, and it is possible that the ad may be blocked after being published.

By November 20, the publication had considerable engagement in terms of likes compared to the baseline. It obtained 10,573 likes, which represents almost eight times more (787.6%) than the average of the last 20 publications of the profile. In link clicks (the objective of the specific ad), the internal metrics of the Ads Manager reported 432 clicks, all from Facebook. Regarding the likes metric, the following chart was created, showing the comparison between organic performance and paid performance.

'ÉCHELE CABEZA' (ATS CORPORATION)



The second ad had the same characteristics as the first in campaign objectives and audience segmentation. It was a carousel publication titled Cannabis Vaporizers: Risk and harm reduction guide. Part 2/2. It was done in collaboration with another ATS campaign on risk reduction for nicotine consumption (@nicotinarrd).

This ad was rejected by the platform. The reason: non-compliance with ad policies. However, when seeking clarification on the violated policies, the platform did not provide information and showed “zero” in the number of criteria violated by the publication. The interface displayed the following message:

In the absence of information about the rejection, the organization sent the decision for review. As of the writing date of this report, there has been no response. The perception is that the rejection was due to the word “cannabis” within the publication.

Rechazado

Este anuncio no cumple nuestras Políticas de publicidad. Puedes editarlo o ir a "Inicio de ayuda para empresas" para solicitar otra revisión.

[Ir a Inicio de ayuda para empresas](#)

Resumen del rendimiento [Personalizar métricas](#)

<p>Clics en el enlace</p> <p>---</p>	<p>Por clic en el enlace</p> <p>---</p>	<p>Importe gastado</p> <p>\$0</p>
---	--	--

No hay actividad en el intervalo de fechas seleccionado

Selecciona otro intervalo de fechas y vuelve a realizar la búsqueda.

[Cambiar fecha](#)

Although a comparative analysis of the performance of the two paid contents was not possible, the first of them shows a significant increase in the measured metrics, which are at a point that the organization does not reach within its organic content.

5.3. Paid content in the context of a social organization promoting and defending the rights of people with trans life experiences

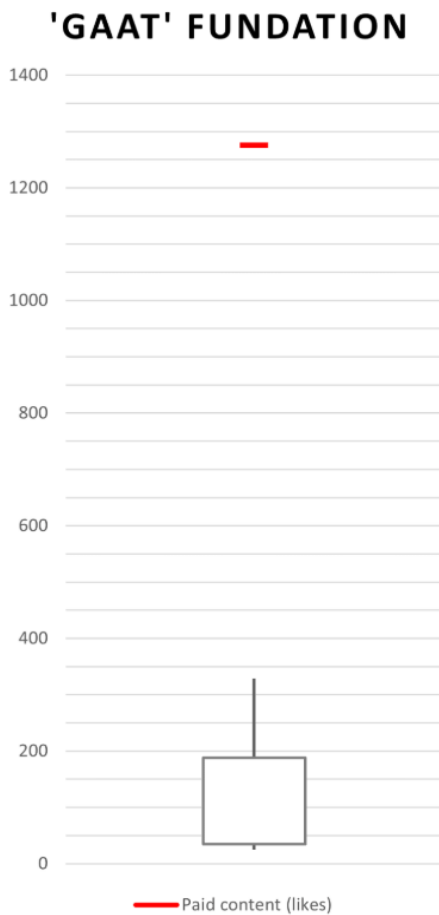
The Group of Action and Support for Trans People Foundation - GAAT was the other interlocutor in this testing. It is a grassroots organization “working for the promotion and defense of the rights and full citizenship of people with Trans Life Experiences and their support networks in Colombia, especially in the city of Bogotá”. Its objective is to “socially and politically influence the transformation of social, legislative, and institutional dynamics at the national and international levels regarding the rights of people with Trans life experiences”¹⁰⁶. With this organization, there were communication obstacles in obtaining results within the schedule of this report.

The [first ad](#) was created within the Business Manager with the objective of profile visits. The automatic variations of Instagram about the content (“Advantage+”) were activated, and an automatic audience was chosen, according to which “Instagram will target people similar to your followers”.

A total of \$83,300 COP was paid for the advertisement for five days, through the budget recharged via a credit card.

Regarding the same category of Social issues, elections, or politics, within the ad process, an attempt was made to mark it, but the platform demanded authorization to publish the content under that category, indicating that the Foundation’s account was not authorized to publish this type of ad. When attempting to go through the authorization process, it requested the password of the personal profile from which the ad was being made and then an identification document with which to verify the ad or, failing that, a document certified by a notary. Due to the lack of a quick response to the process, it was decided to uncheck that category for the paid process.

¹⁰⁶ Fundación GAAT (LinkedIn). “Resumen”. <https://www.linkedin.com/company/fundaci%C3%B3n-gaat/about/>



The [second ad](#) was created under the same criteria regarding campaign objectives and audience segmentation. It was a denunciation reel on the occasion of Trans Memory Day. However, the performance metrics of the first ad were not available due to internal barriers within the organization. For this reason, the chart shows the performance of the second ad publication:

Similar to the advertisement made with Échele Cabeza, the performance of the second ad content was significant compared to the average of the last 10 publications of the profile: more than six times more performance (617.8%) based on the number of likes. However, this was tempered by the fact that it was a commemorative date where, according to the organization, the visibility of the content is usually higher than on other dates.

