

**TECHNIQUES OF POLITICAL MARKETING:
A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST
PERSPECTIVE ON NEWS DISTRIBUTION AS
A PART OF THE PEACE PROCESS IN
COLOMBIA**

- Perceptions of the impact of fake news and misinformation

Master's Thesis in International Marketing

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Abstract for Master's thesis

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Title: Techniques of political marketing: a social constructionist perspective on news distribution as a part of the peace process in Colombia - perceptions of the impact of fake news and misinformation	
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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Colombia is a corrupt nation that remain one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists and activists. Colombia is a country where misinformation and fake news have characterized the society to a large extent for a long time, and today's globalized and digitalized media landscape make it easier than ever before for institutions and authoritarian leaders with an agenda to spread propaganda.</p> <p>The aim of this thesis is to map and analyse perceptions of how communication of political agenda, in the form of fake news and misinformation, has affected the political climate and democracy during the (ongoing) peace process in Colombia.</p> <p>The theoretical frame of reference focuses on three subject areas: social constructionism, political communication, and fake news. The empirical part of the thesis consists of secondary data based on previous research, statistics, and netnography, and primary data from 9 individual interviews conducted with Colombian citizens (all experts in the subject area), and extracts from meetings with former FARC-combatants.</p> <p>Through a social constructionist approach this thesis aimed to explain why communication political agenda is understood differently in different parts of the Colombian society.</p> <p>The analysis of the empirical research established that there is no general common consensus in Colombia to what the history of the country and what the fundamental problems are to why Colombia has been in conflict for over 50 years. In other words, there are many different subjective truths, and hence, the political communication understood distinctly throughout the country.</p> <p>The results of this research established that fake news is used as an unethical marketing tool to counteract transparent fact-based communication, due to financial and/or political agenda. Fake news has been a way of discrediting the peace agreement and delegitimizing the actors, thus, limiting their future political possibilities, and further deepening the polarization in the country. The results of the research states that fake news and misinformation are challenges affecting the attempt(s) to build lasting peace in Colombia.</p>	
Key words: social constructionism, political marketing, fake news, misinformation, disinformation, predatory advertising, data-borne marketing, computational propaganda	
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Innehållsförteckning

1 Introduction	1
1.1 Preamble.....	1
1.2 Problem area.....	2
1.3 Research questions and aim of the thesis.....	3
1.4 Methodology.....	4
1.5 Delimitations.....	5
1.6 Key concepts.....	6
1.7 Disposition.....	7
2 A social constructionist perspective on communication	8
2.1 Social Constructionism.....	8
2.2 Social constructionism in politics.....	11
3 Political Marketing	13
3.1 Modern political marketing.....	13
3.2 Manipulation of democracy.....	15
3.2.1 Heresthetics, overload, and rational ignorance.....	16
3.2.2 Worrying trends in the modern political communication landscape.....	18
4 Fake News	21
4.1 Defining fake news.....	21
4.1.1 Motivations behind fake news.....	22
4.2 Fake news and social media.....	23
4.2.1 Fake news spread differently than the truth.....	25
4.3 Different type of fake news.....	27
4.4 The role of the consumer – attention is an asset.....	28
4.5 Misinformation as a threat to democracy.....	30
4.6 Summary of the theory: General implications of political communication and fake news from a social constructionist perspective.....	32
5 Method	34
5.1 Research Design.....	34
5.2 Mixed method research.....	35
5.3 Interviews and choice of informants.....	38
5.4 Interview guide- and process.....	41
5.5 Processing and analysis of data.....	43
5.5.1 Research quality.....	45

5.6	Methodological limitations.....	45
6	Case description	47
6.1	The historical background of the peace process in Colombia.....	47
6.1.1	Views of James Robinson on the situation in Colombia	50
6.2	The media landscape in Colombia	51
6.2.1	Digital media in Colombia.....	53
6.3	Voices of the conflict	57
6.3.1	Introduction to the graduation of former FARC- guerrilla 8.3.2018, Panaca, Colombia	58
6.3.2	Interview with Óscar Naranjo, Vice President of Colombia (March 2017 – August 2018)	59
6.3.3	Interviews with former FARC-combatants	61
6.4	Summary of the case description.....	65
7	Presentation of data	66
7.1	Perceptions of the peace process in Colombia	66
7.2	Perceptions of the political communication in the different phases of the peace process in Colombia	70
7.2.1	Perceptions of the communication of fake news during the peace process	75
7.3	Perceptions on the societal implications of fake news used as a political marketing tool in Colombia.....	78
7.4	Summary of the data.....	81
8	Analysis.....	83
8.1	A social constructionist perspective on factors that have affected perceptions of communicated political agenda during the peace process in Colombia	83
8.2	Fake news – the unethical application of marketing methods to the Colombian political spectrum	87
8.3	The societal implications of Fake news in Colombia.....	89
9	Final discussion	92
9.1	Results and answers to the research questions	92
9.2	Criticism towards the thesis	96
9.3	Suggestions for future research	98
10	Svensk sammanfattning	99
	Inledning.....	99
	Syfte och ämnesmotivering	100
	Presentation av metod och material.....	101

Redogörelse för undersökningen.....	101
Resultat.....	102
References:.....	103
Appendix 1	111
Annex 1	112

Tables

Table 1 Typlogy of fake news.....	27
Table 2 GENERAL TYPES OF FAKE NEWS, BASED ON AUTHOR'S IMMEDIATE INTENTION TO DECEIVE AND THE LEVEL OF FACTICITY	28
Table 3 Presentation of the 9 informants (informant-occupation-further information)..	40
Table 4 PRESENTATION OF DATE OF INTERVIEWS, METHOD, LOCATION (OF INFORMANT), AGE AND GENDER OF INFORMANT.....	41
Table 5 Republic of colombia, voters and election turnouts.....	49

Figures

Figure 1 THE DISPOSITION OF THE THESIS	7
Figure 2 The social constructionism theory in practice based on the literature review ..	10
Figure 3 MOST POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORKS BASED ON SHARES IN COLOMBIA IN 2018	54
Figure 4 TIME SPENT WITH NEWS IN COLOMBIA IN 2020.....	55
Figure 5 MESSAGES OF VIOLENDE DURING THE ELECTORAL CONVERSATIONS IN 2018	56

1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research of this thesis. The chapter provides a research overview by presenting the problem area, the purpose, the research questions and the aim of the thesis, the methodology, key concepts, and delimitations. The chapter ends with a presentation of the thesis outline.

1.1 Preamble

Already in 2013, the World Economic Forum announced misinformation as a global challenge. It has joined the family of anthropogenic climate change, increasing economic inequality, global health problems, water supply shortage, and a range of other urgent challenges. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017)

At times, it seems to be more important to win debates and to sell commercial and emotional messages, than to spread facts and knowledge. Today's globalized digitized world and media landscape make it easier than ever for authoritarian leaders, as well as various non-democratic states, to propagate propaganda (Torrado, 2019). However, the challenge of misinformation cannot be met only by pointing fingers at the ones creating or paying for the creation of the content, the structural conditions creating ways for misinformation to spread must also be examined. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017) Fake news and misinformation are hence a very interesting and current subjects of discussion.

This thesis will discuss communication from a social constructionist perspective. It will give an insight into political communication, media as a channel for political communication, the impact of fake news in the political climate, and finally, the perceptions of the societal impacts of fake news in a Colombian context during the ongoing peace process in Colombia.

1.2 Problem area

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have significantly changed the nature of communication. The emerge of the New Media has provided the audience with diverse channels of information gathering and consumption. This inevitably comes with diverse influences on the audience. (Nwabueze & Okonkwo, 2018)

Communication in the news media today is an interplay between the content creator, the channel in which the information is communicated, and the audience. (UNESCO, 2018). According to Silverman (2017) a functioning democracy requires criticism, transparency, and consequences for journalistic mistakes. Furthermore, it requires that we should be able to collectively distinguish the truth from fabrications and deception.

The problem is not (exclusively) about not having access to reliable news or other content. The huge amount of information circulating in the media, the audience's capability to be critical to the sources, and the way information is communicated is new and distressing.

Disinformation is an emerging global problem that confronts societies in general, but specifically the communication landscape (UNESCO, 2018). One definition of fake news is: "News articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers". (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). The extent to which fake news is circulating in media channels today is alarming. They play an important role in the political climate, the development of the news media and, consequently, they affect democratic processes. (Silverman, 2017)

1.3 Research questions and aim of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to map and analyse perceptions of how communication of political agenda, in the form of fake news and misinformation in various media channels, has affected the political climate and the democracy during the (ongoing) peace process in Colombia.

This thesis thus intends to create a coherent and profound theoretical understanding of political communication, fake news, and social constructionism. The empirical research focuses on the dissemination of political communication, in the form of fake news and misinformation, by analysing perceptions by Colombian citizens and experts in the subject area, of how it has affected the political climate and the democratic processes during the (ongoing) peace process in Colombia.

The theory of social constructionism lends itself well to the discussion of the microlevel (words, images, actions) and the macrolevel (structures, institutions) processes (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009), and was hence chosen as the theoretical and empirical approach for this thesis.

The research questions are established as:

1. In the context of the ongoing peace process in Colombia, what are fake news and what is their societal impact?
2. How can the different perceptions of communicated political agenda in Colombia be understood from a social constructionism perspective?
3. Can fake news be understood as the unethical application of marketing methods to the political spectrum?

1.4 Methodology

The data collection has been done through a mixed-method research, by conducting semi-structured and unstructured interviews and analysing previous research and secondary data. Social constructionism has been used as both a theoretical and empirical approach. Secondary data was collected from literature, academic journals, scientific articles, and internet sources that support the subject areas in this thesis. The analysis of secondary data and other previous research serve to support the primary data collected.

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) state that interviewing is a productive method to gather data when one wants to study people's experiences regarding a specific matter. The empirical part of the investigation consists of nine individual in-depth interviews with Colombian citizens who have worked and/or lived through the conflict first-hand. Journalist, university professors and other professionals were interviewed, to give a thorough insight in the political climate and the impact of misinformation on the Colombian society during the ongoing peace process. Former guerrilla-combatants and the former vice-president of Colombia were also interviewed to even further broaden the understanding of the structural conditions in Colombia, and to provide a first-hand insight on the processes that have been implemented during the peace process. The informants in this thesis have different experiences and perspectives on the current issues but are all deeply connected to the subject matter. The data collected is based on the informants' personal and professional experiences, observations, and life-situations. Hence, the social constructionism approach.

The interviews were conducted in the informants' own language, recorded, and/or written down, translated, transcribed, and categorized to support the analysis process. (Bryman & Bell, 2013) The gathering of data was made between March 2018 and June 2020, which is reflected in an image overlapping a development of the situation.

The results are based on a compilation of the thesis's empirical results and the theoretical frame of reference.

1.5 Delimitations

The theory presented in this thesis is restricted to focus on two main subject areas: Political communication (marketing) and Fake News (misinformation and disinformation). The empirical part of the research investigates perceptions on the effects of fake news and its societal implications in the Colombian context during the peace process.

The data collection has been done partly through interviews and personal communication first-hand, and partly through the gathering of secondary data and previous research on the subject area.

Only Colombian citizens and people who have a direct link to the peace process and the Colombian media, were chosen to take part in the interviews (presented in chapters 6 and 7). All informants were born and raised in Colombia in respect to the social constructionist approach, building an understanding of *Colombian* perceptions on the peace process in Colombia. This was an important limitation made to find clear connections, relationships, patterns, and deviations more easily without the risk of interfering cultural differences.

1.6 Key concepts

Social constructionism: According to Gergen (1985) Social constructionism views discourse about the world as an artifact of communal interchange, rather than as a map or reflection of the world. Social constructionism aims to place knowledge within the process of social interchange.

Political marketing: The general method of political communication. Political marketing is unidirectional communication (for example advertising). (Maarek, 1995)

Fake News: “*News articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers.*” (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213)

Misinformation: Unintentional sharing of false information. (Wardle, 2017)

Disinformation: Information that is known to be false, created deliberately and shared. (Wardle, 2017)

Predatory advertising: When personal information such as demographics, habits, interests, zip codes and consumer preferences, are used to target ads, specifically to people under economic and social pressure. (O’Neil, 2016)

Data-borne marketing: Data-borne marketing is usually exploited in campaigns and elections. If one knows the voters’ profiles, it is much easier to seduce, persuade and manipulate them, hence make them stay on election day or influence which candidate they vote for. With the right data it is possible to modify behaviour and possibly even influence election results. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017)

Computational propaganda: Automated accounts, bots, trolls, identity, and profile thefts on social networks, with the intention of adding emotions to the trending topic of feelings shared by a county, state, or nation. (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017)

1.7 Disposition

Chapter 2 presents social communication that was used as a research approach in this thesis. Chapters 3 and 4 present the literature review. The theoretical framework is built upon three subject matters: A social constructionist approach to communication, political marketing, and Fake News. The theoretical framework is structured to support the purposes/objectives of this thesis.

FIGURE 1 THE DISPOSITION OF THE THESIS

INTRODUCTION		1
RESEARCH APPROACH: SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM		2
Theory POLITICAL MARKETING	Theory FAKE NEWS	3 4
METHOD <hr/> Mixed-method research		5
CASE DESCRIPTION <hr/> Case Colombia - Secondary data - Interviews		6
PRESENTATION OF DATA		7
ANALYSIS OF DATA		8
RESULTS AND CLOSING DISCUSSION		9

In chapter 5 the method of research is presented. Chapter 6 provides an insight in the history of the Colombian conflict and the ongoing peace process. Chapter 7 presents the data that is analysed in chapter 8. Chapter 9 presents the results of the research, answers the research questions, followed by recommendations for future research.

2 A social constructionist perspective on communication

This chapter defines social constructionism as a communication theory and discusses why social constructionism lends itself well as a research approach when analysing perceptions of political communication and the spread of fake news and misinformation.

2.1 Social Constructionism

” Although the media may be dominant, they are not omnipotent” - Peter Steven (2003)

There are several ways to understand communication. A purely theoretical approach includes a sender, a message, noise, and a receiver. All communication is about interpretation, in other words, people can understand the message in distinct ways even if what they hear is the same. (Fiske, 1997)

One implication of the social constructionist theory is that the social reality requires interaction between people (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Social Constructionism sees the language, the communication and the speech as having the central role of the interactive process through which we understand ourselves and the world. (Galbin, 2014) In other words, construction is social as it requires collaborative rather than individual effort. According to social constructionism, all that exist in the social world is a result of words and actions of people interacting. Bringing something, making something, or building something into being that had no existence previously, is central to social constructionism. Each culture and social group develop its own understanding of the world and creates its own meanings for behaviour, and how it is to be understood. Social actors develop a concept and then figure out ways to make it concrete. It is necessary to actively maintain a social construction for it to remain viable, otherwise it will be ignored and dissolve as it is no longer conceived as relevant. Every generation maintains or

reaffirms some parts of the social world, recreating, discarding, or repairing other parts. (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009)

“Constructionism stands in striking contrast to several hundred years of Western thought that views knowledge as built up from the individual’s observations and rational thought.” – Gergen (2006, p. 2)

Social constructionism is, without denying the influence of genetical heritage, concentrating on investigating the social influences on communal and individual life. According to social constructionism we all see the same world differently. Each of us creates our own perceptions of the actual world, hence, we will never know what is universally true or false, what is right or wrong, or/and good or bad. Social constructionism thus abandons the idea that the individual’s mind represents a mirror of reality. (Galbin, 2014)

Social constructionism is sometimes called a movement, at other times a position, a theory, a theoretical orientation, or an approach. Social constructionism challenges most of our common-sense knowledge of ourselves and the world we live in. Anthropologists would call the subject of study culture, whereas sociologists would call it society. Social constructionism emphasizes the complexity and the interrelatedness of the many facets of individuals in their own communities. As mentioned above, language is considered an essential tool in social construction, hence, any type of speech is interpreted as a social construction from a cultural consensus. (ibid.)

According to McLeod (1997) the modern self is not seen as an entity, but a construction and understanding, and can therefore only be achieved in a careful analysis of the cultural and historical context of social life. According to the same author (1997), social constructionism should be viewed as a social and cultural postmodern movement that is attempting to move beyond modernism. Social constructionism finds that any way of making sense of the self is socially constructed and can be understood as originating from a set of cultural, social, and historical conditions. Social constructionists attempt to develop ‘local knowledges’, where theory and practice are closely integrated. (McLeod, 1997)

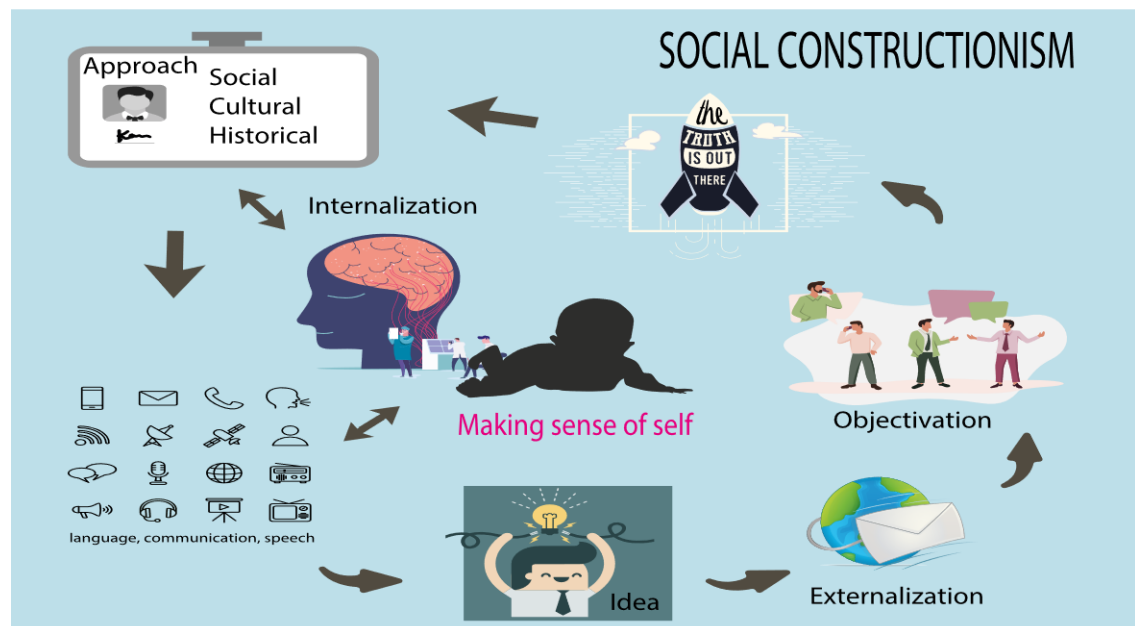
“A great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences”.
- Gergen (1985, p 265)

Many things have social reality without having prior physical existence, such as social roles, religions, and relationships. Additionally, people create social meanings for the physical world. Social actors invent stories, arguments, and conversations, as well as understandings of the significance of these and other “social productions”. (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009)

Berger and Luckman (1996), who first introduced social constructionism in 1966, state that the individual is born with a predisposition towards sociality. Hence, one is not born a member of society, but becomes one. Human beings create and sustain all social phenomena through social practises.

