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***Pacifista*, between Vice and Virtue: Funding Digital Journalism for a “Generation of Peace” in Colombia**

Alexander L. Fattal

This is the story of *Pacifista*. *Pacifista* is a left-leaning, youth-focused, pro-peace digital-native journalism initiative (meaning it is not the digital version of an established publication) in Colombia. It has been an important outlet that has worked to bridge the breach between urban youth culture and the war-torn countryside in Colombia. Yet, despite its novel editorial approach to timely subject matter, vibrant graphic design and potentially lucrative ability to connect with millennial audiences in Colombia, it struggles to survive financially. This article is about that struggle.

As a more freewheeling digital journalism comes to supplant traditional reporting, questions about how digital media’s political economy influences the stories it produces and circulates are vital to understanding transformations in the digital public sphere. In parsing the case of *Pacifista*, I want to suggest that the same pressures that scholars have identified in allowing corporate interests to subtly condition legacy media’s news production through their advertising budgets are at work in digital-native media.

A key difference is that online editorial projects, like *Pacifista*, often lack the institutional culture and protocols to mediate inevitable conflicts between the editorial and advertising sides of the news business.¹ The argument is not intended to be a critique of *Pacifista* as much as an alarm about the lack of a stable funding model for novel digital journalism projects that cut against the grain of corporate interests. While other scholars have made similar arguments in Western contexts, in less wealthy countries, where subscription models are less viable, such projects are even more vulnerable.² In the last WhatsApp message that one of my interlocutors at *Pacifista* sent me, he urged me to publish my article soon “Before *Pacifista* dies, jajajaja” adding in the next bubble “It’s going broke.” I hope that, by the time you are reading this, the publication will still be posting.

Trying to Go Native

It began as a pitch to Unilever—Axe deodorant to be specific. In 2014, *VICE Colombia* began as a new franchise of VICE Media in New York City and had adopted its model of funding journalism through an internal marketing firm. As if to troll the righteous who might bristle at such close coordination between the editorial and financial sides of the company, VICE branded its ad agency wing Virtue.³ The business model hinged upon the idea that a digital media platform can sustain itself, and even capitalize, on its ability to engage the elusive demographic of young, online savvy audiences coveted by marketing executives. This intuition proved clairvoyant and lucrative in the speculative media ecol-



Figure 1. Pacifista's home page, May 8, 2019.

ogy of New York City but out of sync with the more conservative economic climate of Bogotá's media industries.

Unilever sent the VICE startup in Bogotá a brief to develop Colombia-specific commercials for its global "Axe Peace" campaign. When I interviewed Juan Camilo Maldonado, the first director of news for *VICE Colombia*, he described how Unilever had "placed its deodorant next to Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Gandhi," and added, "It was crazy." The campaign's tagline was "Make love not war." The advertising blitz featured images and allusions to adolescent kissing to promote its male grooming products. The campaign affected a depoliticized reformulation of political struggles past in a pubescent register. In Colombia, the idea was to do a local version of the campaign and thereby tap into energetic debates surrounding the then unfolding

peace negotiations between the Colombian government and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Nicolás Vallejo, Maldonado's colleague at *VICE Colombia*, crafted the pitch to Unilever, diagramming a web platform called Pacifista. Vallejo designed the project as a native advertising initiative of Axe in which the brand would sponsor a website that featured content about peace in Colombia. According to Maldonado, *VICE Colombia* wanted Unilever to "stick its hand in its pockets and finance a platform to talk to the youth about the peace process," quixotic as that sounds. The project's foundational idealism and its initial expression in a corporate idiom established an early ambivalence that has hounded the digital journalism initiative since its inception.

The model for *VICE Colombia's* pitch was one of the largest native advertising initiatives to date, the "Creators Project," a

dynamic website replete with content at the interstice of technology and culture. Intel, the company best known for manufacturing computer chips, paid VICE Media (New York) \$40-million to create and update the portal, which has imbued the otherwise bland company with a lively corporate identity. In line with the trend toward a “cool sell,” Intel’s sponsorship was subtle.⁴ *VICE Colombia*, however, was still building its platform, and the wave of branded content had only arrived to Colombia’s shores as a ripple. Executives at Unilever rejected the idea of developing a full-fledged news forum called *Pacifista*. Paraphrasing the company’s response, Vallejo said, “It’s very nice but we’re not interested in having our brand associated with people who have been kidnapped, or tortured, or paramilitary takeovers, or guerrillas or sixty years of bloodshed.” The journalists and entrepreneurs at *VICE Colombia*, many of whom had left jobs in corporate media and were brimming with enthusiasm, filed the presentation away on their hard drives.