5.4. Experiment findings

Although the testing was not designed with the pretense of yielding conclusive data, due to its scale, budget, and time considered for it, it does provide elements of great interest to deepen and contextualize findings from the interviews component of this report.

Firstly, the data obtained shows that, in these three contexts related to social or political issues, paid content does have a visible effect on increasing the reach performance of publications compared to organic content. However, as is evident in the case of Camila Gil's profile, advertisement does not guarantee the magnitude of this reach, and some results may be within the range achievable by organic metrics. The difference in the metrics achieved in the two contexts of Échele Cabeza and the GAAT Foundation compared to the trend of organic results is noteworthy, a difference that could explain why most of the interviewed organizations have paid for ads within Meta.

The performances and barriers regarding the category of Social issues, elections, or politics were impossible to test, as in none of the cases was it possible to check the respective box to classify the contents in this topic. From a content creator profile, an unverified organization, and another one that was verified, the result was similar in relation to the impossibility of using this category. The scope of the test could not corroborate or prove problems associated with advertising social issues, as the category was not accessible to any of the participating organizations.

This is why internal restrictions on this content continue to be the subject of exploration; however, the question arises as to the reasons for the existing filters to even access such classification. Furthermore, when it has been pointed out by multiple organizations as a category that could close the visibility of paid content in question.

Several assertions related to the finding of “content moderation” arose during the advertisement process, sometimes identified by organizations as “self-censorship”. The paid content does not have the same characteristics as organic content, according to the perceptions of the interlocutors, and this warranted changes in the publications to make the ads acceptable. What is relevant is that this process is no longer determined by the ads process itself, but by the experiences with the platform they have had in the past. This observation helps support the idea that platforms “teach” those responsible for designing these publications about possible and impossible content, parameters that are appropriated and used for publication and creation of future ads without the platform having to interfere.

Another relevant issue is the lack of social issues in the ad classification. Although a diversity of tags was found in the “interests” within Camila Gil’s advertisement process, that was focused on advertising without using Business Manager or Ads Manager, for the other experiences there were no topics that could encompass the work of the organizations.

06.

Conclusions

Through this mapping exercise, it was possible to observe how organizations have established their presence on platforms such as Meta and TikTok, taking advantage of the immediacy, dynamism and diversity that these spaces offer. Platforms have proven to be effective catalysts for direct connection with diverse audiences. Constant interaction, the generation of relevant content and participation have boosted the visibility and reach of these organizations, and have allowed them to transmit their messages in an impactful way.

While the advantages were recognized, there were multiple challenges that were observed within the relationship between platforms and organizations. Precisely because of the need to have a presence on social networks, the challenges have a direct impact on the way in which they do their work.

Challenges regarding tone management in communications (1.1.) or the availability of resources for their media strategies (1.6.) are beyond the scope of the platforms. The others could be mitigated with a review of the norms and practices of the platforms in relation to the content produced by organizations that have passed the accreditation process.

An application of the platforms' own policies with a human rights perspective, as requested by [Meta's Oversight Board](#) on gender issues, could be the way to ensure the expression and work of those organizations, which must be specially protected. This perspective is urgent in the face of the decrease in the visibility of political content on the platforms and the announcement about the change in the policy according to which political content will not be proactively recommended on those platforms¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁷ Meta: [Our Approach to Political Content](#). [Consulted on March 1, 2024]

In this review, the following topics should be addressed at least:

6.1. Transparency

The platforms need to establish a transparent decision-making procedure and ensure its understanding by civil society organizations and independent media that have been accredited as such. The removal or reduction of content visibility, the blocking of functions (such as monetization or advertising), and the deletion of accounts have a high cost for these actors (1.2., 1.3., and 1.4.), as it affects their freedom of expression and association, while depriving society of access to that content.

This impact requires greater care and explanation when making decisions. This requires an effort of motivation and a clear process of information and appeal.

6.2. Consultation with civil society organizations regarding policy changes

It is important for social media platforms to receive questions raised by civil society organizations, independent media, and social content creators, so that solutions can be generated that fit the conditions of the contexts and the needs of social actors. Also, so that those changes are not sudden and disproportionately affect them, taking into account the limitations of those who organize to achieve the general interest (1.1., 1.6., 1.7. and 3.).

Opening the policy-making process to actors who are not experts but are affected by them is urgent. This responds to the recognition of these spaces as essential places of deliberation on crucial issues for societies. It also responds to the recognition of social actors as vital for the functioning of society. For civil society, it is essential to generate conversations about experiences regarding the dissemination of social causes on digital platforms, to find solutions to obstacles and doubts experienced.

6.3. Designing specific advertising policies for social actors

Currently, civil society organizations, independent media, and social content creators must interpret how advertising works, the categories it contains, the scope, and the benefits it can bring. This makes it very costly, in terms of money and human resources, to have sustained communication strategies over time. This is because advertising policies do not take into account such organizations as a differential actor. In addition, recent changes to Meta's political content policy could render any effort by organizations to reach new people who could benefit from the information they produce and their calls to action superfluous.

Having specific advertising policies, with clear rules and more granular categories, could address the interests of platforms regarding the type of content recommended and the interests of organizations regarding their work (4.1., 4.2., 4.3., 4.4.).

6.4. Access to company representatives other than business representatives

To achieve a true recognition of the importance of the work of social actors, it is necessary for them to have communication channels separate from business ones (3.). Having differentiated contacts could allow for the explanation of social and political contexts related to content. It would also allow for a dialogical process between platforms and civil society organizations, independent media, and social content creators.

07.

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