Berger and Luckman (1966) see three fundamental processes as responsible for the creation of social phenomena: *internalization*, *objectivation* and *externalization*.

FIGURE 2 GENERIC ILLUSTRATION OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM THEORY IN PRACTICE BASED ON THE LITERATURE REVIEW¹



People externalize when they act in the world. For example: They have an idea or a message and *externalize* it by writing an article. This article then enters the social realm as other people read and re-tell the article, and slowly the article (or more so; the idea)

¹ All vector graphics retrieved from www.vecteezy.com

begins to take on a life of its own. For people, the idea has become an object of consciousness in the society (*objectivation*) – and has developed a factual truth or existence and it seems to be independent from the constructive work of and interaction of people. Ultimately, future generations are born into a world where this idea already exists. Hence, they *internalize* it as a part of their consciousness and as a part of their understanding of the world. (Galbin, 2014)

According to Littlejohn and Foss (2009) one can, with a social constructionist approach, for example study how people use words when describing race, or the roles individuals of different races have been given in the media and reveal how racism has been maintained and how it could, in theory, be dismantled.

2.2 Social constructionism in politics

Political communication theory explains the processes in which appointed leaders and elected representatives, the media, and the citizenry, use messages to create opinions about political parties. Messages and interactions are a strategic means for influencing public policies when people exercise power in support of public interest. The conceptualization of who it is that has the power, and how the power is exercised, is prevalent in political communication theories. (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009)

The constructionist theory evolves from symbolic interaction. This is the social theory on how reality is created by people reflecting on and using symbols in social interactions. The meaning of political symbols surfaces through social interactions and is dependent on the content expressed through written, spoken, aural and visual messages. Symbolic interaction would according to this theory, promote self-understanding, social knowledge, and informative clarification relevant to political communication theory. (ibid.)

Social constructionism implies that there are no real external bodies that can be apprehended or mapped. We can therefore not see ourselves as knowers or assume that there are facts that we can come to know. “Facts”, among other assumptions and ideas, are social constructions. (Tandoc et.al.,2017)

Our societies are run by politics, whether the structure is dictatorial or democratic, or something else. The theoretical relationship is communal, where the citizens come first whilst striving for maximum social, economic, and environmental welfare. According to social constructionism, everyone views the artifact reality distinctly. Hence, protecting and bringing forward different (read: your own) interest becomes central. In a democracy this is primarily done by electing representatives that comply with one's values. Bringing forward political interests and candidates require communication, and in a political sphere that implies political marketing. Social construction theory focuses on the practices by which people jointly construct their understanding of the world. Social constructionists imply that meanings are developed in coordination with others, and hence, the social fabric is woven. Social construction theory, or social constructionism, lends itself well to the discussion of the connection between the microlevel (words, images, actions) and the macrolevel processes (structures, institutions). (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009)

3 Political Marketing

This chapter begins with describing the meaning of the concept of political marketing and the differences from, and similarities with, commercial marketing, followed by a discussion of political manipulation and the worrying trends in the modern political communication landscape.

3.1 Modern political marketing

According to Kotler (2017, p. 4):” *Marketing is managing profitable customer relationships. The two-fold goal of marketing is to attract new customers by promising superior value and keep and grow current customers by delivering satisfaction.*” Maarek (1995) defines traditional (commercial) marketing as the set of means by which a business venture may maintain, develop, or create its market and clientele.

Marketing is, apart from ‘telling and selling’, the art of “satisfying customer needs”. Every brand on a market needs to differentiate and position itself in the marketplace by increasing their value proposition, hence offering a set of benefits or values that it delivers to the customers to satisfy their needs. The traditional marketing strategy-steps include production, product, selling, marketing, and societal marketing (short-run wants and long-run welfare). (Kotler, 2017)

Lees-Marshment (2009) states that politics can be viewed as a product (even if many do not like this idea since it brings with its connotations of commodification and consumerisation). The political party product is an evolving and complex phenomenon, which varies from one electoral area to another. Commercial marketing methods offer political parties the possibility to address diverse voter concerns and needs through marketing analysis, planning, implementation, and control of political and electoral campaigns (O’Cass, 1996).

The [marketing] concept of sensitively serving and satisfying human needs... provides a useful concept for all organisations. All organisations are formed to serve the interest of particular groups: hospitals serve the sick, schools serve the students, governments serve the citizens, and labour unions serve the members... Marketing is that function of the organisation that can keep in constant touch with the organisation's customers, read their need, develop "products" that meet these needs, and build a program of communications to express organisation's purposes. (Kotler & Levy, 1969, p. 15, as cited by Lees-Marshment, 2009)

Maarek (1995) defines political marketing as the general method of political communication. Political marketing is not only about 'political campaigning', but it also extends well beyond what is usually claimed. O'Cass (1996) defines political marketing as the analysis, planning, implementation and control of political electoral programmes that are designed to create, build and maintain beneficial exchange relationships between a political party and a voter, for the purpose of achieving the political marketers objectives.

According to Lees-Marshment (2009) political parties are nowadays acting like businesses, using market intelligence to inform and communicate the design of the political product they are offering, becoming market- (or voter-) oriented, rather than focusing on selling.

According to Lee-Marshment (2009), there are many potentials of political marketing. Using political marketing tools, politics potentially become more responsive. People are more individualistic, sophisticated, and knowledgeable than ever before, and should therefore be the guiding principle of understanding the trends all around the world. Marketing tools can even be used to enhance democracy, through marketing research by understanding the concerns of smaller groups in society that would otherwise have been neglected. By ensuring that politicians are more aware of the public opinion, it will encourage greater consideration of the public's views and reduce elite domination of the political process. E-marketing offers the potential of a more effective consultation and discussion and continued marketing can help governments stay in touch or reconnect with the public opinion. Furthermore, ideology can be integrated through political branding.

The general perception is that the goal of political marketing is for a politician to get elected or re-elected. However there are other goals of political marketing, for example; advancing a particular ideology, policy, cause, or piece of legislation, gain support from

new segments in the market, change the agenda in the media and the public sphere, increasing the number and activity of volunteers, winning control of government (or senate), becoming a coalition partner in the government, or/and finally, making the world a better place. (Lee-Marshment, 2009)

Even if political marketing often replicates the methods of commercial marketing, it acquires methods specific to its field. According to Maarek (1995), there are some universal rules that should be adopted in a political marketing campaign. Primary, the principle of coherence requires that no campaign decisions can be taken until it has been correlated with all other decisions. A successful political marketing campaign requires systematic re-examination of earlier campaigns. An effective campaign demands, that the entire communication process shall be redefined – ruling out the repetition of even successful campaigns. Another of Maarek's (1995) principles is that of minimal differentiation. The politician must have an advantage on a specific point, in other words, a specific factor that differentiates him/her from his/her opponents. This advantage must be emphasized throughout the campaign. And finally, the same author highlights the principle of maximum security. Maximum security warns against adopting a communication strategy that could jeopardize the candidate or the aim of the campaign, for example, not anticipating on a future event.

Political communication is not a new phenomenon, it can be dated as far back as the antiques. However, political marketing came with the elaboration of a policy of political communication: a global strategy of design, rationalization, and conveyance of modern political communication. Political marketing today, is largely held responsible for the banalization of modern political discourse, as well as the escalating campaign costs. Hence, the numerous critiques on political marketing. (Maarek,1995)

3.2 Manipulation of democracy

The general discourse today focuses on whether the voter preferences are shaped by political elements or by the effects of the social environment. (Çoban & Öztürk, 2019) Theoretical work in economics shows that under competition and diversity of opinion,

daily newspapers will provide content that is more biased, and that technology narrows, rather than widens, the news audiences' political horizons. With the new media, individuals tend to rely on familiar comforting sources for the more attentive segments of citizenry and are consequently less able to deliberate over questions of public policy. As the news audience increasingly polarizes through questions of politics and ideology, media owners stand to gain market share by injecting more, rather than less, political bias to the news. When the audience is polarized, novel news (or “news with an edge”) makes for market success. (Cheminant & Parrish, 2011)

Simultaneously, the less informed – who are in most need of exposure to news – will fall further behind the more informed part of the citizenry. As an increasing number of people fall outside the reach of news, they become less informed about current affairs and more receptive to persuasive appeals of political elites. Exposure can thus be said to be limited to the politically engaged strata. This consequently leads to an even less informed and more polarized electorate. (Iyengar & Hahn, 2011)

Journalism should be based on objectivity. Today, in the new media environment, in many parts of the world, entire cable news channels have become identified with partisan leanings. In the new media environment, a news consumer can tailor the style and substance of the news to fit their own ideological preferences. This consequently makes it easier to propagate manipulation and distortion, consequently, creating a world with little common ground, where each side in the political debate is armed with a tailored version of the facts. (Fox & Gangl, 2011)

3.2.1 Heresthetics, overload, and rational ignorance

Manipulation is defined as “the failure of compassion”. Trading the victim's ignorance, or lack of attention, to a situation of choice, leaves the victim thinking that they have more agency in the situation than they in fact do. To ensure equality, strategies must be public and universal. Manipulation is a failure of political equality as it involves deception – getting victims to do something they would not normally have done, something that is contrary to their putative will. Political manipulation implies manipulation of the circumstances of the choice, rather than the will of the choice. It is oftentimes very hard

to hold someone accountable for political manipulation - if there is no victim, is there a crime? (Sahl, 2011)

Heresthetics is a political strategy that implies manipulating the structure and the context of a decision-making process. The basic idea of heresthetics is that even when one's choice among alternatives is completely free, the content of the alternatives is determined. The person that determinate the alternatives is usually a designated leader, or an agenda setter – not the individual chooser or the one that judges the choice (usually in ignorance of who framed the alternatives and why). (ibid.)

For most voters, the time and effort needed to make a thorough analysis, and hence, a reasoned political choice, cost more than a voter's perceived effect on the outcome of the choice. Therefor many people remain clueless (rational ignorance), and consequently, potentially exploited. The powerful can systematically use hereshetics to obscure their own actions and avoid accountability in a way that outsiders find difficult to understand. This can be understood as political manipulation. This is ethically and politically worrying for empirical reasons rather than analytic reasons, because of how it works, rather than how it is defined. (Sahl, 2011)

Another technique is political manipulation through overload that lacks distributive bias. It is the opposite of manipulation that relies on secrecy. Overload signifies maximal disclosure, in other words accurate and full reporting. Overload does not rely on the level of falsifying facts, but on the level of interpreting them. People that are overloaded with information, naturally becomes desperate for a scheme for integrating and making sense of it, which allows for politicians to step in with an interpretive framework which supports their own policy preferences. (Sahl, 2011) Goodin (2007, as cited by Sahl, 2011) suggests that national security issues provide the most opportunity for this kind of manipulation, as interpretive frames are easier to sell when the subject at hand lies outside the audience's experience.

Heresthetic overload implies true facts being technically public, but practically incomprehensible. In other words, deliberately providing, or encouraging, the release of massive amounts of information – followed by a biased frame to make sense of it. The

frame serving the purpose, not the audience. The information at hand concerns, not the substance of the public issue, but the process of decision making that politicians have deliberately set up in considering the issue. These processes are designed to obscure their unpopular positions on the issue. Biased frames about policy indicates how politicians are manipulating the available choices of policy. (Sahl, 2011)

Heresthetic power implies the power, not to win over votes on statistically defined issues, but to dynamically choose, what will be voted on. This can also imply controlling the agenda, in other words, not only influencing the agenda, but influencing which ones get attention in the public discourse. (ibid.)

In other words, rather than propagating propaganda, at times, marketing methods are used to shift attention to other matters to benefit the agenda setter's policy preferences.

3.2.2 Worrying trends in the modern political communication landscape

There is a very large difference between the nature of communication strategies of the individual political figure, and communication efforts of governments and public institutions. In recent years, politics and the media have largely been suffering from a loss of credibility. Politicians are in a large scale solely focusing on their personal interest and driving so called "politician's politics" as the media is, simultaneously, inflicting with uncontrolled input and unverified information. (O'Cass, 1996)

Rúas and Capdevila (2017) highlights that the loss of credibility and the general lack of trust in politicians has placed political communication in a scenario of a rising left-wing and right-wing population, hence, a deepened polarization. This phenomenon especially threatens to pave way in countries with leaders that are already relatively radical. Deepened polarization due to the loss of credibility and lack of trust in politicians is a global phenomenon, and one that has had a very strong foothold in Latin-American countries, such as Colombia, for a long time. (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017)

Rúas and Capdevila (2017), among others, state that we are in an age of conceiving politics as politically incorrect. This threat extends to traditional communication means, as they are perceived as a part of the same system. The same author (2017) implies that we are moving towards the return of the old rules of propaganda: exaggeration, simplification, ridicule of adversary, misinformation, lies, conspiracy theories and dissemination of hoaxes. (As defined by Domenach, 1968; referred by Rúas & Capdevila, 2017) Furthermore, defining what is true and what is false has become a common political strategy that is replacing debates that are based on a mutually agreed sets of facts. (Tandoc et.al., 2017)

In search of alternative audiences, politicians have embraced a way of political entertainment and infotainment (also referred to as “politainment” in the political context), full of false promises and intentions, facing new dimension of political action based on the concept of post-truth (The truth felt, perceived, and accepted as a belief or faith). Politicians are forced to perform, which has led to a personalization of politics that is increasingly present in digital media. (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017)

There is an interest in gaining control of the voting market through emotional manipulation. Facts are less important than the sensations they produce. There is an advent of Big Data, a new algorithm culture, that aim to gain technical control of the voting market. (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017) As indicated by Woolley and Howard (2016), computational propaganda is now becoming one of the most important social impacts of innovation in computer science and engineering. One of the most evident consequences of these practices is the issue of whether one can hack the election of a president (Also discussed and presented in the documentary “The great hack”, 2019, Netflix). There is a new dimension to the contemporary problem of manipulation: psychological vulnerabilities are amplified exponentially by the increasing power and complexity of the media and other institutions. (Cheminant & Parrish, 2011)

Supported by the social constructionism theory, Rúas and Capdevila (2017), state that we are transmitters of our cultural heritage and expressions of our social brain. Decision-making goes far beyond the rational calculation and evaluation of possibilities. (Ledoux, 1996). Decision- making acts below the threshold of intentionality and consciousness (Connolly & Zeelenberg, 2002), and when in conflict, resulting in emotion, hence, clearly overriding reasoning. This *nearly* post-factual age is thereby explained as “emotions over

reasoning” or “emotional capitalism”, where economic and emotional discourse is designed mutually, and emotional life follows the logic of economic relations and trade, and taken to the extreme, the implementation could lead to the tyranny of emotions, instincts and passions, due to misgovernment – the kind that paved way for many of the wars and dictatorships of the past. (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017)

The rejection by referendum of the peace agreement with the FARC guerrillas in Colombia (October, 2016), the unexpected triumph of Donald Trump in the US (November, 2016) presidential election, the victory of Brexit in Great Britain (June, 2016) and, the rise of the populist parties in several European countries have, among other events, highlighted western democracies events that contradict the electoral logic known until now, and the role of political communication and its effects on citizenry. The current discussion concerns the questions of to what extent the media language and political communication (as a reflection and expression of *reality*) can contribute to the recovery of confidence, the necessary democratic dialogue, and the understanding and participation between politicians and voters, and citizens and governments. (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017)

4 Fake News

In this chapter the concept of Fake News is defined. This chapter discusses motivations behind fake news, fake news and social media, how fake news spread differently than the truth, the role of the consumer, and how misinformation can imply a threat to democracy. At the end of this chapter (4.6), both the second, the third and the fourth chapter are interconnected through a summary of the theoretical frame of reference.

4.1 Defining fake news

Throughout history news has been defined in numerous ways. Kershner (2005), defines news as an “*accurate account of a real event*”. News can be an account of a recent, interesting, or significant event (Kershner 2005), an account of events that have significantly affected people (Richardson, 2007), or/and a dramatic account of something interestingly new, unusual, or something deviant. (Jamieson & Campell, 1997) However, factual news is an output of journalism - a field that is expected to provide “*Independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive information*” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 11)

According to Strömbäck (2003) one of the most important journalistic tasks is to examine and review those in power. This is done through public media investigations, but also by examining and reviewing citizens, politicians, and journalists. By examining those in power, informing the public and allowing different views and cultural expressions to be spoken, journalism contributes to a better functioning democracy.