Over the course of 2014, peace talks between the Colombian government and the FARC in Havana, Cuba, intensified. The guerrilla group seized the international spotlight after years of marginalization. (The last time the FARC enjoyed a similar status as celebrity outlaws was during negotiations in southern Colombia that ended in acrimony and led to an escalation of the war in 2002.) Guerrilla negotiators rushed to the microphones at every opportunity, whereas President Santos’ administration maintained a staid communication strategy. The government’s defensive posture was meant to control the message and avoid

giving grist to misinformation from its strident right-wing critics, led by former president Álvaro Uribe. In 2014, the midway point of the negotiations, the staff in the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace—the office charged with developing and implementing the strategy behind the peace process—became concerned about growing public skepticism of the negotiations.⁵ Under the banner of “peace pedagogy,” the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace hastily contracted a series of media outlets to buttress falling popular support for the peace process.

Such was the context in which a staff member in the High Commissioner for Peace’s office reached out to *VICE Colombia* and invited the new digital journalism platform to submit a proposal. The startup, then in dire need of funding, updated the *Pacifista* proposal it had crafted for Unilever, replacing references to Axe deodorant with phrases about the high-stakes negotiations and the meaning of peace for a new generation, and marched into the offices of the presidency. Maldonado described the meeting as “love at first sight” and added, “I never saw a project come to fruition so quickly in my life.”⁶

“Tarantino meets Watergate” in Colombia: *Pacifista* 2014–2016

Shortly after its meeting in the offices of the presidency, the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace kickstarted *Pacifista* with a large infusion of funds, and on December 10, 2014, *Pacifista* launched as a branded platform of *VICE Colombia* with a manifesto.



Figure 2. Screenshot from the manifesto that launched *Pacifista* on December 10, 2014.

We are children of the war. We, like our parents, are a generation that hasn't lived one day without conflict in Colombia....

More than a (peace) Process in capital letters, we're interested in going to the jungles and the *barrios*, to the peripheries and rearguards, to the regions where the conflict in Colombia is lived to understand how to move beyond it. We are going to follow projects and leaders, citizen resistance and community activism. We are looking for lives of people who — through culture, communication, politics, entrepreneurship,

sports, the academy, as well as those who through their daily worlds — are the protagonists of multiple peace processes that give form to a new nation.⁷

Summarizing his sentiment upon writing the manifesto, Vallejo said, "I felt that this was a great opportunity to develop an editorial concept for a new generation that would allow us to understand one another through our conflict." The original group of three journalists on the editorial side of *VICE Colombia* had little experience with hard news. Two of them, Nicolás Vallejo and Juan Pablo Gallón, had come up

through *Shock and Colors*, publications of the music industry, and Juan Camilo Maldonado had risen to editor of the metro desk of *El Espectador*, Colombia's national daily that is a tick to the left of the more establishment *El Tiempo*.

VICE Colombia's inaugural story, "The Invisible Trenches of Cazucá," is an immersive exploration of the violent underworld in informal settlements sprawling over the hills of Bogotá's southwest edge. Maldonado plunged into Cazucá's dangerous crack dealings and selective assassinations, known euphemistically as "cleansings." The reporting oscillated between a gonzo journalism similar to that of *VICE's* New York headquarters and the ethnographic impulse to translate an unfamiliar locale to a curious audience. While at times voyeuristic, the 4,000-word article contains an engaging mixture of descriptions and analysis and is punctuated by pithy observations such as "nobody knows in a community of 17,000 displaced people when the victim turns into the perpetrator."

Pacifista looked to extend such intrepid urban journalism to remote rural communities impacted by the armed conflict. The staff, however, had little firsthand experience with war-affected provinces. Rather than try to hide their callowness, they leaned in to it. "All we had were questions," Maldonado said, adding that "*Pacifista* was the place where we projected all of our ignorance to compensate for it and mitigate it with journalism." The reporters served as proxies for their youthful readership that was curious about the war ripping their country apart, and perhaps a touch guilty about not knowing more about it. This generation had grown up tethered to digital devices and with little patience for the formality and formulism of traditional media.

Old media, however—specifically print journalism—continues to serve as the privileged forum for debates about war and peace in Colombia. Going back to the mid-19th century, newspapers—a medium dominated by elite families of the conservative or liberal parties—expressed ideological differences that fueled the partisan conflicts of the 19th and 20th centuries.⁸ Many of those families began to sell off some of their media properties to corporate conglomerates in the late 20th century. The consolidation of the corporate press in the early 21st century meant that advertisements saturated the pages of newspapers, and their folds bulged with circulars.⁹ Similarly, the online versions of print publications were (and are) chock-full of banners, pop-ups and intrusive digital advertising. Although the news industry needed the revenue, given the tsunami of free content flooding the web and luring readers elsewhere, the visual clutter and crass commercialism created an opportunity for an aesthetically cleaner and more socially conscious format.

It was in this context that *Pacifista* and a raft of other digital-native journalism platforms emerged. *Pacifista's* niche in this crowded field is its focus on 18- to 35-year-olds, many of whom are attending universities or have recently left them. In my interview with Diego Alarcón, the director of content for *Pacifista*, he said, "The advantage we have is that we talk to young people in their own language, with a young aesthetic, and very focused on social networks." The most obvious instantiations of this commitment are the site's pastel colors, comic-book style illustrations, steady flow of memes (see [Figure 3](#)) and partnership with YouTuber "Juanpis Gonzalez," a country club caricature whose schtick plays upon

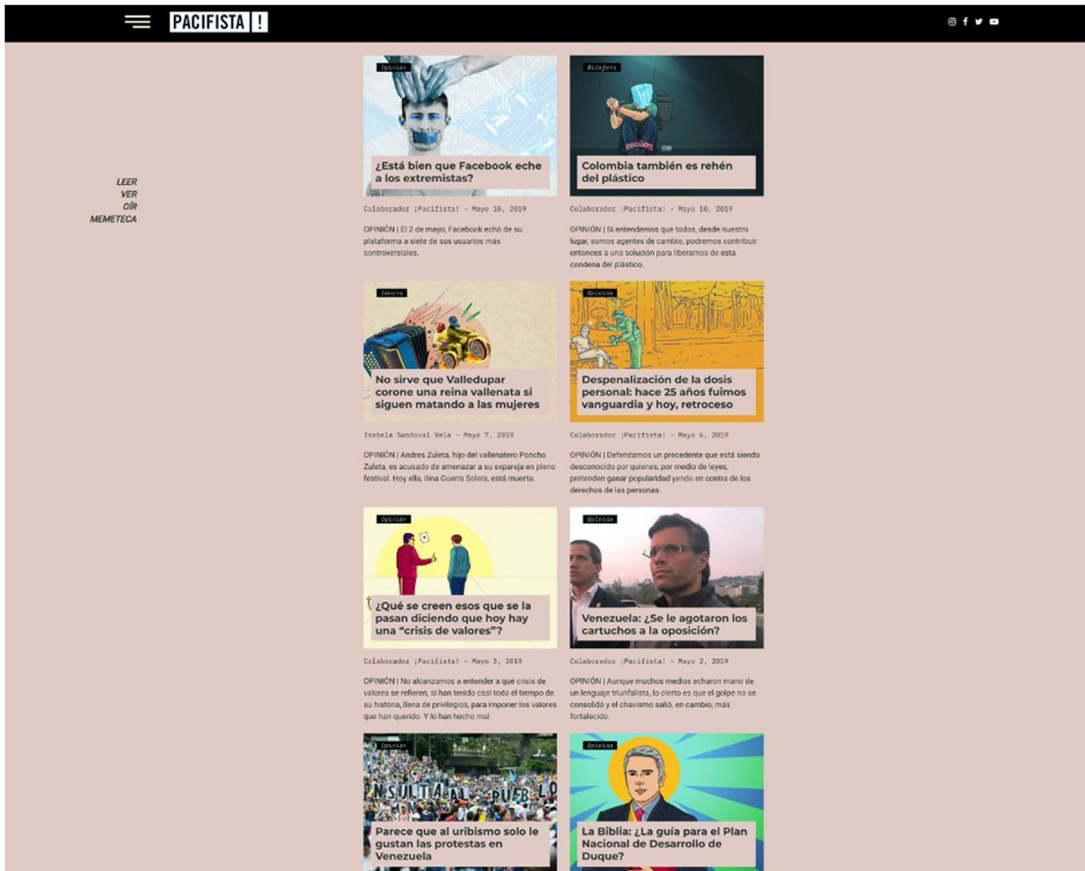


Figure 3. Screenshot from Pacifista's "Memeteca," May 13, 2019.

class politics, particularly the self-interested aloofness of the elite.