A journalist you must adhere to standards, such as being accurate and objective. Furthermore, one must acknowledge that along with the responsibility of the profession, comes power. Journalists have an influential position in society and are often referred to as the fourth pillar of democracy, as they are amplifying and conferring legitimacy to what they report. (Schudson, 2003)

Fake news is an oxymoron since news is normatively based on truth. One definition of fake news is “*News articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers.*” (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213) Fake news is also found in the larger context of misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation, according to the UK parliament, referring to “*the inadvertent sharing of false information*”, and disinformation on the other hand, referring to “*the deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false*”. (Wardle, 2017)

Fake news is not a new concept, it reaches back centuries. In the 16th century fabricated news were referred to as ‘false news’, in the 19th century ‘yellow journalism’ was a term used to describe fabricated or exaggerated news stories, and was, like today’s fake news, generally connected to profit motives. The term *fake news* appears to have emerged in the late 19th century. (Muqshith & Muzykant, 2019) A common factor for fabricated news is that it appropriates both the look and feel of real news. Fake news intends to take on some form of credibility by trying to appear like real news, hence hiding under a façade of legitimacy. (Tandoc et.al., 2017)

4.1.1 Motivations behind fake news

Fake news stories have engaged and fooled millions of readers all over the world (Silverman, 2017). Recent studies have examined the implications of fake news, not only in terms of confusing readers (Barthel et.al.,2016), but regarding the potential for affecting election results (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Readers generally ignore the fake news stories they encounter, but in a lot of cases the consumption of fake news stories leads to tangible action (Muqshith & Muzykant, 2019).

According to Tandoc, Zheng and Ling (2017), there are two main motivations that underlie the production of fake news: the financial motivation and the ideological motivation.

There is financial motivation behind fake news going viral and providing content-creators with clicks that are convertible to advertising revenue. The motivation is ideological when

fake news stories are produced to promote ideas or people that they favour, often discrediting others. (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017).

According to Vosoughi et.al. (2018), an active and irrelevant use of the term fake news has polarized the political landscape and the media climate. Politicians have implemented a political strategy of labelling news stories that do not support their standpoint as unreliable or fake news, and sources that do support their positions as reliable or not fake. (ibid.) Since the presidential elections in the United States in 2016 ‘fake news’ has become a buzzword that has lost connection to the actual veracity of the information presented. The elections were a democratic exercise marked by misinformation and fabricated news. (Albright, 2016)

Fake news today is thus not only discussed in scholarly discourse, but also in daily conversations, with the purpose not only to point out false information, but also (the opposite way of acting within the framework of the concept of false news) to demonize traditional and legitimate news organizations. All of this illustrates the importance of understanding what the concept of fake news can stand for. (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017)

4.2 Fake news and social media

Misinformation and disinformation in the media are nothing new. They have been around since the development of the first writing systems. (Marcus, 1993) However, the digitalization of news has profoundly challenged the traditional definition of news. Today, online platforms, particularly social media, are becoming the main source of news consumption for a growing number of individuals. Consequently, misinformation and disinformation have found *new* channels. Online platforms provide space for non-journalists to reach mass audiences. This has widely challenged the link between news and journalists due to non-journalists engaging in journalistic activities to produce journalistic outputs, including “news”. (Robinson & DeShano, 2011)

Initially Social media was used to promote news stories (Lasorsa et.al., 2011), but it quickly became a way to break stories and interact with the audiences (Tandoc & Vos, 2015). Social media has changed news distribution, as well as the traditional beliefs of

what news should look like. Twitter, as an example, is a perfect platform for quickly disseminating details about a breaking event (Hermida, 2011). A tweet² of 140 characters from a person with authority is nowadays considered news (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017). Through social media accounts users can post videos, photos, information, and narratives about newsworthy events that they witness first-hand, hence, engaging in journalism. (Hermida, 2011) Concurrently, journalists have followed the audience into the world of social media.

Social media sites have a massive audience, and as they facilitate speedy exchange and spread of information, they also facilitate the spread of misinformation. Facebook, for example, has around 2.7 billion active monthly users according to Statista (2020), and nowadays functions as a portal where users have the possibility to not only share personal ideas and updates with friends, but also to consume, produce, and exchange different type of information, such as news. Receiving information from socially proximate sources, helps legitimate the veracity of information that is being shared on social networks. Users, however, seldom verify the information they share -which is the very base of journalistic work. (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017)

As each post on social media is accompanied by popularity ratings, social media increases the bandwagon effect (the rate of uptake of beliefs, ideas, trends etc. increase the more they have already been adapted by others). In other words, when a post receives many likes, shares or/and comments, it is likely to receive even more attention from other users, hence, more visibility that has very little to do with quality.(Tandoc et.al., 2017)

New media technologies have both enabled an increased the volume of news content and allowed for niche marketing on a unique scale, often presenting ideologically diverged consumers with entirely different universes of discourse. (Muqshith & Muzykant, 2019)

Social media fosters an environment that lends well to the propagation and spread of unverified information, such as fake news. (Tandoc et.al., 2017)

² Tweet = A post made on the social media site Twitter.

4.2.1 Fake news spread differently than the truth

Both true and false information spread rapidly online. The success of fabricated items often relies on pre-existing social tension. When the population have trust in an institution or a person with authority, it is very unlikely that they would accept stories that are critical of these actors (in other words, a false news story on these would NOT gain legitimacy). However, if social tension exists: if there is serious sectarian, political, racial, or cultural differences - people will be more susceptible to fabricated news (In other words, a false news story gaining legitimacy). (Tandoc et.al., 2017)

The development of news bots³ are adding to what the reader might interpret as legitimacy of the item, which hence, gives legitimacy and the illusion of widespread acceptance of a news item. A study on detecting fake websites distinguished two types of fake news sites, one is called “spoof sites”, which imitate already existing websites, and the other one is “concocted sites”, which are misleading websites attempting to appear as unique, legitimate, commercial entities. (Abbasi et.al., 2010) With News Bots, fake news exceeds the simple appearance of real news by building a network of fake sites that is consequently undermining journalism’s legitimacy. (Kang et.al. 2011)

Two examples of fabricated news stories that gained legitimacy is one titled “Pope Francis Endorsed Donald Trump”⁴. The estimation was that this fabricated news, relating to the former president of USA, Donald Trump, was shared 30 million times. Another fabricated news implied that Hillary Clinton was selling weapons to ISIS. This fabricated news was shared 8 million times on Facebook. Approximately half of the people who read and remembered these stories, also believed them to be true. (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017)

In a study conducted by Vosoughi et.al. (2018), the research question was: “*How do truth and falsity diffuse differently, and what factors of human judgment explain these differences?*” The study is one of the first studies that comprehensively evaluates

³ various pieces of software that harvest articles from newsgroups or/and news websites

⁴ “Fake News went viral in 2016. This expert studied who clicked.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/fake-news-went-viral-2016-expert-studied-who-clicked-n836581> (accessed 10.12.2019)

differences in the spread of truth and falsity across topics and examines how and why false news spread differently than the truth.

In the study, politics was the largest rumour category in the data. (45 000 cascades followed by urban legends, business, terrorism, science, entertainment, and natural disasters). They showed that political news travelled more broadly and deeper, reached more people, and was more viral than any other category of false information. They also found that falsehood diffused significantly further, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information. Overall, a larger amount of people retweeted falsehood than the truth. They found that falsehood was 70% more likely to get retweeted than the truth. It also took the truth six times as long as for falsehood to reach 1500 people. They found that users that spread false news had significantly fewer followers, followed significantly fewer people, were less active on Twitter (the platform that the study was focused on), were verified significantly less often, and had been on Twitter for significantly less time. (ibid.)

The same research also showed that false rumours were significantly more unique than the truth across all novelty metrics, displaying significantly higher information uniqueness. (Vosoughi et.al., 2018)

It cannot be claimed that innovation causes retweets, or that innovation is the reason for the large number of retweets of fake news. However, Vosoughi et.al. (2018), found that fake news is more novel, and that novel information is more likely to get shared and retweeted than the truth.

4.3 Different type of fake news

A review of 34 academic articles conducted by Tandoc, Zheng and Ling (2017), articles that all used the term “Fake news”, between the years 2003 and 2017, resulted in a typology of fake news: news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda - presented in the table below. The definitions are based on two dimensions: deception and level of facticity.

TABLE 1 TYPLOGY OF FAKE NEWS

<p>News Satire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use humour and exaggeration to present news updates • Focus on current affairs • The core content of political satires is based on actual events • Style of TV news broadcast • Promoted as entertainment rather than information • Referred to as fake news due to the format 	<p>News parody</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-factual information to inject humour • Highlight current issued by composing fictitious news stories • Assume that both the author and reader understand the fabrication
<p>(Native) Advertising and public relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fulfilling news and advertising goals concurrently • Part of other forms of fabrication e.g. political manipulation • Focusing on positive aspects, but generally one-sided claim • Taking advantage of the news-format to gain legitimacy • Inserting marketing messages into news format • “Clickbait”-headlines (News value to attract attention – misleading) 	<p>News fabrication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refers to articles with no factual basis • Published in the style of news articles to gain legitimacy • No understanding between author and reader that the item is false • Financial or political motivations • Fabricated news outlets attract readers and eventually advertising revenues, creating websites that mimic official organizations
<p>Photo manipulation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manipulation of real images or videos to create a false narrative as visual news • Misappropriation: non-manipulated photo taken put of its original context to present a different narrative 	<p>Propaganda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partial, unidirectional communication • Aim to impose opinions • News stories that intend to influence perceptions • Generally created by a political entity • Motivation: to benefit a government, organization, or public figure

Source: Tandoc et.al. (2017)

Facticity refers to the degree to which (fake) news rely on facts. The authors intention refers to the degree to which the producer/content creator of (fake) news intends to mislead the reader. Based on these two domains, there are four general types of fake news: Native advertising, propaganda, manipulation, and news fabrication. (Tandoc et.al., 2017)

TABLE 2 GENERAL TYPES OF FAKE NEWS, BASED ON AUTHOR'S IMMEDIATE INTENTION TO DECEIVE AND THE LEVEL OF FACTICITY

Level of facticity	Author's immediate intention to deceive	
	HIGH	LOW
HIGH	Native advertising Propaganda Manipulation	News satire
LOW	News fabrication	News parody

Source: Tandoc, et.al. (2017, p.148)

4.4 The role of the consumer – attention is an asset

Just a few years ago, information was much more difficult to get a hold on than it is today. How informed one was depended on a subscription to a newspaper, heading out to buy one, or if one had access to a library. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017) Information today is expected to be financially free. People refuse to pay for books, entertainment products and newspapers, as digitalization and information technology have enabled that. Today, generally, having a smartphone is enough to obtain information: you have access to any information of choice, weather it is news, politics, science, entertainment, or gossip. Never has so much information been so easily accessible. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017)

A large amount of money is spent on buying attention and influence on the internet, TV, and the radio. There are generally large quantities of money in politics, but the attention

politicians can secure by exposure, making headlines, and influence the mass media coverage oftentimes comes without charge. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017)

The aim of marketing is to attract and harvest attention, and ultimately, influence behaviour. Marketing is about persuading consumer into consuming a certain product or voting for a specific candidate. Attention is vital for all successful communication, as it is the portal into people's minds. Attention is the main factor in all aspects of marketing, branding, and advertising. (Teixeira, 2014)

The challenge today is not to find information, but to find the time and the space to view all the material at one's disposal, as attention paid to one thing, excludes spending time on something else. Information consumes as the audience is deflecting its attention away from some matters, attention becomes a scarce and valuable resource. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017)

Services like Google and Facebook are not truly free of charge - that perception is a misunderstanding of the business model and one's role in it. Platforms are selling the audience to advertisers, in other words, one is not the customer of Facebook or Google, one is the product, or as Hendricks & Vestergaard (2017, p.11) stated: *"If you are not paying for the product, you are the product."* In other words, the attention merchant is the main default business model today, as people pay with their attention. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017)

Users are being monitored as companies are making economic profit by selling information about users to third parties. Networks, such as Google and Facebook, are securing their profit using a business model that is based on surveillance. (Taplin, 2017) The surveillance provides information about the users, that then can be (mis)used to trick, manipulate, and persuade the user effectively. In a political context, gathering user data allows for targeted advertising: if the voters' profiles are known, it is much easier to seduce, persuade and manipulate them, make them stay at home on election day, or influence which candidate they should vote for. In other words, it is possible to modify behaviour with access to the right data and, consequently, even influence election results. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017) As Cathy O'Neil points out in her book *Weapons of Math Destruction* (2016); if someone is in possession of someone's personal information, such as demographics, habits, interests, zip codes and consumer preferences, it is very

easy to effectively use this information to target ads, specifically to people under economic and social pressure. The phenomenon is called *predatory advertising*. The idea behind predatory advertising is to localize the most vulnerable people and use their information against them by finding out where they hurt the most. (O’Neil, 2016)

4.5 Misinformation as a threat to democracy

“The media is the most powerful entity on Earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” -Malcolm X

The development of the internet has presented opportunities in many countries to strengthened democratization. In various parts of the world internet has allowed for a more flexible democracy as it creates openness and political participation providing wide access to information, that undermines authoritarian regimes. The internet, and foremost social media, has allowed marginalized voices to raise the profile of social issues (#MeToo, #blacklivesmatter, #TimesUp). However, social media platforms are posing significant challenges as spaces for news consumption as private corporations, that desire markets rather than supporting democracy, are increasingly controlling the public discourse. Hence, as social media platforms are attracting attention, newspapers have experienced diminished sales as shrinking add revenue due to competition from the internet. In many parts of the world this has led to less in-depth reporting and diminished local news coverage. (Muqshith & Muzykant, 2019)

Media manipulation is nothing new, but the term fake news has not been a key term in media discourse until recent years. Concerns about this concept are to be understood withing the emerge of new technologies interconnecting with current socio-political and economic dynamics. (Muqshith & Muzykant, 2019) In 2013, The World Economic Forum stated that democratic governance is threatened by misinformation. According to Vosoughi et.al., 2018) fake news can lead to misallocation of resources during natural disasters and terror attack, the misalignment of business investments, and misinformed elections.

Our economies are not immune to fake news either. False rumours have, among other things, affected stock prices and motivations for investments. Our response to everything from natural disasters to terrorist attacks is being altered by the spread of fake news online. (Tandoc et.al., 2017). New mass-media technologies have also provided new avenues for advertisers to reach massive audiences simultaneously which has also increased consumerism. (Muqshith & Muzykant, 2019)

New mass-media technologies have always presented new opportunities for those in positions of power to influence citizenry. Hitler, for example, used the radio for intimate one-way communication to rally German citizens behind his nationalistic, imperial agenda. (Muqshith & Muzykant, 2019) But the internet has presented a new dimension to the contemporary problem of manipulation: psychological vulnerabilities are amplified exponentially by the increasing power and complexity of the media and other institutions. (Cheminant & Parrish, 2011)

A democracy is in a post-factual state when politically opportune but factually misleading narratives form the very basis of political debate and legislation. In a worst-case scenario, with an uncontrollable amount of accepted misinformation circulating wildly, democracy may approach a post-factual state, consequently, political, and practical ability to address and solve social and global challenges diminish. (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017)

4.6 Summary of the theory: General implications of political communication and fake news from a social constructionist perspective

“Propaganda, like advertising, only strikes chords when the conditions are right. For all his ranting, Hitler could never have won widespread support if he had not been able to exploit the multiple miseries of the depression.” (Death of truth: when propaganda and alternative facts first gripped the world, Brendon, 2017)

According to social constructionism, people jointly construct an understanding (cultural, social, and historical) of the world, as meanings and opinions are developed in coordination with others and then passed on for generations. Language, communication, and speech have a central role in making sense of the self and one’s surroundings. We are not born a member of society – we become one. Social actors invent different narratives; stories, arguments, and conversations, and understandings of the significance of “social productions”. All people have distinct perceptions of the same world, in other words, we cannot argue that there is a universal truth or something universally false.

A fundamental thought in social constructionism is the interest in representations, as they play a central role in the construction of the social reality. In a democracy (a social structure) our political interests are represented by (democratically) elected political representatives who communicate their policies through political communication - primarily political marketing.

Today social media platforms are the key infrastructure for political and public discourse. Some argue that this has put open societies and democracies into a “democratic deficit”. (UNESCO, 2018) recognizing that human beings are emotional voters and that “emotions over reasoning”, has become the new *normal*.

News should, by definition, be an output of journalism, and intend to provide objective, independent, reliable, and comprehensive information, thus, contributing to a better functioning democracy.

The success of fake news often rely on pre-existing social tension, and many people have a hard time distinguishing fake news from legitimate news, especially in remote parts of the world where education, or other structural conditions, limit the access to information or the prerequisites to critically examine and interpret information.

Heresthetics are used to shift the attention to benefit the agenda setter's policy preferences, and concurrently fake news has polarized our political environment and media climate even further. There is so much content circulating that it tends to overwhelm any sense of coherency. Self-selection of news content further aggravates the issue of fake news as data -collection enables the use of predictive algorithms to pave way for predatory marketing. Consequently, people do not know what to believe anymore, and some, without knowing any better, believe everything they come across. It is thus relevant to ask to which extent voter preferences depend on political elements, or if voter preferences are merely a product of the social environment.

Social media fosters an environment that makes it easy for misinformation and fake news to spread fast, hence, posing a real threat to communities and democracies. According to the World Economic Forum (2019) controlling the spread of false information online (either through laws or technology), raises questions on the limits to the freedom of speech – a human value that is not celebrated or regarded equally across different societies. Regulations that restrict communications platforms and activities, indiscriminately often have insufficient alignment to the international principles requiring that limitations on expression should be demonstrably necessary, proportional, and for a legitimate purpose. The effect, even if not always intended, is to make news media subject to a “ministry of truth”, with the power to suppress information for purely political reasons (UNESCO, 2018).

5 Method

This chapter presents the method for the empirical study. The chapter begins with a presentation of the research design and the mixed method approach, followed by a presentation of the interview-process, the interview guide, the research quality and, finally, an assessment of methodological limitations.

5.1 Research Design

According to Malhotra and Birks (2007) a research design serves as a framework for conducting a marketing research project, and hence sets the foundation for the research project. A good research design will ensure an effectively and efficiently conducted marketing research project. A research design lines out the necessary procedures needed to obtain the information when structuring or solving a marketing research problem.

In this thesis a case study design has been applied. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) what distinguishes a case study design from other designs is that it entails details and intensive study of a single case. A case study research is concerned with the nature and complexity of the case in question; in this thesis: case Colombia. A case study often favours qualitative methods because these methods are viewed as particularly helpful in the generation of a detailed, intensive examination of the case. However, qualitative methods are not precluded. A case study provides a vehicle through which both qualitative and quantitative methods can be combined, hence, not relying on one single approach. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) the selection of cases should be based primarily on the anticipation of the opportunity to learn.

The research has been conducted with a social constructionism perspective, using abductive reasoning, which implies that none of these approaches will result in one objective result or “truth”. (Denscombe, 2017) According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2013) an abductive way of working is characterized by logical thinking and hence a logical working process. In other words, the researcher moves between theory and

empiricism to find a logical explanation and understanding to the research problem. The abductive way of working is a mix of an inductive and deductive research approach.

5.2 Mixed method research

A research design and a research method are not the same thing. A research method implies the way the data have been collected. Research methods are however associated with different research designs. (Bryman & Bell, 2013) According to Denscombe (2017) there are four primary methods for collection of data that social scientists can use: observation, interviews, questionnaires/surveys, previous research, and/or other written sources. Every method has their weaknesses and strengths. What method is chosen is primarily a question of applicability and usefulness.

None of the methods mentioned above are mutually exclusive. Often both primary and secondary data are utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the research problem at hand. (Denscombe, 2017) Considering the object of the case study design of this thesis, a combination of methods was used.

Quantitative research uses numbers as units of analyses. Quantitative research usually aims to focus on larger scale research with larger numbers and quantities. People that tend to approach research with a quantitative method usually prefer to stay “close to the data”, as they believe numbers speak louder and words. Quantitative research tends to be associated with the researcher’s impartiality and the analysis of quantitative data tends to be made *after* the collection of data. (Denscombe, 2017)

A qualitative research is a research approach that is focused on exploring personal experiences with a phenomenon by collecting and analysing narrative text or data, expressed by individuals in words or images. (Clark & Ivankova, 2016) Qualitative research normally involves relatively few people or happenings, and the analysis of qualitative data is often done *during* the collection of data. A qualitative research tends to be associated with the researcher’s partiality. (Denscombe, 2017)

A mixed-method approach is a combination of different types of research within one specific project. A mixed-method research is usually a mix of quantitative and qualitative components, quantitative and qualitative methods, quantitative and qualitative data, or/and quantitative and qualitative research. A mixed-method approach is usually chosen when the researcher prefers to investigate the research issue from various perspectives. (Denscombe, 2017) In this thesis a mixed method approach has been used.

By addressing a phenomenon through a mixed method research approach, a researcher can produce stronger and more credible studies, thus, adding more value by complementary and corroborating evidence on the research problem of interest. In other words, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods within one study can help a researcher minimize or exclude potential alternative explanations of the result. Furthermore, a mixed method approach can provide enough information to explain the divergent aspects of the studied phenomenon. (Clark & Ivankova, 2016)

According to Denscombe (2017) there are several advantages with a method combination:

1) A better understanding of what is being studied

- Validates findings and increases accuracy and provides a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon that is being researched.

2) A practical, problem-based approach to research

- A more practical and problem-based than theory-based approach to the phenomenon.

3) A clearer connection between methods and the different types of data

- A mixed-method approach emphasizes integrating alternative approaches and encourages the researcher to provide a clear account over how and why the methods and the data complement each other.
- A good research with a mixed-method approach avoids all arbitrary forms of combinations.

4) Compensates strong and weak sides

- Research strategies and research methods all have their weak and strong sides. A clever combination of strategies and methods makes it possible for the researcher to take advantage of a certain method's strong sides, without having be vulnerable for criticism of the weak sides.

Denscombe (2017) also establishes some of the disadvantages with a combination of methods: The cost and duration for the research might increase, the researcher must acquire skills in more than one method, the findings from different methods might not

confirm one another (prolonging the research process), and finally, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative findings can result in a tendency of oversimplification.

Considering the social constructionist approach, the complexity of the case study research and, most importantly, the unique opportunity to access privileged information, semi structured and unstructured interviews - supported by previous research and data, such as previous interviews, official statistics, and netnography (virtual ethnography) - were found to be the most suitable methods for this research. Thus, a mixed method approach.

Interviews, chosen as the method to collect primary data for this thesis, is a method for collection of data that uses people's answers to the researcher's questions as a source of data. The interviews focus on self-reporting, in other words, what people say they do, the opinions they say they have, and what they say they believe. Interviews are an effective way to study people's experiences from their own perspective. (Denscombe, 2017)

According to Denscombe (2017), interviews are a good method to use when the purpose is to explore complex and subtle phenomena, such as:

- 1) *Perceptions, opinions, feelings, and experiences*, where the purpose of the research is to understand them in-depth, rather than to present them in a few words.
- 2) When the research focuses on *complex things* that require a thorough understanding of how things work, how factors are interconnected and how systems work.
- 3) *Privileged information*, where there is an opportunity to speak with key- persons on the field that can give especially valuable insight and knowledge based on their experience or position.

The purpose of the thesis is to map perceptions of the impact of fake news in Colombia during the peace process, from a social constructionist perspective.

Semi structured and unstructured interviews have been used as the method to collect primary data in this thesis. Semi-structured and unstructured interviews provide an opportunity for the interviewer to develop and change the questions during the project. In other words, use them developmentally. (Denscombe, 2017)

In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer has a complete list of topics to be addressed and questions to be answered. However, the interviewer is flexible about the order of the questions when the subjects are addressed and allows the respondent to develop his or her own ideas and speak extensively about the topics. The questions are usually open as the emphasis is on the respondent to develop their views on the topic. The whole interview - process is hence very open and flexible. (Denscombe, 2017)

Unstructured interviews go even further in the aim to emphasise the respondent's own views and thoughts on the subject. The role of the interviewer is to introduce the theme or the subject but interfere as little as possible during the interview. The aim of this is to let the respondent develop his or her own ideas and pursue their own thinking, without letting the discussion be shaped by questions the researcher already has in mind. (Denscombe, 2017)

Like in this thesis, the mixed method mostly combines previous research and secondary data with primary data. By using already existing data, the researcher saves both cost and time. Secondary data also provides the opportunity for a longitudinal analysis, where trends are identified over time. Official statistics provide opportunity for subset or subgroup analysis (nationally representative samples) of specialized categories of individuals. Using already existing data leaves the researcher with more time for data-analysis. Furthermore, reanalysis may offer new interpretations of the data. Another positive aspect of using secondary data is that the data are given more value (fuller use of the data). Some negative aspects of using secondary data are the lack of familiarity with the data, the complexity of the data, the lack of control of the quality of the data, and the absence of key variables. (Bryman & Bell, 2013)

5.3 Interviews and choice of informants

The interviews were conducted in two different phases: the first interviews were conducted 8 of March 2018 in Panaca, Quimbaya, Colombia, and the second part of the interviews remotely during the months of April – July 2020. The informants participated voluntarily and out of their own interest.

The informants that took part in the interviews conducted in the field (Panaca, Colombia) the 8th of March, were, now former, vice president Óscar Naranjo, former guerrilla leader Pastor Alape, members of the ARN and former ex-combatants, consisting of altogether six people. The informants have all been directly affected by the conflict or/and are in some way personally involved in the implementation of the peace agreements, as former combatants, or directly representing the process as state authority.

The first interviews in 2018, were conducted by the author accompanied by three other students attending the University of Javeriana, Bogotá, Colombia, in cooperation with the newspapers *Semana Rural* and *Directo Bogotá*. All participants were flown by the state, military plane, and helicopter, to Panaca, Armenia, Colombia where the graduation ceremony took place. The fieldtrip was conducted with aim to report on the graduation of former FARC combatants that graduated in agriculture as a part of the reincorporation efforts of the peace accords, for the newspapers *Semana Rural* and *Directo Bogotá*. Hence, the interviews were mainly focused on the ex-combatants' past experiences and their expectations for the future. Former Vice President Óscar Naranjo was asked about the government's efforts regarding the implementation of the peace process with the focus on reintegration of the ex-combatants. These interviews deepen the understanding of the conflict and its effects on the people that have lived it first-hand, and present information building a broader perspective on different perceptions of the peace process in Colombia. The interviews were conducted in the field and first-hand.

The first interviews are presented in the case description (chapter 6), as they are representing people directly affected by the conflict⁵ and the societal implications of fake news in the peace process.

In the second part of the interview-process, nine (9) experts in their field of work participated. The experts are numbered as *Informant X* (1-9). These informants were chosen due to their expertise in their field, as professors, journalist, photojournalists, public administrators, and lawyers (Table 3). In the second part of the interviews the informants were chosen to provide a personal perception on how they have experienced the peace process and the impact and consequences of political marketing and fake news. They were chosen from *different* professional fields to give a broader variety of

⁵ The author understands that every Colombian is affected by the conflict. However, ex-combatants are directly affected, and are amongst the most vulnerable part of the population.

experiences and insights. The informants are all continuously working in their field of expertise.

The informant's occupations and areas of focus, that took part in the second phase of the interviews, are presented in the following table.

TABLE 3 A PRESENTATION OF THE 9 INFORMANTS (INFORMANT-OCCUPATION-FURTHER INFORMATION)

Informant 1	Photo-journalist/ Photographer	Has worked in various media channels since 1985. Now works for the Reuters agency. Has worked with protagonists of the conflict (the FARC, ELN, paramilitaries, peasants, victims etc.)
Informant 2	Journalist	Has worked as a journalist since 1993. Has worked for international media and various institutions (among others the UN and the truth commission), the national media (e.g. SEMANA, EL TIEMPO), Editor of Semana Rural & Reconciliación Colombia. Has edited books and has taught a class on the topic of the Colombian conflict for 17 years.
Informant 3	Journalist	Works as a journalist and as a teacher at universities. Specialist in educational communication and social organizational communication. Has covered the conflict with focus on the southern parts of Colombia. Works as a workshop facilitator in communities with victims of the conflict.
Informant 4	Professor of Science and international relations	Researcher and teacher of political theory, public policy, and political philosophy.
Informant 5	Research professor in engineering and social sciences	Has led a research group for 17 years, has written many articles on the topic(s) of engineering and social sciences. Has worked in making social appropriation of ICT. Leads a foundation that provides nutritional support for vulnerable children of the armed conflict and structural dysfunctionalities.
Informant 6	University professor in economics	Works in dissemination of science and technology.
Informant 7	Political scientist and social communicator	Emphasises in conflict resolution and peace research, and the audio-visual media. Teaches conflict negotiation, reconciliation, culture of peace and SIVJRN. R.
Informant 8	Public administrator	Works with vulnerable populations in extreme poverty, victims of forced displacement and other victimizing acts because of the Colombian armed conflict. Specializes in public policy and the demand of attention for these populations.
Informant 9	Lawyer	Human rights lawyer. Works on a state level.

The second part of the interviews were all conducted individually with the author of this thesis. Due to the distance and time-difference (Colombia – Finland) most of the interviews were conducted in writing, through e-mail communication, apart from a few that was done through a combination of voice messages and/or phone calls. The time, location of the informant, methods of interview, the ages of the informant, and gender of informant, are presented in the following table.

TABLE 4 PRESENTATION OF DATE OF INTERVIEWS, METHOD, LOCATION (OF INFORMANT), AGE AND GENDER OF INFORMANT

Informant	Date	Method	Location (Informant)	Age	Gender
Informant 1	4.5.2020	E-mail correspondence	Bogotá, Colombia	60+	Male
Informant 2	25.5.2020	E-mail correspondence	Bogotá, Colombia	40 +	Female
Informant 3	2.6.2020	E-mail correspondence	Bogotá, Colombia	40 +	Female
Informant 4	21.5.2020	WhatsApp, voicemails	Bogotá, Colombia	30+	Male
Informant 5	4.5 - 5.5.2020	E-mail correspondence, phone call	Bogotá, Colombia	50+	Male
Informant 6	11.5.2020	E-mail correspondence	Cali, Colombia	40+	Male
Informant 7	5.7.2020	WhatsApp, voicemail	Bogotá, Colombia	30+	Female
Informant 8	23.4.2020	E-mail correspondence	Bogotá, Colombia	30+	Female
Informant 9	15.5.2020	E-mail correspondence	Bogotá, Colombia	Unknown	Female

Only two of the informants requested to stay anonymous, but due to the current situation in Colombia the author of this thesis has chosen to not disclose the names of the informants in the first or the second round of interviews.

5.4 Interview guide- and process

The first interviews conducted in 2018, were unstructured, in respect to the assigned work, and to give the respondents the complete freedom to express their perceptions, experiences and feelings in that moment of time.

For the second part of the interviews, conducted between May and June 2020, an interview-guide was constructed (see appendix 1) to gather useful and valuable information to support the aim, themes, and the research questions of the thesis. The interview-guide was divided into three (3) themes; (1) experiences of the peace process, (2) fake news, and disinformation in the peace process and the perceived consequences,

and (3) fake news in the different phases of the peace process. The interview guide was written in Spanish, as it is the native language of all the respondents. The interview questions presented in this chapter are translated into English, as the publishing language of this thesis is English.

For every interview, the researcher introduced the area of investigation and the title of the thesis. With respect to the social constructionist approach, not wanting to interfere with the answers, not much else was said. The questions were left open as the researcher's aim was to gather as much authentic information as possible.

The informants were first asked to give a brief presentation of themselves, with focus on their expertise in the subject of the research. The question was: *“Could you please tell me about yourself? Focused on your expertise in the subject of my research.* This question gave the informants the opportunity to introduce themselves in relation to the area of the investigation, as they wished to be perceived, which would also help them to answer the following questions.

The next question that the informants were asked was: *“In relation to the peace process, could you give me, in your own words, an overview of the peace process as how you have experienced it?”* The aim of this question was to get a general picture of how the informants have, and still are, experiencing the peace process in Colombia and to map potential patterns and exceptions in relation to the area of the investigation.

The first theme that was discussed was perceptions of the factors that have affected the peace process in a negative or/and positive manner. This was an essential theme to cover regarding the object of this thesis. The aim was to map perceptions on political marketing and fake news, without directly asking for it. The third (3) question was: *“What factors have affected the peace process (in a positive or/and negative manner)?”*

The second theme that was brought up was the impact of fake news and misinformation in the peace process. Hence, the fourth (4) question was: *“How much has fake news and misinformation affected the peace process? What effects have they generated?”* The aim was to map the informant's perceptions on how fake news and misinformation has affected the peace process and their perceptions of the possible consequences of the phenomenon.

The informants were also asked how much fake news and misinformation has affected different phases of the peace process in Colombia. The aim was to receive an even broader insight of perceptions of how fake news and disinformation, in form of political marketing, has affected the peace process through the phases of the peace process, from a social constructionism perspective.

The fifth (5) question was (that was divided into four parts: a, b, c, and d):

“How much have fake news and disinformation affected the peace process in the following phases:

- (a) Initial contact between the administration of President Santos and the FARC*
- (b) The beginning of the conversations between the administration of President Santos and the FARC*
- (c) The negotiations between the administration of President Santos and the FARC*
- (d) The implementation of the peace agreement between the administration of President Santos and the FARC”*

5.5 Processing and analysis of data

Qualitative must be catalogued and indexed, as this makes it easier for the researcher to navigate in the data material and to register what data are valuable in for the research. Regarding the qualitative data, voice recordings are transcribed and commented on. Transcribing makes it easier to make thorough detailed searches in the data and to compare them. For a project researcher, transcribing must be understood as a time consuming and essential part of the interview process. In the process of transcribing the researcher can come “close” to the data, hence, it is a very valuable process. (Denscombe, 2017) In this thesis, the interviews were also translated from their original language, Spanish, into English.