During 2015, *VICE Colombia's* first full calendar year of operation, the journalists worked to find their own voices, expanding on prominent editorial themes of *VICE international*, such as drugs, while creating Colombian extensions of its headquarters' branded platforms—namely, *Noisy* and *Thump*, online music magazines. At the same time, *VICE News*—the adventurous documentary current affairs program of *VICE Media* in New York City—was proving to be

extremely popular. Documentary filmmaker Spike Jonze had urged *VICE* to embrace digital video. In commenting on the company's macho-adventurist style, he said, "You guys are going around the world doing these insane stories, buying dirty bombs in Bulgaria or whatever. ... I hope you're bringing a video camera."¹⁰ *VICE News* marked the company's aspiration to be more than an entrepreneurial bad boy provocateur, to strive for legitimacy in the news world—gonzo journalism, but with gravitas. The thinking in Colombia was not too far off. Maldonado said,

I wanted to take all the youthfulness *VICE* had but take away the innocence and superficiality. ... We began to make alliances with investigative journalism organizations and work with an editorial committee. I always wanted to somehow fuse Watergate and Tarantino, so we could do real investigative reporting, but with something extra.

Realizing Maldonado's vision of melding the cult-cool of *Pulp Fiction* with the dogged investigative reporting of the *Washington Post's* heyday would depend on finding a funding model that could sustain the project. In the first months of 2016, the government withdrew its support, sending *VICE Colombia* scrambling to find outside funding in anticipation of a crucial moment, the plebiscite of 2016, a yes-or-no vote on a peace accord that had taken four years to negotiate.

Plebiscite Problems

In January 2016, former president Álvaro Uribe publicized contracts signed by the High Commissioner for Peace's office. The documentation revealed large tenders to pro-peace media initiatives that gave the appearance that the Santos government was buying favorable coverage. The most eye-popping figure was for two contracts for *VICE Colombia's Pacifista*. Spread over a 13-month period, the two totaled 1.74 billion Colombian pesos, nearly US\$600,000.

I interviewed Johanna Cárdenas, who worked in the High Commissioner for Peace's communication unit, who brushed off the criticism, saying, "It was ridiculous, because behind *Pacifista* was an entire team

of quality journalists, doing big reports in the territories. We know what goes into quality reporting." All of the people I have interviewed who worked with *Pacifista* at the time denied any editorial intervention by the government. Although, Nicolás Vallejo faintly remembers the government trying to place one of its representatives on *VICE Colombia's* editorial board, an overture that *VICE* diplomatically denied. Editorial intervention was not necessary. Everyone was pulling in the same direction, trying to convince a skeptical citizenry to support the peace process in the face of a boisterous cum hysterical right-wing opposition.

The Santos administration used the term "peace pedagogy" to describe its public outreach. In practice, peace pedagogy meant producing educational reporting about the peace process and staging events to provide a forum for people to learn about the negotiations and have their voices heard (or at least to feel they were being heard). For the first half of the negotiating period, the pedagogy resembled bland informational bulletins. It was only in 2016, in the final stages of the negotiation, that the country prepared to vote in a plebiscite to approve or reject the accord that the government began to strike a more emotional chord.¹¹

As the Santos administration and its allies led pedagogical events around the country, it faced this most common question, according to Cárdenas who helped organize many of those events: *What is the peace agreement going to do for me?* It was this sentiment that the right-wing opposition to President Santos exploited. Through targeted disinformation campaigns the opposition led people

to believe that they would be worse off with peace. It suggested to the poor that welfare given to former guerrillas would exceed basic social subsidies; it warned, in apocalyptic terms, that the FARC would connive to take power electorally and lead the country into an economic crisis similar to the one playing out in Venezuela; it intimated to large landholders that the agreements made in Havana would lead to land expropriations; it alarmed religious publics by signaling that the accord would be a Trojan Horse for homosexual empowerment. These exaggerations, distortions and outright lies came into full relief only

after the votes were counted on October 2, 2016, and the “no” vote carried the day the razor thin margin of 0.4 percent.