The first step of analysing data is to code and categorize it. That means that the researcher will transfer pieces of “raw data” to specific categories. A thorough examination of data

(for example interviews) makes it possible for the researcher to see correlations or if the data bits have something in common. (Denscombe, 2017)

In this thesis abductive reasoning was chosen for the data -analysis process. According to social constructionism, reality is not an objective truth. Abductive reasoning uses the pragmatism perspective, according to which actions cannot be separated from past experiences and from beliefs that have originated from those experiences. (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013) An abductive approach takes a pragmatic perspective that emphasises, investigates, and evaluates purpose and ethics. (Kelder et.al., 2005) The abductive approach therefore aligns well with the social constructionism commitment, to look for and accommodate many different perspectives in any social setting where decisions are being made. (Kelder et.al., 2005) Abductive reasoning is, like inductive and deductive approaches, used to make logical inferences and build theories about the world. Abductive reasoning seeks to identify conditions to make phenomenon less puzzling, aiming to find “the best prediction” out of “incomplete observations”. Abductive reasoning uses a back-and-forth engagement with the social world and literature, as an empirical source, for theoretical ideas. Abduction implies that the researcher selects the “best” explanation from competing explanations or interpretations of data. (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013)

Abduction highlights the limited ability of the researcher to think rationally (computational reasoning) and acknowledges the importance of cognitive reasoning in theory building. The understanding is seen as the continuous dialogue between the data and the researcher’s preunderstandings (the hermeneutic circle). When applying the abductive approach, the researcher remains open to the possibility of being surprised by the data, rather than having the data confirming their preunderstandings. (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013) The researcher takes an iterative approach and moves between the different segments of the research to finally find a suitable understanding of the research problem, and finally, presenting a result (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). According to Bryman and Bell (2013) this implies that the analysis has been started in an early stage and been continuous throughout the research.

5.5.1 Research quality

There are some possible factors that can affect the research quality when conducting and transcribing interviews, for example; sometimes it might be hard to understand what is said in the recordings (due to quality of recording, slurring, incomplete sentences, and language barriers (such as the use of slang)), furthermore, people do not always express themselves in full sentences or/and do not always finish their conclusions. Intonation, pronunciation, and emphasis are difficult to capture in printed text. For the reader to fully understand, the author must sometimes edit the spoken works, and as a result it sometimes loses some of its authenticity. (Denscombe, 2017)

As the data are analysed from a social constructionist perspective with an abductive approach, it is important to take into account that the researcher might have certain “blind spots” regarding the insight in the Colombian society (due to the interviewers heritage, age, gender, ethnic origin, and native language (among other things)), and therefore, how the respondents are understood and how the secondary data are analysed. Furthermore, neither the quantitative data nor the interviews will provide one complete and flawless image of reality. According to the social constructionism theory there is not *one* objective truth, in other words, this thesis provides **one** perspective to the research issue.

5.6 Methodological limitations

A qualitative approach from a social constructionist perspective tends to be associated with the researcher’s indirect partiality. In other words, the researcher has a limited ability to reflect on the world from any other perspective than that of their own. It presupposes a discussion about how honest the respondents have been in the interviews with the researcher, who in the research context can be perceived as an “outsider”. It is also important to discuss how well the researcher has been able to perceive, interpret and understand what the respondents have said. (Denscombe, 2017) Social constructionism as a research approach implies reflexivity, in other words, the awareness of the researcher’s role in conducting research and the questioning of assumptions in the construction of knowledge. This implies stopping to ask questions about what is

occurring, rather than taking matters for granted and consequently letting the questions and the answers influence future choices. Researchers need to pay attention to their own assumptions and biases to account for them. A central matter for social constructionism is to question what is known and what forms of evidence are accepted as valid. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2009) social constructionists are however more likely to ask questions about their own activities as well as of those that they study as they focus on the created nature of knowledge and information. (ibid.)

In this thesis there are a couple of central limitations that can be accounted for. Three of the main limitations that are worth mentioning are:

1. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish, which is not the native language of the author. The interviews were translated by the author into English, which might affect the content presented in this thesis.
2. Although the author has lived in Colombia, she is not Colombian. As the author has not lived the conflict, she can consequently not possess a thorough understanding of the structural conditions nor the current situation in Colombia. (However, this can contribute a relatively objective approach to the research matter)
3. The respondent's political views are not known by the author. However, all the informants supported the peace process (generally not the extreme-right). Thus, the result of a similar research would possibly differ if people opposing the peace process would have been interviewed too.

In a case study, the case is an object of its own right, and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth explanation of it. Case study researchers exclude possibilities to identify cases that can be used to represent a certain class of objects. Hence, the goal of a case study analysis is to be concrete on the uniqueness of the case and to develop a deep understanding of its complexity (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Social constructionism emphasises that it is not trying to eliminate any perspectives, the result of a research is only one way to explain a phenomenon, as the result in itself is constructed, hence, it is not defining a definite truth, only one perspective. (Gergen, 2010)

6 Case description

This chapter includes a brief insight into the Colombian society, current political climate, and media landscape. The chapter ends with interviews conducted in March 2018 with some former FARC-combatants and the (former) vice president of Colombia, followed by a summary of the chapter.

6.1 The historical background of the peace process in Colombia

In the late 19th and early 20th century the Colombian state sold off large swatches of land to private owners to pay for its debts. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was founded in 1996 as the armed wing of the communist party, during a time of brutal repression against any form of action considered subversive. FARC was inspired by the Cuban revolution in the 1950s, and they demanded more rights and control over the land. Their communist ideals were however seen as a threat by big landowners and the state, who sent in the army to disband the agricultural commune that the FARC had established. The FARC has said that it was after the clashes with the army the struggle was transferred into an armed one. (BBC News, 2016)

In November 2016, the FARC, and the government of President Santos (2010-2018), Colombia, signed a peace agreement, “ending” more than five decades of violent conflict.

Today however, with the relatively new president Ivan Duque (elected 2018), ordained political heir of former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez ⁶, the FARC commander Ivan Marquez (Luciano Marín) announcing “a new phase of armed struggle” (BBC News, 2019), the Duque government cutting funding to its transitional justice mechanism (JEP), the Truth Commission and the Search Unit for Disappeared Persons early in 2019 (Gill, 2019), the killings of social leaders (rights defenders and activists) and ex-combatants

⁶ Alvara Uribe was investigated by the Supreme Court over his alleged role in war crimes committed by a paramilitary death squads and is now under investigation for witness tampering and fraud in relation to crimes committed during the civil war (Parkings, 2020)

(Via AP news wire, 2020), and Duque losing support among people (Alsema, 2019), Colombia still faces major challenges striving to leave behind its long legacy of political violence.

Individual participation is the essence of democracy. According to studies on Latin Americans commitment to democracy, it was found that poor or/and rich people are equally politically active and committed to democracy. It was stated that democracy is the best hope poor people have for improving their life. (Krishna, 2008) However, people are “disappearing”, and social leaders are being assassinated on a huge scale – especially in rural areas where state presence is nearly non-existent. Officially, more than 700 activists, indigenous leaders and former FARC-combatants have been killed since 2016. (Krygier, 2019)

In November 2019, the general public started nation-wide demonstrations against inequality, an unjust educational system, Duque’s slow implementation of the 2016 peace agreement (which has led to an uptick of violence against indigenous people and social leaders), and issues related to economic reforms and corruption⁷. (Grattan, 2019). False news and promises unfulfilled plays a significant role in the Colombian political climate. One early and significant example of this is the so called “false positives”- scandal that is centred around the extrajudicial killings of thousands of civilians. During these times, the Army measured its success in counterinsurgency by the number of guerrilla combatants killed. Many of the claimed guerrilla combatants that were killed, were in fact civilians killed by the armed forces to show results. The military was dressing the victims as guerrillas to present them as combat kills to the media during the years 1986-2002. At the time, these civilians, often young men, were killed to gain positive publicity, and for military to receive financial support. (The Fellowship of Reconciliation, 2014)

The Colombian peace process can be divided into five different eras/moments according to Octavio Salcedo, professor of social sciences (Personal communication, March 2018, [Bogotá, Colombia]):

1. Initial contact between the administration of President Santos and FARC

⁷ According to the Corruption Perception Index score obtained by Colombia was 37 in 2019. (comparison: Finland 86) The highest possible score in the index being 100, and a score of 0 indicating no corruption in the respective country. (Statista, 2020)

2. Start of the conversation between the administration of President Santos and FARC
3. Negotiations between the government and FARC
4. Implementation of the peace agreement between the administration of President Santos and FARC
5. The implementation of the peace agreement between the administration of President Santos and FARC, is today (2020) in the hands of the administration of President Duque (elected May,2018).

The peace agreement is composed in six (6) parts (Cancillería de Colombia, 2016):

1. The comprehensive Rural Reform
2. Political participation
3. End of the conflict
4. Solution to the illicit drugs problem
5. Agreement regarding the Victims of the Conflict
“Comprehensive System for Truth, Justice, Reparations and Non-Recurrence”; including the *Special Jurisdiction for Peace*⁸; and *Commitment on Human Rights*.
6. Implementation and verification

TABLE 5 REPUBLIC OF COLOMBIA, VOTERS AND ELECTION TURNOUTS

Population (2019)	Registered voters (2018)	Referendum turnout (2016)	Presidential elections turnout (2018)
49,849,8181	36,783,940	37,44%	53,04%

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2019)

⁸ Many countries, mainly European, are believers in the SJP, not only because they took part in the process of its construction, but also because they helped finance it.

6.1.1 Views of James Robinson on the situation in Colombia

In 2019 Daniel Pardo interviewed economist James Robinson⁹ for BBC about the ongoing continuous violent protests and the political climate in Colombia.

According to Robinson the prosperity of a country depends on the social, political, and economic inclusion. The exclusion in Colombia has historically generated guerrillas, drug trafficking and poverty. According to Robinson, the current violent protests in Colombia are not surprising. After all, Colombia is a country where 5000 civilians got murdered, reported as war combats, so the military would get raises in salary (known as the “false positive” -scandal).

The peace process has nevertheless opened space for a different type of politics. The presidential elections in 2018 was the first time in 60 years when a left-wing politician like Gustavo Petro made it to the second round, and now candidates outside of the traditional system are winning support all over the country. However, the power is held by a government that is not interested in change and are not implementing the important part of the peace agreement, most importantly the rural components.

According to Robinson the biggest problem in Colombia is how the politics and the state works. The state is co-opted by elites that are very distant from the society. The elite in Colombia are living as if they were in a first world country, being in a predominantly poor country such as Colombia – one of the most unequal countries in the world. They have never governed a bigger part the country and that has created a peripheral country that stays outside the system. The society is fragmented and integrates with the State in a very politically patronage manner which makes it very difficult to change things as the fragmented system is deeply rooted and has been that way since the colonialism.

According to Robinson even people like Juan Manuel Santos (former President and promoter of the peace process), never understood that this way of doing politics is harmful. During the peace negotiations Sergio Jaramillo (peace negotiator) sat in one wing trying to sign peace with the Marxists, and in the other wing Santos “distributed

⁹ James Robinson is a professor at the University of Chicago. He is one of the worlds most recognized experts on Colombia in the world.

jam” (positions, money) in the congress, to have his projects approved, not understanding how the two (war and political patronage) are connected.

According to Robinson (Pardo, 2019) the way of doing politics created space for the guerrillas to emerge. Not because the Colombian elite wanted the country to become the world capital of kidnapping and drug trafficking, but because they could not control it. They did not have control over the rural areas of the country, which allowed drug traffickers to buy thousands of acres of land and exporting drugs to the United States, which had severe consequences.

When asked if there are ways to change the system, Robinson said that the traditional system has always allowed a certain level of social or political mobility, politicians who started at the bottom made their way to high positions and power. What has traditionally happened with these cases is that the elites co-opt these politicians, who end up adapting to the system. According to Robinson even politicians like Petro¹⁰ are co-opted by the traditional system and end up being functional for the existing system. Mobility can however generate space for changes in the political culture. An historical example of that is how the elite tried to adjust Pablo Escobar¹¹ to their logic for many years, and eventually he was elected as an alternate member of the Chamber of Representatives as a part of the Liberal Alternative movement.

According to Robinson the fundamental problem is that Colombia is a fragmented country in many ways and that it is therefore hard to imagine that Colombians would achieve consensus on what the fundamental problem is.

6.2 The media landscape in Colombia

According to Media Landscapes (Cabrera, 2020) print media, with regional and national circulation, have traditionally been those of superior influence and credibility in Colombia, and those that have traditionally established the information agenda. The pioneering newspaper have historically belonged to recognized families that have had a clear political affiliation and have been inherited by their successors. *El Tiempo* and *El*

¹⁰ A left-wing politician, and Presidential candidate (2018) who also previously served as a mayor of Bogotá.

¹¹ A famous Colombian criminal who was the head of the Medellín cartel

Espectador, are the two oldest newspapers with the largest circulation. *El Espectador*, established in 1887, was traditionally a newspaper advocating liberalism in the country. *El Tiempo*, was launched in 1911 as an initiative to support the political views of the Republicans. Many regional newspapers followed the trend, and it is commonly known that most known newspapers have been related to families with political and economic influence in the regions.

There has been a change in the logic of administering media companies in Colombia. Today, many of the print media houses belong to large economic corporations. Traditionally the media companies have been passed through inheritance within families with clearly recognized, prestige, established political roles. Today, media companies are considered part of the business chain (commercial outlet), hence, with interests interfering with the professional journalistic interest of informing the audience objectively and impartially. (Cabrera, 2020)

According to DANE (2018), 55% of the population in Colombia over the age of 12, read printed news. The group with the highest level of education, is the one that consumes the least printed media. Only 9.3 % of the population with a university-level education or higher education, 25.32% of people with secondary education, and 14.27% of people with preschool or basic primary education consume printed media. According to DANE (2018) this could be explained by the fact that 5 of the 10 newspapers with the largest circulation are characterised by short texts, light content, and a lot of graphic information where local topics dominate. Furthermore, people in rural areas tend to consume radio and TV, instead of printed media. (Cabrera, 2020)

There are some newspapers with sections focused on issues of conflict, violence, and human rights – for example Colombia2020 (A section in *El Espectador* that is funded by the European Union). The peace agreement enhanced the enormous challenge of integrating the FARC into the information landscape of the Colombian media. The last time the FARC attempted to form a political party (*Patriotic Union, in the 1980's*) with the members joining civil life, with the intention of participating in the political agenda, it ended in their murder and the extermination of the movement. (Cabrera, 2020)

The average Colombian prefers local or/and regional information above wide national and international information. The former is presented in most media with popular and sensationalism focus, or in newsletters with free circulation. 10 of the most widely circulated print media are concentrated in Bogotá. Indigenous communities and other minorities do not have fair representation in the media. Some of the papers that cover and represents some of these communities, are only sold in the capital of the country and are thus not accessible to (all) minorities. People in rural areas tend to consume radio and TV, instead of printed media. (Cabrera, 2020)

According to a study conducted by FLIP (the Foundation for Press Freedom) in 2015, 92 municipalities in eight departments that have been the epicentres of the armed conflict have had difficulties accessing local information. In other words, at least 1,7 million citizens have not had access to quality sources of information. (ibid.)

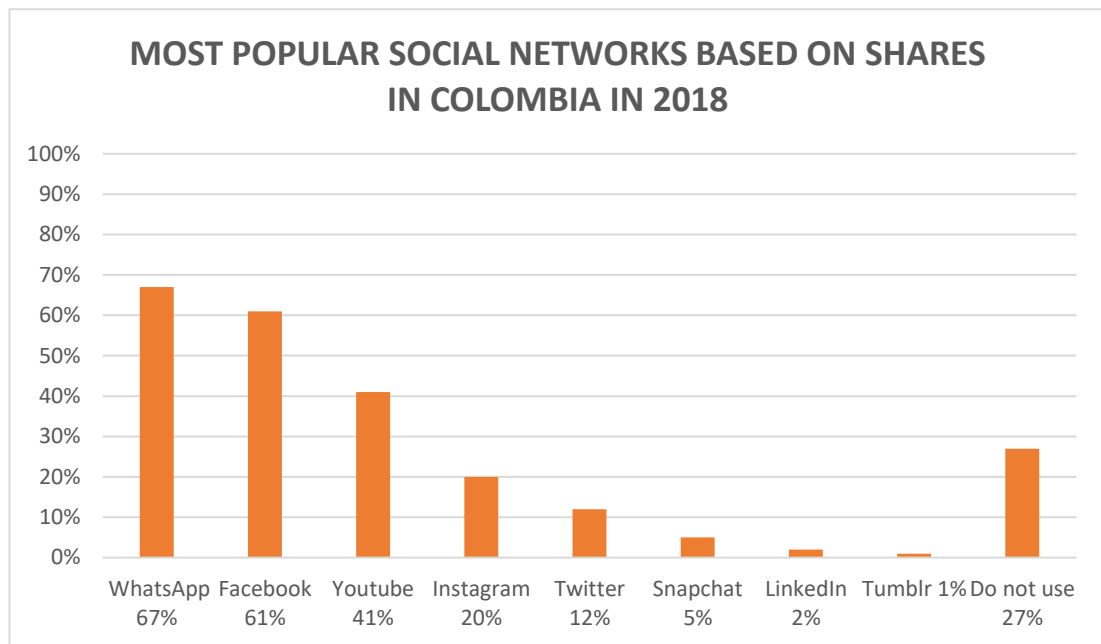
6.2.1 Digital media in Colombia

Despite the peace deal signed in 2016 between the FARC-guerrilla and the government of President Santos, an alarming rate of lethal attacks have targeted activists and human rights defenders, leading to challenges for freedom of expression. The peace process in Colombia has been strongly affected and shaped by social media and the proliferation of misinformation, online aggression, and fake news. The rise of ICTs and media technology has also been significantly influential and damaging to the democratic process. (The Freedom House, 2018)

According to a study conducted in 2017 by the Freedom House (2017), nearly 40% of Colombians do not have access to internet, mostly due to socioeconomic factors, causing limitations for some platforms to be reached.