Those on the “yes” side were left to do some soul-searching. A member of the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace told anthropologist Gwen Burnyeat, “We did not realise the state of society – the hatred, the resentment, the fear, all the emotionality.”¹² Why didn’t the government, allied media outlets and peace activists sound the alarm about disinformation? Maldonado, who was still with *VICE Colombia* at the time of the plebiscite, reflected,



Figure 4. Pacifista’s coverage of the No’s victory in the October 2, 2016, plebiscite.

We didn't see the fake news, we didn't respond in time. We weren't conscious of the fact that we were victims of our own filter bubble. We were stuck in our own social network, seeing how everyone loved peace, and were convinced that we were on the right side of history. We fell in love with our own moral position.

The plebiscite made it clear that alternative media projects, such as *Pacifista*, continue to operate on the fringes of the Colombian public sphere. Though they might build a following and gradually educate an audience, disinformation had made a greater impact.

The sweat labor needed to attract and retain a following in a cutthroat attention economy competed with the hard work of keeping *Pacifista's* operation funded. The project, which began as a pitch to Unilever and then became an initiative of the Colombian presidency, needed to cope with a sharp decrease in funding at the pivotal moment of the plebiscite. *VICE Colombia's* solution was two-pronged: to appeal to international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) interested in supporting a vibrant pro-peace civil society and to redouble its efforts to drum up advertising revenue.

Fumbling for a Sustainable Mixed Income Funding Model

Money had always been an issue. Maldonado and Vallejo left *VICE Colombia* in a dispute with management because the advertising side of the company allegedly sought to suppress *Pacifista's* coverage of the sugary beverage industry. Nobody wanted to

talk about the topic in my interviews, but the *New York Times* wrote a fascinating article on the battle over a proposed nationwide soda tax (which ultimately was not adopted).¹³ A subplot in that drama was the censorship of a video made for a campaign in favor of the tax. The Superintendent of Industry and Commerce deemed it “misleading, imprecise and confusing” (a characterization that one would hope a consumer watchdog would levy against commercials for the sugary beverage industry).¹⁴ The flexing of corporate power to stymie the public health effort led Alejandro Gaviria Uribe, the Health Minister at the time, to tell the *New York Times*, “In Colombia, the sugar industry and the main media companies belong to the same economic conglomerates. ... They have an intimidating power. And they used it.”

Postobón, Colombia's national soft drink giant, is a keystone of Organización Ardile Lülle, a corporate umbrella of more than 80 companies—including some of the country's most powerful media organizations, notably the RCN media properties. As the *New York Times* reported, the conglomerate mobilized its allies in a lobbying effort that focused not only on purchasing influence in the Colombian Congress but also on intimidating media outlets such as *El Espectador*, which could not afford to lose advertising revenue from Postobón, much less the other companies in Organización Ardile Lülle. While *VICE Colombia* inherited international accounts such as Corona and Budweiser on the basis of preexisting relationships in New York and landed new business with global brands such as Huawei and Ray-Ban, the *New York Times's* reporting suggests that it was not

She Took On Colombia's Soda Industry. Then She Was Silenced.



Figure 5. Screenshot of the New York Times story on the battle over sugary beverages; see <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/13/health/colombia-soda-tax-obesity.html>.

immune to the pressure tactics of the advertising industry.

With the umbilical cord from the High Commissioner for Peace cut and revenue from corporate accounts struggling to compensate for the loss, *Pacifista* turned to international NGOs. By then, in mid-2016, the digital journalism initiative had accumulated both a substantial portfolio of work and an impressive profile of analytics that showed a large and engaged young audience. (*Pacifista* refused to share access to this data.) In Open Society Foundations (OSF), the philanthropic apparatus powered by the wealth of George Soros, *VICE Colombia* found an ally that was pushing for drug reforms in the Americas and to cultivate an energized civil society.¹⁵ OSF sponsored two *Pacifista* projects: “Coca” and “Divergentes”; the former references the leaf at the base of cocaine production, and the latter translates roughly as “diverse opposition.” Both are still active. They profile peace

activists, feature opinion pieces, produce documentaries and generate clickbait like listicles and illustrations in a steady stream of content that aspires to a Colombian fusion between the establishment press and the likes of BuzzFeed and Vox.