WhatsApp and Facebook are favoured by Colombians between the age 14 and over 65, according to a government survey. (Statista, 2019)

FIGURE 3 MOST POPULAR SOCIAL NETWORKS BASED ON SHARES IN COLOMBIA IN 2018

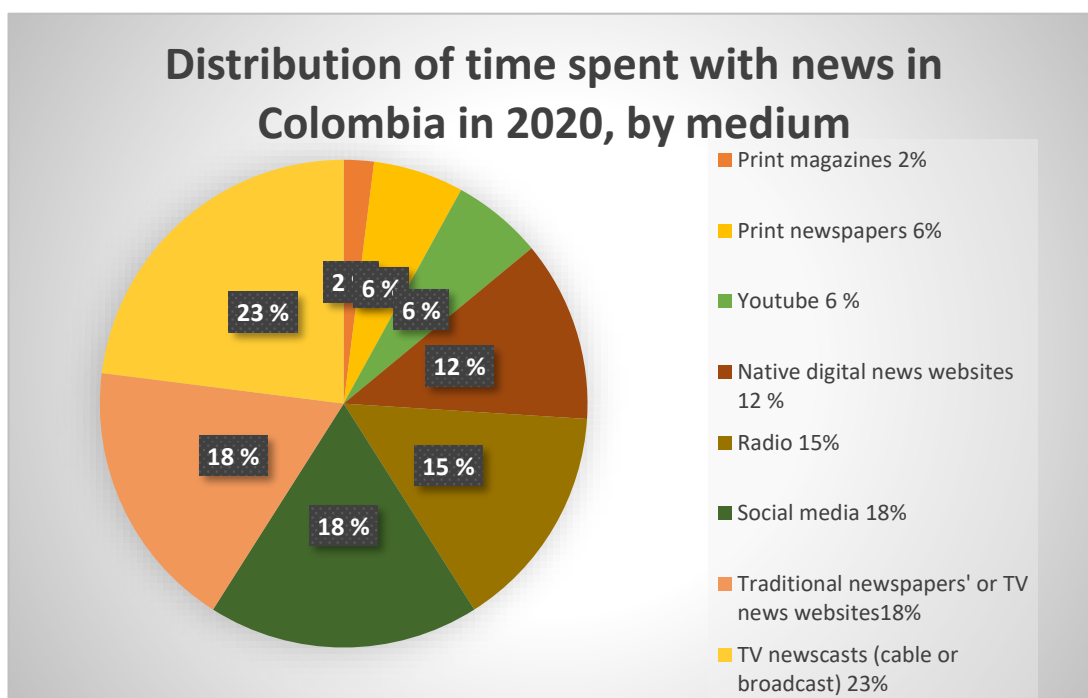


Source: Statista (2019)

A recent study conducted by Kaspersky, a cybersecurity company, showed an alarming rate of consumption of fake news online. According to this study 70% of Latin Americans do not know how to identify fake news online. Colombia ranked second in this region with 73%. (Diazgranados, 2020)

According to the same study, 16% of Latin Americans do not recognize the term or concept of fake news at all. Kaspersky also found that 1/3 of Latin Americans use social media as their only source of information. People from the ages 18 to 24 mostly use social media for the purpose of attaining information, whereas people between 35 and 50 mostly use traditional media for the same purpose. In Colombia 26% use social media as their only source of information, and 47 % of Colombians do not question what they read on the internet. Furthermore, people between 25 and 34 are most likely to share impactful news without verifying, whereas people between 18 and 24 are least likely to do so. (Diazgranados, 2020)

FIGURE 4 DISTRIBUTION OF TIME SPENT WITH NEWS IN COLOMBIA IN 2020



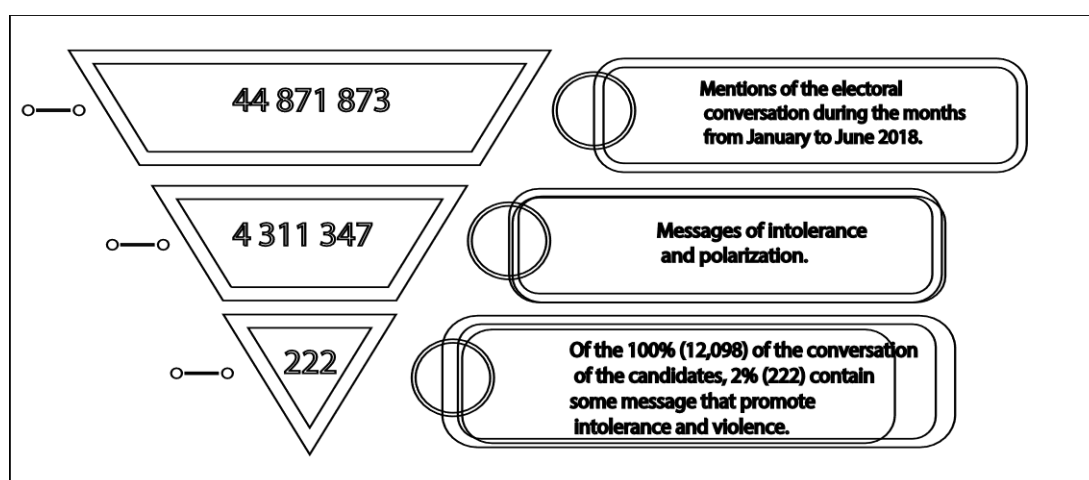
Source: Statista (2020)

According to a study by *Universidad del Rosario* a homogeneity in the way people get information on the internet cannot be ignored. In respect to the 2016 plebiscite, Colombians select who to follow, and tend to get more involved in political discussions with likeminded people on networks such as Twitter. An example of echo-chambers through WhatsApp was also given during the 2016 peace agreement referendum period. Through massive messaging chains, the belief that voting NO to the agreement would be the best option to avoid becoming the “next Venezuela” and “protecting the family”, was massively advertised. In a later stage, the promoters of the campaign admitted that these had been ways to convince the population to vote NO. (Cabrera, 2020)

The presidential elections in 2018 came to be a very crucial phase of the peace agreement – where it stood between Ivan Duque, representing the extreme right and with promises to make big changes on the peace agreement (such as harder punishments or/and

sentences for former FARC combatants¹²), and Gustavo Petro, representing the left with promises of faster implementation of the peace agreement. (ibid.)

FIGURE 5 MESSAGES OF VIOLENDE DURING THE ELECTORAL CONVERSATIONS IN 2018



Source: Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE) (2018)

In the Colombian presidential elections in 2018 a lot of the mentions and electoral conversations contained a lot of messages of intolerance and polarization. These elections came to be potentially crucial for the future progress of the implementation of the peace accords. (The Freedom House, 2018)

Kaspersky concludes the study by stating that a big part of Latin Americans continues to blindly trust everything they read on the internet which can have severe impact in peoples personal lives, but also a larger impact on a wider scale. (Diazgranados, 2020)

6.3 Voices of the conflict

The following interviews were conducted in 2018 in Panaca, Armenia, Colombia. These interviews are presented in this thesis as a representation of the consequences of the conflict and experiences and expectations of people who have lived the very conflict or/and represent it. These people's statements thus give a concrete expression of what the core of the conflict is that the country has experienced and what could pave the way for a lasting peace. The chapter begins with an introduction to the event that the author of this thesis attended in March 2018, followed by an interview of the now former vice President of Colombia: Óscar Naranjo, followed by interviews with some of the former combatants and a former commander of the FARC.¹³



PICTURE 4 FORMER COMBATANT RECEIVING HIS DIPLOMA



PICTURE 3 OSCÁR NARANJO GREETED BY THE POLICE FORCES



PICTURE 5 ON THE WAY TO THE CEREMONY



PICTURE 2 MILITARY IN THE HELICOPTER



PICTURE 1 THE AUTHOR OF THE THESIS WITH OTHER REPORTERS IN THE HELICOPTER ON THE WAY TO THE CEREMONY

¹³ All pictures are taken by the author of this thesis

6.3.1 Introduction to the graduation of former FARC- guerrilla 8.3.2018, Panaca, Colombia

More than 300 ex-combatants, 264 men and 61 women, between the ages 18 and 75, all former combatants, graduated as agricultural technicians, and thus, became the first group of former FARC guerrilla to achieve a higher education with the support of the Colombian government. The graduation took place on March 8, in corporation with the Foundation of the National Park of Agricultural Culture (Fundapanaca), who oversaw the training process. The graduation was a part of the reintegration of the former combatants as a part of the implementation of the peace agreement.



PICTURE 6 THE FORMER COMBATANTS WALKING INTO THE CEREMONY

264 men, 61 women between the ages 18 and 75 that were combatants in the war, are today a demonstration for Colombia and the whole world, that a new era is beginning, that we are in the middle of peace. For them – a strong deserved applause! Today they are graduating as agricultural practical technicians. The discourse of war is today transferred into the discourse to maintain peace. To all of you, welcome! (Speaker in the beginning of the graduation ceremony)



PICTURE 7 REPRESENTATIVES OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PEACE AGREEMENT

6.3.2 Interview with Óscar Naranjo, Vice President of Colombia (March 2017 – August 2018)

During the ceremony Óscar Naranjo stated that the government is proud of seeing how more than 300 men and women, who until recently were armed, today have a diploma that accredits them to return to the field and transform it.

The country no longer endures more violence. (Óscar Naranjo)



PICTURE 8 OSCÁR NARANJO SPEAKING AT THE CEREMONY

(Former) Vice president Óscar Naranjo explained that Colombia is moving forward in a process of building peace in Colombia.

Peace is built, for example today, witnessing more than three hundred men and women that have come to Panaca, who in the past had taken up arms, but today act in peace. For three months they have been enabled, have been trained to become competitive peasants to transform the territory. But beyond that, we are witnessing a process that opens pathways to reconciliation and encounter between all Colombians. What has happened here in Panaca is that Colombians have rediscovered that there is a population that has to be welcomed by us, so that it returns to the territory to build a social fabric, to produce, and particularly, to have a project of life, free from violence, and far from death. (Vice president Óscar Naranjo)

According to the delays in the reincorporation of the ex-combatants, that have been denounced, even by the FARC, Oscar Naranjo commented:

What the government estimates is that we must accelerate the reincorporation processes. This process that is being carried out here today already speaks of concrete results, and now we can get down to work. The debate around peace and peacebuilding shall not be a theoretical debate or a political debate, but a debate formed around realities of transformation. We know that much remains to be done, but we are on the right path. And the best thing is that you and the country will be able to verify is the testimony of men and women who, after this process, feel that there is a future, feel that there is hope, and have faith that Colombians, all of us, include ourselves in the transformation of the country and the building of peace.



PICTURE 9 OSCÁR NARANJO GREETING THE POLICE FORCES

Oscar Naranjo was asked how long the government will add budget to conduct programs like the one in Panaca, and the following was his answer:

The government is reviewing how to ensure political, social, and economic reincorporation for ex-FARC combatants. But beyond that, I must point out, that this is a project that must include communities, this is not a process simply and exclusively for ex-FARC combatants. This is a process of reparation for the transformation of territory, which, in our opinion, must include community leaders, it must include Colombia's peasants, it must include ex-combatants, and it must also include former members of the security forces who, now returning to their fields, must prepare for this transformation.

6.3.3 Interviews with former FARC-combatants

During one of the interviews with a former combatant, he explained how he ended up joining the FARC:

What happened to me was that I was a police officer, and they threw me out on the street because I did a favour for a police officer, a commander of mine.

He said that, because of that favour, they linked him to something that he was not responsible of. He claimed he was not guilty of anything, but they did not listen.

They do not wait for you to explain yourself or give you the benefit of the doubt to understand you.

He got a call from FARC to join their forces, and in desperation, not knowing what else to do, he did. He ended up working with commander Óscar on the front of Teófilo Forero for 12 years. He said he paid a high price with suffer and depression for having changed the pace of his life like that. He was later arrested and served 10 years in prison for several crimes; terrorism, extortion, and other crimes that he, according to himself, did not commit. In prison he learned how to make sculptures, and later shared his art with his fellow students and teachers in Panaca. In Panaca he followed through with all the classes and learned how to write and read.

Now, 74 years old, I graduated in agriculture. It is a new opportunity. I am very excited.



PICTURE 11 THE FORMER COMBATANT RECEIVING HIS DIPLOMA



PICTURE 10 THE FORMER POLICE OFFICER, AND LATER FORMER FARC-COMBATANT WITH HIS FAMILY

José Lisandro Lascarro, more officially known as Pastor Alape, is a former Colombian guerrilla leader and former member of the FARC. He was part of the high command, known as the “Estado Mayor Central”. Pastor Alape is today a member of the ARN (National Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization).



PICTURE 12 PASTOR ALAPE BEING INTERVIEWED BEFORE THE CEREMONY. (2) CONGRATULATING A STUDENT WHEN SHE RECEIVES HER DIPLOMA

He explained that people come to Panaca every day and that his colleagues (former combatants) are closely working with tourists. Pastor Alape stated that peace is achieved by improving the capabilities of the people.

Another former combatant said that she sees a very bright future thanks to the preparation they had in Panaca. She said that the hope is the same as during the 53 years of fight for a change in Colombia.



PICTURE 13 PASTOR ALAPE EMBRACING ONE OF THE FORMER COMBATANTS RECEIVING HIS DIPLOMA

In one way or another we must do it, and this is where we start. We want to go where the government has not been, the places that have been abandoned for centuries, and tell our brothers and sisters that one must move forward. I think it is very important for all of us that we have accomplished this process. (Former female FARC-combatant)

She said that the goal is to build a new Colombia, without war, so that young people no longer must train for war. She said that the objective is to consolidate collective gardens and the production of minor species, because if there is no work in the region, there will be no peace.



PICTURE 14 ONE OF THE FORMER COMBATANTS APPLAUDED BY THE INSTRUCTORS OF FUNDAPANACA WHILE WALKING UP TO RECEIVE HER DIPLOMA

She also said that they are setting an example. The FARC are social transformers, and it is a right that corresponds to them, the former guerrilla, to teach the people that the Colombian state have not managed to do. Therefore, the Colombians state and all entities that are included in this process, have to offer them the guarantee of education, for them to address the people, since the state has not previously succeeded in doing so.

She stated that now, during the reintegration process, there has been a lot of support from the state.

There has been a dialogue, and well, here we are, hand in hand, as brothers and sisters, so far, right? We continue hoping for more, that they fulfil their promises. The first thing we all do with these new learnings is that we demand, in order to apply what we have learned in the field, that they give land to us ex-combatants and to the people of the rural areas.



PICTURE 15 FORMER COMBATANTS STANDING UP FOR THE NATIONAL ANTHEM DURING THE CEREMONY

ARN wants to follow up on the productive projects of some of the graduates, and many of them still expect the Government to continue providing them towards productivity.

Another former combatant commented:

Right now, we are going back to our territories hoping that the Government is going to support us in moving forward. We are people who have nothing but life and the desire to work. Thus, the next step is to wait for land, because right now we do not have it, we cannot buy it, and we do not have a place to work.

Farians¹⁴, we remain convinced that 53 years of struggle have not been in vain. Until Victory, Always! (Loud spontaneous comment by another former FARC-combatant)



PICTURE 16 EL COCUY, COLOMBIA. (VISITED BY AUTHOR IN SEPTEMBER 2018). DURING THE CONFLICT EL COCUY WAS A VIOLENT REGION THAT HOSTED MANY GUERRILLA GROUPS.

¹⁴ Farian = To be a Farian (Fariano) - self-giving and personal sacrifice for achieving changes to liberate Colombia from centuries of oppression, humiliation, and deprivation.

6.4 Summary of the case description

According to Óscar Palma (Interviewed by Worley, 2018), messages of intolerance and violence can be viewed as particularly problematic in the Colombian context, where political violence has been a powerful force for a long time. The country has suffered a civil war for many decades, resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions.

Despite of the ongoing peace process, social activists and former combatants are continuously murdered. Some doubt the link between violence online and violence in real life. Others believe that there is a direct link between Fake News and violence, believing that narratives of hate, that are amplified by social media, increase viciousness. According to Palma (Worley, 2018), there is a discourse that is pronounced by political leaders that leads to social leaders being killed and former FARC members being harassed. According to Palma (Worley, 2018) one reaction to such discourse could be the decision to vote a specific way, but at the extreme it could result in murder. This phenomenon creates a deep effect in the areas of conflict where there are former combatants and civilians in the same place.



PICTURE 17 FARMERS IN EL COCUY, COLOMBIA, (2018), DURING THE CONFLICT EL COCUY WAS A VIOLENT REGION THAT HOSTED MANY GUERRILLA GROUPS (AUTHOR VISITED EL COCUY IN SEPTEMBER 2018)

7 Presentation of data

In this chapter the data gathered during the interviews with the Colombian informants (presented in chapter 5.3, table 3 & 4), is presented. How the interviews were planned and carried out is described in detail in Chapter 5.4. Data are presented with an abductive reasoning, which means that the researcher has reproduced the most representative statements in the interview material. The main themes the respondents give their views on are the peace process in general (Chapter 7.1), the role that marketing of political agendas (7.2) and especially fake news (7.2.1) has had, and the social consequences of fake news in Colombia (7.4).

7.1 Perceptions of the peace process in Colombia

Informant 8 summarized the peace process that was put forward by talks between the government of Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC as a national need that had been brewing many years, not only the conflict in itself, but also the permanence of existing critical problems in the country, such as inequality.

The peace process is an opportunity for Colombia to achieve an advancement that it has not been able to experience due to the armed conflict. (Informant 9)

Informant 3 started by pointing out that the initiating decision of President Pastrana (1980's) to present a proposition¹⁵ of a peace agreement on a negotiation basis, was a very positive factor. A view shared by many of the informants was that another positive factor was that once the negotiations that started under the Santos regime, they involved of various actors, among them the catholic church. Informant 3 also pointed out that the peace process has been supported by various foreign governments, sectors of the civil society, and various social organizations.