Divergentes grew its following in the wake of the No’s victory in the plebiscite when a spontaneous movement that dubbed itself “Peace to the Streets” emerged to occupy the Plaza de Bolívar, Colombia’s main square. Peace to the Streets insisted that the government and the FARC not abandon the peace agreement (which the parties would slightly modify and Congress would pass into law within two months of the plebiscite). Jose Antequera Guzmán, a leader of Peace to the Streets, recalled the following:

If we were going to lead a march, we always tried to talk to *Pacifista* first so they would cover it, since they were part of a network

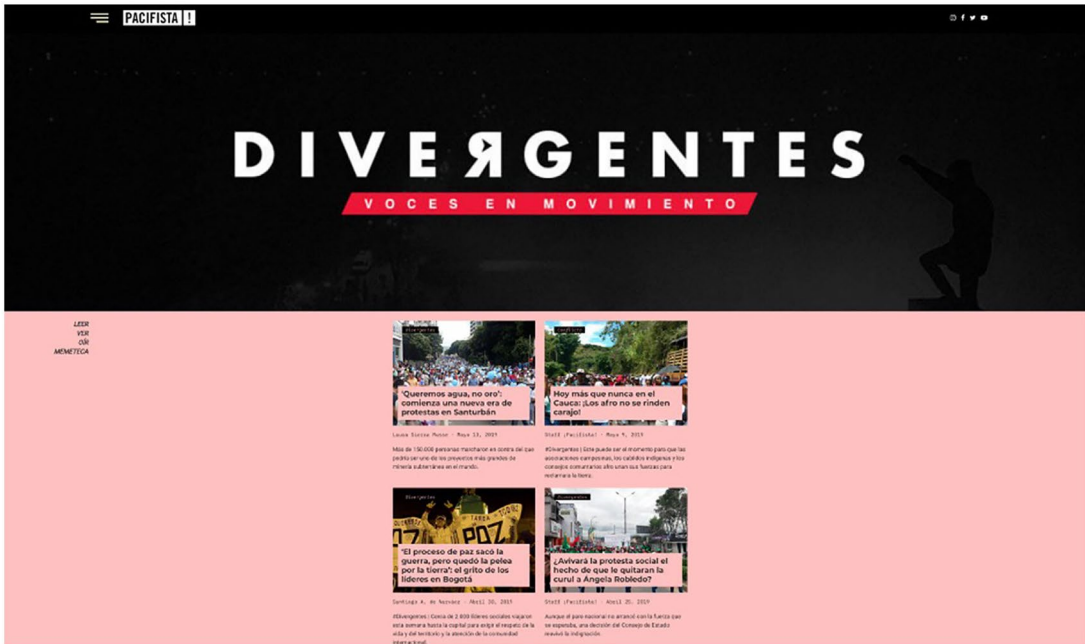


Figure 6. Screenshot of Divergentes page of Pacifista, May 14, 2019.

of activists ... an activism based on journalism, that followed its rules, but was involved, committed.

The results of the plebiscite helped ignite a public sphere that had been largely marginalized from the negotiating process. A new wave of feminism, LGBTQ activism, the student movement, indigenous and Afro-Colombian mobilizations, and human rights defenders denouncing the successive assassination of social leaders all mobilized for their own agendas but also against right-wing machinations to pare back the agreement, ultimately drawing together at the end of 2019 in a series of mega-marches framed as strikes. Divergentes became an important forum to highlight the activism of this composite of communities, following their mobilizations and airing their grievances.

The Coca project gave narrative life and compelling visuals to abstract policy debates about the drug war, such as alternative crop substitution and aerial spraying of glyphosate, a potent herbicide. The project has focused on people who have been pushed by structural factors, such as entrenched poverty and lack of infrastructure for bringing legal crops to market, to participate in cocaine's supply chains and distribution networks. *Pacifista's* courageous coverage of the drug trade culminated in an extraordinary award-winning documentary *El Naya: la ruta oculta de la cocaína* (El Naya: The Hidden Cocaine Corridor). A reporter and videographer duo, Isabella Bernal Vega and Jaime Barbosa, followed the production of cocaine from the leaves pulled from bushes in the highlands of Cauca department to a



Figure 7. Screenshot from the VICE: *Pacifista* documentary *Naya: la ruta oculta de la cocaína*.

boat that shuttles bricks of packaged cocaine out to the Pacific Ocean.