¹⁵ President Pastrana was the first president to introduce a proposition of a peace agreement on negotiation basis with the FARC

Informant 7 described the final peace agreement as an representation of an advancement in the country, as it attempts to account for some critical issues in the Colombian history that have been considered to be the roots of the very conflict; primarily that land ownership has been concentrated in the hands of a few, and the closed political regime that has not allowed the participation of alternative political forces. Informant 4 noted that Colombia is now in the implementation stage of the peace process – in the stage of which the government is to implement the different points of the agreements.

Informant 4 said that the peace process is progressing, but it has had its main “Achilles heel” in the political participation of the victims. Many of the informants agreed that that even if the negotiations included participations of the victims of the conflict and the society in general, the victims were not a central actor, and this, consequently, weakened the agreement.

I have had conversations with victims where they told me that they felt relegated and that their proposals ended up as small annexes. To limit the negotiations to the government and one single guerrilla left out millions of victims and other illegal armed groups, it left gaps in the implementation, and thus means that the conflict continues. (Informant, 7)

According to many of the informants, the active political participation of the victims in the Colombian political system is the most important element of the implementation. However, this element of the implementation stage has not yet been complied. The process has made some progress when it comes to certain issues raised in the peace agreement in terms of reparation, justice, and non-repetition. But it is also a process that has, in political terms, been quite truncated.

Something that has to be kept in mind when trying to understand the peace process in a way where the victims are understood as the central axis, is that even if they have received some state response, they have not managed to become full political actors in the Colombian political system. (Informant 4)

The incorporation of armed groups into civilian life has brought some successful political representations in government bodies, recognition of territories and generation of alternative production, but also tragic situations, such as the murder of reintegrated people, intimidation of leaders and delays in land law. (Informant 6)

Personally, due to my political convictions, my origin - I was born and lived in Cali -, and my work as a university professor, this passing has moved between the hope for a truly inclusive Colombia that redistributes better, and the capsizing of the fatal destiny of those who have dared to report an work to make those changes. (Informant 6)

Informant 4 stated that a positive element regarding the peace agreement is that it has been viewed positively in many countries in the international community. It is understood that moving forward in the implementation of the peace agreement is a fundamental element for Colombia to advance in terms of developing processes of peaceful dynamics for elimination of the different forms of conflict. According to Informant 4, another positive element is that it has been possible to advance a lot, excluding the element of victim participation, in some important implementation processes – such as the special jurisdiction for peace and the mechanism for restitution. According to the informants, a positive aspect of the political communication is that people in the cities are now generally more aware of the conflict that for many years hit the rural areas.

Many of the informants agreed that Colombia has been relatively successful in de-weaponizing many armed organizations, but not in dealing with the communities, populations, and territories from where the armed groups have come. Informant 5 stated that, the peace process is more about the abandonment of arms of the oldest group raised in arms and only secondly about a peace process. According to informant 5, simply put, it is a contract signed with President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018), that should be implemented by the succeeding governments. However, the implementation has encountered numerous obstacles in relation to the implementation, on the part of the current president Iván Duque Márquez. According to informant 1, it is obvious that the current government (Duque, 2018 -) have not had the will to implement the peace accords, because they never agreed to them in the first place.

They are continuing the killing of community leaders; the aid does not reach the demobilized and not the people that were amid the conflict. Drug trafficking has increased and this is how illegal groups continue to finance themselves. Therefore, I am pessimistic about if they will ever be implemented. This can recur all over again and turn into a new war in Colombia. (Informant 1)

Informant 2 stated that structural reforms for socially, economically and politically marginalized communities have never been in the interest of the state, nor have they been developed by institutions that have dedicated themselves to providing assistance-based responses to both guerrillas and paramilitaries who have laid down their arms and to the communities where these organizations were present. After the withdrawal of the armed organizations, these communities, populations, and territories, have been exposed and left even more vulnerable than before. The state never arrived in these areas. The peasants have been forced to plant coca bushes, because the coca leaf is the only thing that has

commercial outlet in these areas where there is no infrastructure (access only by trail) and where there are no schools nor healthcare.

Additionally, to slow down and/or end the “peace process”, systematic assassinations of social leaders are taking place and some members of the dome of the former FARC are returning to the field of belligerence - insurgent warfare - to form the new FARC. In conclusion, the process is being bogged down in the current government 2019-2023. (Informant 5)

Another shortcoming was that the FARC was considered a homogenous group. This fact led to some of the members choosing to return to arms, as they did not feel considered in the peace agreement. Furthermore, many of the ex-combatants that did believe in peace, still returned to arms, as many of the promises that were given to the ex-combatants, were not fulfilled.

In conversations with former combatants in ETCR ¹⁶ I have heard a constant disappointment in the actions of the State regarding its guarantees. It should be added that this disappointment has increased with the increase in murders of ex-combatants in recent years. (Informant 7)

Informant 2 also pointed out that the implementation passes through the congress of the republic, where the representants opposing the peace agreement have been further strengthened. They made sure all the agreements had to pass through this instance, and consequently, the votes of political parties in favour of the implementation do not add up to approve the necessary reforms.

These sectors have successfully militarized the processes of disarming men and women of the left and right. The democratic changes that have been suggested and considered, are developed in a very limited and controlled way, and as the guerrilla and paramilitary organizations have already laid down their arms, they have absolutely no capacity to demand compliance.

Informant 6 describes the peace process as a “long and painful handover of the country” since the signing of the first agreements in the late 1980’s.

With the change of government, the implementation of the agreements that were achieved, were weakened. And somehow, the momentum brought by the results of the peace negotiations, and, above all, the social and political motivation to accompany the process, slowed down in a sense. (Informant 8)

¹⁶ Territorial spaces for training and reincorporation

7.2 Perceptions of the political communication in the different phases of the peace process in Colombia

To understand the perceptions that the Colombian informants have of the peace process and the impacts of fake news, more specifically, the impact of marketing methods when applied in an unethical way within the political spectrum, it is important to understand how the informants comprehend the political communication in Colombia in general. The informants freely provided an account on, based on the questions presented in the interview guide, their own views on several events, and the role of the media, and how information dissemination - or the lack of it - have affected the developments in the country when working towards a peaceful solution to the conflict and the establishment of a peaceful and democratically civil society.

According to Informant 2, the international community surrounded the government in power, led by President Santos, to advance the negotiations. Four foreign governments (Chile, Venezuela, Cuba, and Norway) offered to accompany Colombia in the peace efforts. The peace negotiations were carried out in Havana, Cuba. The peace negotiations began with a strong opposition, as the fear of the country being handed over to the FARC was spread through the country.

According to informant 7, the negotiations were set to take place outside Colombia, to guarantee the protection of the process. The idea was to protect the dialogues from external spoilers and misrepresentations. However, specifically because of the silence, rumours about topics of what was discussed in Havana, started to hover around. This generated fear in a part of the population. Therefore, a part of the agreement was disclosed that year to clarify some of the points that were being discussed and deny some of the false messages that were circulating. However, fake news reoccurred - for example, that the agreement would imply immunity for the FARC combatants and that they would receive money.

If we locate ourselves at the beginning of the peace process, when it was already public knowledge, there was considerable disbelief since the extreme right, led by the central democratic party, was in charge of undermining the credibility of the dialogues that were being carried out in Havana, Cuba, among the Colombian population. The democratic centre claimed that the guerrilla was a gang of drug traffickers and assassins who had no intention of leaving the business, much less the drug trafficking routes. Additionally, they

reaffirmed that the FARC secretariat had already started several peace processes and left them laying (they withdrew) and used them to grow their ranks. (Informant 5)

Informant 4 highlighted that comments and disinformation attacking the peace process was seen already during the negotiations. According to the informants, the secrecy with which the administration conducted the peace negotiations and the lack of information about the process during the negotiations, created a great deal of mistrust towards the peace negotiations, something that was constantly used by opponents to misinform.

The informants all mentioned that a narrative was created that FARC obtained many benefits that they did not deserve, among these immunity, and that the Santos government allied with the FARC to “take revenge” against the so-called “good citizens” – according to informant 2 - basically people representing the sectors that have controlled the official narrative historically. According to the informants expressions were established such as that the government was “selling the country to the FARC” and “allowing the FARC to take control of the country, the politics and/or the government”. Most of the informants mentioned that the biggest fake news moving around during the period of negotiations was that there would be a guarantee of immunity for the FARC combatants and other paramilitary. In other words, that the members of FARC would not face any type of punishment or administrative justice for the crimes that were committed.

That the members of FARC would not face any type of punishment or administrative justice is false because that is why SJP [The Special Jurisdiction for Peace] exist, the SJP is a product of the peace agreement and it is built upon a special normative framework that is in charge of applying justice. But yes, that was one of the main fake news that was moving around. (Informant 4)

Informants mentioned that they felt that false claims had a great impact on the public opinion and that it generated- using then listing of informant 4 - a strong polarization, creating fractionation around how the public understood the peace agreement.

The process has been affected by fake news in a negative way, not allowing the demonstration of the importance of the process. (Informant 9)

It was explained by the informants, that in this phase, when the Santos government presented the peace agreement to be endorsed by the Colombian population, as the agreements had been approved in Havana, Cuba, and signed at the Colon theatre in Bogotá (between the members representing the Colombian State and the Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC-EP negotiators and Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri, “Timochenko”), that a great wave of disinformation was generated.

It is to be highlighted that the design of the fake news was so thorough that some indicate that the extreme right used “Cambridge Analytica”-type strategies in the same way as during the elections of Donald Trump. (Informant 5)

The result of the voting on the peace agreement was in favour of the extreme right with a very small margin (51%).¹⁷ This, according to many of the informants, increased, deepened, and polarized the divergency between the ones that agreed with the peace process and those who did not agree with what was signed in Havana even further.

Informant 5 listed some false narratives that were designed by the Democratic Centre (the extreme right) residual groups of paramilitaries (The Gulf Clan, Black Eagles):

1. The handover of the government of Juan Manuel Santos from the Colombian state to the criminal gang of the FARC-EP.
2. A transformation of the State of Colombia into a socialist country in the style of Venezuela.
3. Absolute forgiveness to the members of FARC-EP and they therefor would not have to answer for the crimes against humanity that they committed.
4. Ending private property ownership, especially expropriating the owners of large tracts of land (landowners).
5. The management of the military forces would be given to the hands of the FARC-EP.

According to informant 1, Alvaro Uribe and other members of the democratic centre possess so much hate, and therefore misinformed and torpedoed the peace agreement by creating anxiety and capsize in Colombian voters.

The informants described the current situation (2020) as a stage of implementation. The informants mentioned that a lot of components of the agreement have not yet been implemented with validity, in a real and effective way, such as the political participation of the victims. And in the stage of the implementation, there is a larger variety of fake news, positions, strategies, mechanisms in networks, and fake profiles of people with public visibility. Informant 4 says that one of the main focuses now, during the implementation stage, is the PDETs (territorially focused development plans), as ex-combatants need territorial spaces for civil presence. One of the biggest false narratives

¹⁷ Later realized without the popular vote.

that has been circulating is that the ex-combatants would take advantage of this space to grow more cocaine to extort money for terrorist actions, among other things.

In Colombia we have evidence of recidivism of some former FARC members, that is a fact. And they have taken part in illegal actions, that is true, but what the right extreme forces have done is to point out some cases and generalised it to sound like something that is happening with all ex-combatants. (Informant 4)

Informant 2 describes the implantation of the peace accords as being “sold” as containing too many concessions to the FARC and stated that the peace agreement has been discredited by creating fear in the Colombian society. The informant all mentioned how the most vulnerable part of the population has not been given the aid that they have been promised and how they still to this day are unable to practice their democratic rights. Some of the informants mentioned that the seats in congress that were created for peasants, indigenous people, and black communities – that have never been able to represent their interest - were presented as seats for predators and seats to benefit only the communities that are inhabited by ex-combatants of the FARC-EP, even if FARC already had representation in congress.

It was pointed out how a vulnerable situation is used by political figures to propagate their propaganda. The opponents took advantage to discredit the agreements. The administration of President Santos had very little time to implement the agreements¹⁸, and the Duque government has stopped the process.

This administration wants to show the very few advancements in the peace process and what have been implemented as great achievements, but these have been insufficient. (Informant 1)

The informants pointed out that the peace process contemplated that the profound causes of why the Colombian society has remained in conflict for so long have to be revised. According to informant 2 however this review is not in the interest of certain sectors since they would not benefit from it. For these sectors, the version according to which the FARC are the cause of everything bad in Colombia, and now the drug trafficking, is a satisfactory explanation, which they have also undertaken against the transitional justice system and its institutions.

The groups in power that opened up for the opportunity to democratize the Colombian society lost the referendum and the elections, partly out of clumsiness, and partly because they were not able to create a different narrative than the idea of that as the country we are,

¹⁸ The agreement was signed in November 2016, and Santos left the presidency in August, 2018.

we are doing well. And this has made it a lot more difficult to implement the different peace agreements, which was already very difficult to achieve. (Informant 2)

According to informant 2, the sectors that have governed the Colombian society and state since colonial times (1810 and onward), are owners of the media, occupy the Presidency, and the seats in congress. They are senior state officials and rule the directives of the political parties. Informant 5 says that it is necessary to contextualize that historically, during the last 70 years, Colombia has been subjected to a systematic handling of information according to the groups of power and interest in the conduct of the State. In other words, manipulation has not only been happening during the initial contacts of the peace process up to the current stage of the process – Colombia has always been manipulated with disinformation.

Informant 6, describes the phenomenon of fake news in Colombia in the recent years as the transfer of confrontation between the political right - that has governed with all its economic and political apparatus - and anyone who does not agree with their actions or forms. Fake news has been accepted in alternative communication channels, such as communal councils and social networks. The literate left has tried challenging them, but with less economic and political power. Informant 6 describes it as an unequal fight that has led to negative results of the referendum for peace and to the recent election of the president going under the scheme “Colombia cannot end up like Venezuela.”

The scaremongering regarding Colombia ending up like Venezuela, was repeated continuously by the respondents.

Informant 4 also stated that another factor that has greatly affected the credibility of the peace agreement, is the choice of offenders, such as Ivan Marquez and Jesus Santrich who were members and very important leaders in the FARC, to leave SJP (the Special Jurisdiction for Peace) and return to arms or/and leave the country.

No peace agreement, and nobody is going to pretend that all ex-combatants agree with the peace agreement, but let us say that in the Colombian case, the departure of these people has been very, very, crucial. (Informant 4)

Another moment of fake news was the claim that because Iván Márquez, Jesús Santrich, alias “el paisa”, left to form the new FARC-EP, the process is a total failure since a large part of the ex-guerrillas returned to the insurgency. (Informant 5)

Many of the informants stated that political and media mismanagement overshadowed the relevance of the agreement. From the moment that the peace process was made public,

there was a lack of pedagogy for the ordinary citizen and the communities in general to prepare the setting for the plebiscite – which could and should have been managed in a much more positive way: pro-victim and pro-peace. According to informant 8, political and media mismanagement overshadowed the relevance of the agreement, the history, and what the peace agreement could represent for the country's dynamics. This applies especially to the future communities where the FARC has had power and historical presence.

The zone, the territory of the war, could not give its voice and be the protagonist in the absence of a more successful handling of the communication and, on the contrary, regions that have been little affected - were the voices for the attainments of opposing the peace agreement. The government lacked assertiveness to manage and communicate the achievements and benefits of the agreement and lost the opportunity in the presentation of the news. (Informant 8)

7.2.1 Perceptions of the communication of fake news during the peace process

It was generally noted by the informants that the arguments to vote NO for the peace referendum (in 2016) that spread on social networks were created with a mix of fake news. These messages went viral and included topics related to the peace process such as the question regarding justice, and the processes of political participation of the FARC - that then lingered in the minds of the readers who believed in the fake news. Informant 3 stated that at the time many believed that the government would be offering the guerrillas, once demobilized, a monthly salary of 1,600,000¹⁹ pesos.” According to informant 5, another effect of the fake news was the nonconformity that the members of the FARC-EP, would not pay one day in jail despite their human rights violations, which took root in a large part of all the social strata's²⁰. These were the interactions of the users of the Hashtags (#) #SíALaPaz #QuieroLaPazVotoNO.²¹”

There was talk about a pen that could be erased with the use of a light bulb. In the news it was stated that the NO- votes were going to be erased, so it ended up inviting voters to bring their own ballpoint pen. It was also said that Timoshenko would be the next president,

¹⁹ 375 euro

²⁰ There are six social classes in Colombia, based on social status, wealth, and race – these are official demographic categories based mainly on housing characteristics

²¹ #YesToPeace #IwantPeaceIVoteNO

that Colombia would fall into the hands of “Castrochavismo”²² and that the pensioners’ money were going to be reduced as it would be used to finance ex-combatants in their reintegration process. (Informant 7)

Some of the informants mentioned the tweets of former President Alvaro Uribe, who repeatedly chose to communicate to his followers that if the YES vote²³ (for the referendum) won, it would mean that the government would surrender to a group of terrorists as the country was going to be handed over to FARC.

Informants stated that consequently, due to the fake news campaigns, when the time came for the Colombian people to vote about what was negotiated in Havana, people were so misinformed and had such a high level of mistrust, that they took the streets to vote NO to the referendum that would approve the agreement between the Government of Juan Manuel Santos and FARC.

The informants mentioned that a lot of fake news was moving through WhatsApp and Facebook and has ended up increasing the polarization in the Colombian society.