As the editorial side of *Pacifista* was finding its stride, the organizational dimension began to fray. *Vice Colombia* and *Pacifista* split in 2018. Juan Manuel Peña, who co-founded the VICE franchise in Colombia in 2014, began his own company, Freedom Media S A S. Peña and his team did their best to operate as if nothing had changed, creating Pacífico Labs, an in-house advertising agency, replicating the VICE/Virtue structure. The new outfit was now separated from the global network of VICE franchises, giving it greater freedom but less support. *VICE Colombia* would continue to work in Bogotá under the direction of *VICE Latam*, based in Mexico.

I conducted my research into *Pacifista* one year after the divorce from VICE. All current and recent employees of *Pacifista* and Pacífico Labs insisted that a firm wall separates the youth-oriented media outlet and the ad

agency targeting young audiences. The caveat to such separation being that the design, illustration and video staff of Pacífico Labs pitches in to create art for *Pacifista* stories and produce its videos, allowing the media outlet to run a thinner staff and project a brand aesthetic that is at once fun and youthful (pastel colors, heavy on illustrations), and clean and professional (simple layout and savvy use of stretch images and empty space). The short videos produced by *Pacifista* share the immersive feel of Pacífico Labs' content marketing, a category Nicolás Vallejo described as "commercials that feel like documentaries, although they're commercials."

Other than sharing skilled personnel, current and recent employees insist that the corporate interests of one side of the company in no way influence the journalistic agenda of the other. When I asked if a policy exists to ensure such a division between "church and state," the response was always a fumbling version of "it's not an issue—so no."

But the ambivalent origin of the project as a pitch to Unilever, and the internal disagreements over how to report on the proposed tax on sugary beverages, seems to indicate that a clear, well-formed policy would help mitigate inevitable conflicts of interest. Neither government support nor that of international NGOs is sustainable; at the time of writing (February 2020), both are in jeopardy. The internal advertising agency, previously Virtue and now Pacífico Labs, serves as the one continuous stream of funding. In addition to competing with its peers, Pacífico Labs must also carry some of *Pacifista*'s costs. Absent robust internal policies that enforce high journalistic standards, the boundary between advertising and editorial is bound to smudge. As *Pacifista* gropes around for a mixed revenue funding model, it remains vulnerable to corporate influence on its reporting.

In the contemporary post-peace accord moment, Colombia is trying to come to terms with its recent history, apportion blame and mete out punishment—even if only symbolic—for decades of violence. It's a difficult reckoning and the role of digital journalism is fundamental. If, following Christopher Kelly's framing of the internet as a textual contest in which the texts are "constantly being rewritten," digital journalism is a prominent forum where such reckoning takes place.¹⁶ As the country is holding transitional justice trials, struggling to reconcile with recently demobilized FARC guerrillas, rethinking its experience with the drug war and trying to emerge from decades of political violence, will *Pacifista* and other digital journalism outlets break a taboo on reporting on the quiet complicities of corporations? As human

rights reports have documented, companies have often sponsored paramilitaries for the protection they offer from guerrilla sabotage and allegedly recruited death squads to kill pesky union leaders.¹⁷ While *Pacifista* has covered paramilitarism vigorously, its coverage of corporate complicity in the conflict is thinner.¹⁸ (Meanwhile, at *VICE Colombia*, investigative reporting of any stripe is now off the table. In March 2019, *VICE Colombia* laid off all of its journalists.)

The comparison between Vice Media in New York and its Colombian offshoot is telling. Commenting on the relationship, Nicolás Vallejo said, "They (in New York) were stuck on being the biggest company, having the biggest penis. I didn't feel that there was any guidance, because they didn't have many ideas—it felt like a big bluff." He saw echoes of "a grand strategy of quick capitalization" in both New York and Bogotá. VICE Media in New York, however, managed to cash in on a boom that never materialized in Bogotá, that of "branded content." Should such a business model, predicated on intentionally blurring the lines between content and advertising, take off in Colombia, it would complicate the already fraught politics of determining the truth about the country's armed conflict.

VICE Media in New York did not share its largess with its franchises around the globe; rather, it hoped to profit on its satellites' savvy use of its brand name. To the credit of the editorial team at *Pacifista*, their aspiration is not to strike a gold mine but to find a funding model that might sustain a journalistically rigorous youth-oriented platform to describe and debate the challenges and possibilities of building peace in Colombia. Digital journalism in Colombia is

alive and thrashing about, trying to find its way to a business model for peace reporting in minefields that are gradually becoming more metaphorical than literal. One of the truths that those metaphorical minefields are protecting may very well be the fact that corporate conglomerates have not been innocent bystanders but active participants in Colombia's conflict.

Notes

1. Jef I. Richards and John H. Murphy, II, "Economic Censorship and Free Speech: The Circle of Communication between Advertisers, Media, and Consumers," in *The Advertising and Consumer Culture Reader*, ed. Joseph Turow and Matthew P. McAllister (New York: Routledge, 2009).

2. Ramón Salaverría, Charo Sádaba, James G. Breiner, and Janine C. Warner, "A Brave New Digital Journalism in Latin America," in *Communication: Innovation & Quality. Studies in Systems, Decision and Control*, ed. in M. Túniz-López, V. A. Martínez-Fernández, X. López-García, X. Rúas-Araújo, and F. Campos-Freire (New York: Springer, 2019): 229–47.

3. Virtue—the creative agency spawned by VICE—has since reorganized to resemble a global advertising firm, connecting its various satellite offices under a single umbrella, "Virtue Worldwide."

4. Michael Serazio, *Your Ad Here: The Cool Sell of Guerrilla Marketing* (New York: NYU Press, 2013); and Jill Abrahamson, *Merchants of Truth: The Business of News and Fight for the Facts* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019), loc. 3000–35.

5. For detailed research into the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, see Gwen Burnyeat, "The Face of Peace: Government Peace Pedagogy in Colombia's Transition" (PhD diss., University College London, Department of Anthropology, 2020).

6. *Pacifista's* proper name is ¡*Pacifista!* However, for readability purposes, I have dropped the exclamation points.

7. "VICE presenta: ¡*Pacifista!* Una plataforma para la generación de paz," *VICE*, December 10, 2014, https://www.VICE.com/es_co/article/yv74d5/pacifista-una-plataforma-para-la-generacion-de-paz.

8. For a fascinating account of the formation of the partisan press in the Gran Colombia of the 1820s, see David Bushnell, "The Development of the Press in Great Colombia," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 30, no. 4 (1950): 432–52.

9. For thoughtful reflections on the impacts of economic austerity on Colombian journalism, see Omar Rincón, "Buenos periodistas, malos medios," *Nueva Sociedad* 249 (2014): 97–107.

10. Abrahamson, *Merchants of Truth*, loc. 910.

11. For a discussion of some of the campaign dynamics in the plebiscite, see the epilogue of Alexander L. Fattal, *Guerrilla Marketing: Counterinsurgency and Capitalism in Colombia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

12. Gwen Burnyeat, "Peace Pedagogy and Interpretative Frameworks of Distrust," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* (2018): 7.

13. Andrew Jacobs and Matt Richtel, "She Took on Colombia's Soda Industry. Then She Was Silenced," *New York Times* November 13, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/13/health/colombia-soda-tax-obesity.html>.

14. For a sarcastic takedown of the whole episode, see "The Sweet Lies of Congressmen," *El Espectador*, December 16, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=It_R9zj6AeY.

15. Disclosure: I received a one-year fellowship from OSF in 2012–13 as part of its Drugs, Security, and Democracy in the Americas fellowship, a program administered by the Social Science Research Council.

16. Christopher Kelty, "Geeks, Social Imaginaries, and Recursive Publics," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2005): 185.

17. Olga Martín Ortega, "Deadly Ventures? Multinational Corporations and Paramilitaries in Colombia," *Revista electrónica de estudios internacionales (REEI)* 16 (2008): 14; and Carlos Medina Gallego, "La economía de guerra paramilitar: una aproximación a sus fuentes de financiación," *Análisis político* 18, no. 53 (2005): 77–87.

18. To its credit, *Pacifista* has given resonance to the work of *Dejusticia* that has highlighted the role of private companies in the armed conflict. See Daniel Marín López, "La justicia transicional también es con la empresa," *Pacifista*, June 24, 2016, <https://pacifista.tv/notas/la-justicia-transicional-tambien-es-con-la-empresa/>; and Juan Pablo Sepúlveda, "'Los grupos paramilitares sacaron provecho de sus alianzas con empresarios,'" *Pacifista*, May 15, 2018, <https://pacifista.tv/notas/los-grupos-para->

[militares-sacaron-provecho-de-sus-alianzas-con-empresarios/](#).

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