Informant 4 stated that the fact that the vote of the referendum resulted in 51 percent voting against, and 49 percent voting in favour, indicates the high level of political polarization. However, as the voting took place several years ago, fake news had not reached its’ real peak yet - there were no WhatsApp- bots and scammers, for example, false pages and profiles did not exist in the same manner as today. In other words, the fake news issue did have an impact initially at the negotiating tables, when they were installed, but not as strong of an impact as it came to have in later stages. The political polarization has given rise to certain parties, leaders and other political forces that are taking advantage of this polarization to attack the peace agreement. According to informant 4, the political polarization is what has affected the implementation of the peace agreement the most.

Informants highlighted the fact that, now in the present implementation stage, the use of social networks is becoming established and available for all. Today, fake news has a wide range of ways to travel. There are scammers on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook,

²² A term invented by Alvaro Uribe Velez and the Democratic Centre to refer to a left-wing political ideology, created and perfected in Venezuela and Cuba, that could enter Colombia through the peace agreement between President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC and, consequently, end democracy in Colombia as the FARC would step into power.

²³ For the referendum

WhatsApp, among others - basically on all social networks. There are people that are dedicated to creating fake news, twenty-four hours a day, moving them around from false profiles, but also from institutional profiles. Informant 4 says that today Colombia sees a strong impact of that. There is a great movement of fake news around the implementation process.

Whenever there is some news related to the implementation and there is some participation of some provincial political party, or the former leaders of FARC, and if there is a policy to be implemented, or there is some movement on the part of the victims to generate some process of reincorporation – they are automatically attacked with all these scammers, all these false profiles, and they begin to distract with numerous amounts of news - an incalculable amount. In Colombia it is impossible to count the amount of fake news that circulate. (Informant 4)

According to Informant 4 Colombia is one of the countries in Latin America where the topic of fake news has been most strongly present. Fake news in Colombia related to the peace agreement has mainly been from two positions: the primary position is the ideological spectrum of the extreme right that has promoted the idea that a peace agreement would imply giving the FARC too many, undeserved, benefits and no consequences. Informant 4 stated that fake news from this political spectrum succeeded in promoting the idea that the peace agreement was a mistake, and that all it did was to provide economic resources and political power to the ex-combatants and, forgiving them, and fundamentally allowing them great influence in Colombian politics without there being any kind of consequences for their earlier actions.

According to informant 4, there has also been a lot of fake news circulating that was created by the extreme left. Mainly that all the decisions that have been made by the current government (right-wing government) are completely opposing the peace agreement.

In conclusion, fake news from the right are always discrediting the deal and from the left they are always looking at all the government decision through a lens of total criticism. The current government has clearly made mistakes in the implementation of the peace agreement, but on the other hand, any type of political decision that has been enforced by the government is seen as a totally negative element by the left extreme. (Informant 4)

An important component, mentioned by most of the informants, for the peace agreement to be successfully implemented, is gaining the trust of the general population, who is to “live the agreement”. Informant 5 stated that fake news has increased mistrust in the Colombian people, especially in the upper social classes, making people believe that private property and the free-market economic model, of which they are front-line

protagonists, is at stake, in combination with fake news suggesting former FARC-EP combatants would avoid punishment for any earlier committed acts of violence and crime.

According to informant 4, the last presidential elections, although it is not directly connected to the peace process, but related to it, had significant consequences due to the circulation of fake news. During the elections fake news had a very high production and circulation on social media in Colombia and ended up greatly affecting the intention of many of the Colombians' vote. The idea that moved around the elections was that if Gustavo Petro (left-wing politician), who was Ivan Duque's opponent, won, he would hand the country to FARC, and finally Colombia would end up like Venezuela, in other words, with a dictatorial regime, a hyper-deep economic crisis, among other things. This idea circulated extensively. Although this idea was connected to the elections, it has also always been highly connected with the results of the peace agreement. (Informant 4)

After more than 50 years of war and an absurd fight of political and economic powers, one could have thought that it would end in a peace agreement signed in Cartagena. The arrival of the new government [in 2018], based on the thought that the country was handed to the FARC – as it created uncertainty in half of the people in Colombia and they elected a President like Iván Duque - due to fear that a guy from the left such as Gustavo Petro would win. It was the interests of a political party that is full of hate for the left and for the FARC that won the elections. This has been a negative factor for the implementation of the peace accords. (Informant 1)

Informant 3 highlighted that in 2020 former President Santos admitted that fake news had a great impact in misrepresenting what the peace agreement really meant and that he had underestimated the power of social networks and fake news.

7.3 Perceptions on the societal implications of fake news used as a political marketing tool in Colombia

According to informant 5 the democratic centre party has, since the beginning of the peace process, until this day, deepened the hatred, anger and disbelief in the peace process in the Colombian population with the creation and spreading of fake news on social networks and in the representative mass media.

As informants stated, fake news began to circulate even before the referendum, which (further) polarized the views of the population. According to informant 7, the

misrepresentation of gender focus (status of people representing minorities) decisions began to circulate around the agreement, that motivated some religious variants to NOT support the plebiscite. (Informant 7)

Informant 6 stated that Fake news has functioned as a justification for evading the implementation of what was agreed and have allowed attention to divert to invented situations.

Fake news has resulted in all parties losing motivation for the agreement and its achievements losing credibility and social and political support. (Informant 8)

Informant 2 mentioned that the peace processes have always depended on sectors of the national and international civil society, that believe in negotiated solutions rather than in armed confrontations. They have also counted on marginalized communities and territories that have had hope that these processes might bring some sort of opportunities, progress, and presence of the state to these regions. However, currently, since November 2016 (the signing of the peace agreement) nearly 200 ex-combatants have been assassinated (March 2020).

Informant 5 states that the territories that were left by the former FARC guerrilla, are now occupied with other guerrilla groups (ELN and EPL), and groups dedicated to drug trafficking and the exploitation of illegal mining and new fractions of the paramilitaries.

The effects that we are experiencing now are the murders of community leaders are continuing and now exceed 500, more than 200 of them being former members of FARC that demobilized, the drug trafficking have increased. etc. (Informant 1)

Informant 2 stated that many of the women and men that she has interviewed, have expressed that they felt safer during the war than the “peace.”

According to informant 7 it has been asserted that the deaths of social leaders have not been due to the leadership tasks they have been carrying out in the face of the implementations of the peace agreement (land restitution, crop substitution etc.), but are due to other factors, such as problems with short skirts and boundaries.

According to informant 5, the governing coalition in congress that has been opposing the approval of laws that allow the consolidation of the peace process, such as the new seats in the senate and the chamber that represent the victims of the conflict, has tried, on

several occasions, to overturn or modify some of the laws that represent the peace process at its core and that have already been approved – such as the SJP.

Another very negative aspect was the departure of congressmen from the FARC party²⁴, and former members of the general secretariat of the former FARC- EP²⁵, Henrán Darío Velásquez, Alias el Paisa, who formed new fronts of insurgents “The new FARC” (Informant 5)

According to many of the informants, the main problem at this stage is disinformation.

Disinformation has been the main problem that the agreement and its implementation has faced, the most evident point of which was the result of the “No” in the referendum. (Informant 8)

According to informants the actual reporting of how the implementation is going, has not been managed. The fake news about how much is progressing, is the official version.

It is the reality. The supposed efforts, which are imperceptible and non-existent, are the official voices of how the agreement is going in its implementation, as national and international actors’ rains in its regard, leading to a possible failed peace process in Colombia. (Informant 8)

Informant 2 stated that the disinformation surrounding the peace process has generated the withdrawal of interest and support for the FARC’s laying down of arms, as an historic opportunity to deepen democracy in the country. As of today, the country has not understood the deep causes that led to FARC arming itself, nor is it interested in understanding them. Culturally, there is an amnesia and indifference for the daily deaths of social leaders and ex-combatants, which are alarming.

The assassinations are a lot more alarming than what Covid-19 may be causing, and these deaths have not stopped even in this time of pandemic. (Informant 2)

Informant 5 said that the following government, if right-extreme, will probably continue generating fake news, as this nourishes the fundamental part of their political discourse - warfare - with active and inactive guerrilla-groups as their fundamental reason for surviving.

Recently, the President of the Colombian Truth Commission, Francisco de Roux, said that if Colombia kept a minute of silence due to the deaths caused by the war in Colombia, we would have to stay silent for 16 years. [This phrase is on Francisco de Roux’s twitter feed] (Informant 2)

²⁴ The Common Alternative Revolutionary Force, Ivan Marquéz and Jesús Santrich

²⁵ The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the people’s army

According to informant's fake news has been a way of discrediting what was agreed in the peace accords and a way of delegitimizing the actors, hence, limiting their future political possibilities.

Fake news affected the peace process greatly, distorted this important milestone for Colombia, leading to the loss of a unique opportunity for Colombia. (Informant 9)

7.4 Summary of the data

The informant were able to share strong and initiated views on the peace process in the country, the marketing of politics and the impact that false news has had on the peace process, and the societal development in the country. Themes that reoccur in the informants' statements include the lack of knowledge about, and the different established views on, the historical causes that underlie the current situation among different population groups, control of the media, organized dissemination of falsified messages, misinformation, intimidation propaganda (scaremongering), dissemination of rumours, mistrust, increased polarization among the population, and a failed implementation of the peace agreements in the peripheral areas.

The informants expressed genuine worry about the current situation in Colombia. Something that occurred continuously throughout the interviews was the expression of a disappointment in how the peace process has been handled, and the continuous emphasise of how complex a process it has been. The respondents emphasised the lack of guarantees for victims of the conflict, the lack of statal presence in rural areas and how the most vulnerable part of the population is still not able to practice their rights.

During the interviews, the informants stated that the peace agreement presented an opportunity for Colombia to reach an advancement that had not earlier been possible due to the armed conflict, but an opportunity that has not been well handled. The peace agreement has been viewed positively in the international community, but there has been a lack of pedagogy for the ordinary citizen. The victims should, according to the informants, have been the protagonists for the peace agreement, but the warzone was left

with no voice. The government lacked assertiveness to manage and communicate the achievements and benefits of the agreement, losing the opportunity to be the active presenter of the peace agreement.

During the interviews it became clear that the informants perceive Colombia as a deeply socio-economically divided society, that suffers from many structural problems, and consequently also makes the distribution of power very unequal - not only the statal power, but also the power of the media and information distribution. According to the informants, the Colombian citizenry has not found common consensus to what reasons behind the conflict has been, and what the fundamental problems are.

Regarding perceptions of societal implications of fake news in Colombia the informants stated that the fake news has further polarized the population, not only before voting for the referendum, but throughout the peace process. The general view among the informants was that fake news has played a major role in forming attitudes among the Colombian population towards the peace agreement. The vulnerable situation in Colombia has been used to manipulate the citizenry with fake news by groups of power and/or ideological and financial interest are handling the information distribution. According to informants the actual reporting of how the implementation is going, has not been managed. The fake news about how much is progressing, is the official version.

8 Analysis

In this chapter the analysis of the thesis will be presented. The abductive analysis is built upon the empirical investigation and the theoretical frame of reference. The analysis begins by discussing social constructionist perspectives on factors that have affected perceptions of communicated political agenda during the peace process in Colombia, followed by an analysis of fake news and the unethical application of marketing methods to the Colombian political spectrum. The final part of this chapter presents an analysis of the societal implications of fake news in Colombia.

8.1 A social constructionist perspective on factors that have affected perceptions of communicated political agenda during the peace process in Colombia

According to the theoretical frame of reference, it is possible to establish that social constructionism is an applicable theory that establish how the social environment (cultural, historical and social context of life), and how social interactions impact the way people perceive their surroundings, other people and the information at hand. The empirical investigation shows data that, analysed through a social constructionist perspective, can enable a deeper understanding of the different perceptions of communicated political agenda in Colombia during the peace process.

As described in detail earlier (chapter 2.1.), social constructionism finds three fundamental processes as responsible for social phenomena: externalization, objectivation and internalization. When examining perceptions of political communication, it is necessary to examine the constructions of the cultural, social, and historical context, and to establish *who* has the possibility to communicate, who is at the receiving end, and the *potential* of the public to critically examine the information at hand. According to social constructionism, knowledge is created in daily interactions with other people. Things and phenomena do not have the same meaning or value in every

community. We talk about different things, in different ways, and different languages in different communities and constructs. In short, one can say that perceptions are influenced by values, values that one has acquired from the environment one has lived in – perhaps even from previous generations. For a situation like the one in Colombia, where a spiral of violence would need to be broken, this theoretical approach can easily be justified.

As Robinson (2019) stated, the prosperity of a country depends on the social, political, and economic inclusion of the citizenry. Individual participation is the essence of democracy (Krishna, 2008). A democracy is a social construction, a communal agreement. Colombia identifies itself as a democracy. Hence, the prosperity of Colombia must be analysed through how democratic values are met. A democracy is both a way of organizing societies, and a way of solving the question of power. Some fundamentals of democracy are free elections, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, fundamental human rights, that all people are equal before the law and the right to demonstrate. As Strömbäck (2003) stated, by examining those in power, informing the public and allowing different views and cultural expressions to be spoken (*objective*) journalism can contribute to a better functioning democracy.

According to social constructionism we are victims of internalized truth, in other words, constructed social truths. We put labels, and hence value, on ourselves and others around us. This is greatly demonstrated in Colombia where the division into social classes still exist. People are hence victims of a category – system.

As the data reveals, Colombia faces obvious challenges by the threats of organized crime, illegal mining, drug production and -trafficking, human rights violations, limited freedom of speech, murders, forced displacements and disappearances, among other things. Peasants have been continuously forced to plant coca bushes as the coca leaf is the only thing that has commercial outlet in the areas where there is no infrastructure (access only by trail) and where there are no schools nor healthcare. The sectors that have governed the Colombian society since colonial times occupy the Presidency, the seats in congress and are owners of the media. They have militarized the processes of disarming paramilitary, hence, leaving them without capacity to demand compliance, implying that, historically, the arms have been the only option for them to make a political stance.

Furthermore, the victims of the conflict are not recognized as full political actors in the Colombian political system. The peace negotiations were limited to the government and one single guerrilla, hence, leaving out millions of victims and other armed groups – leaving gaps in the implementations of the peace agreement. This suggests a distribution of power that is very centralized and isolated to benefit the elites, leaving very little room for other voices (people from the rural areas, minorities, victims, former guerrilla) to be heard and considered in the decision making. In other words, even if Latin Americans in general, poor and/or rich, are equally politically active and committed to democracy (Krishna, 2008), during the Colombian peace process, many of the important actors have been left out from the peace negotiations and process. The data hence suggest that there are very many challenges to the democracy and democratic values in Colombia.

Social constructionism is a theory that implies that meanings and hence, opinions, are developed in coordination with others. As mentioned earlier (chapter 3.2.), the general discourse focuses on whether the voter preferences are shaped by political elements or by the effects of the social environment. (Coban & Ozturk, 2019) As McLeod (1997) stated, understanding is a result of careful analysis of the historical and cultural context of social life. Social tension and segregation pave way for the spread of disinformation (chapter 4.3.1.). According to Krishna (2008) a special burden on democracy is the insufficient education, in Colombia. The lack of education (some areas even total absence of schools) in Colombia suggest that the potential and for many Colombians to critically analyse information, among other things, is inadequate. In the case of Colombia, some of the structural conditions and social tensions, alongside inadequate education, are; the aftermaths of colonialism, the absence of a common truth regarding the understanding of the history of the conflict and why the FARC armed itself in the first place, inequalities, limited freedom of speech, newspapers historically owned by politically prestige families, and media houses today owned by profit-driven corporations, political and economic corruption, and organized crime, among other things.

According to social constructionism speech and created narratives has a central role in the creation of the social world. In Colombia, the territories of war have no voice, and the regions that have been little affected have been the voices opposing a peace agreement. If we look at the history of Colombia through a social constructionist perspective, it is clear how very different the social constructions of the society are in different settings

(e.g. Peripheral areas – elites in the cities, former combatants – victims of the conflict). In other words, greatly differing perceptions of the peace process and of the political communication exist.

The media houses in Colombia today are owned by big Colombian corporations with financial interests. Previous data stated that minorities have very little representation in the media and the information distribution is very biased. According to Cheminant & Parrish (2011) media owners stand to gain market shares by injecting more, rather than less, political bias to the news as the news audience increasingly polarizes through questions of politics and ideology. When the audience is polarized, novel news makes for market success.

The political polarization in Colombia has given rise to certain parties, leaders and other political forces that are taking advantage of this polarization creating narratives to attack the peace agreement, and according the data, the political polarization is what has affected the implementation of the peace agreement the most. The data suggests political manipulation as political forces are trying to gain control over the voting market through emotional manipulation (Chapter 3.2.2.).

According to social constructionism there are multiple realities, and multiple moralities. The data suggests a relatively subjective handling of the communication of the peace process. The conflict zone has not been able to give its voice and to be the protagonist in the absence of a more successful handling of the communication of the conflict and the peace agreement. On the contrary, regions that have been little affected were the voices for the attainments of opposing the peace agreement.

The data suggests that there is a very limited, and partisan communication that is not allowing different views and cultural expressions to be spoken, suggesting heresthetic power (Chapter 3.2.1.), where agenda setters determine what gets attention in the public sphere. According to the data, communication by the media houses in Colombia, is thus not, at its whole, contributing to a better functioning democracy.

8.2 Fake news – the unethical application of marketing methods to the Colombian political spectrum

Bringing something, making something, or building something into being, that had no existence previously, is central to social constructionism. Social actors develop a concept and then figure out ways to make it concrete (Galbin, 2014)

The ultimate, concrete goal of political marketing is generally to influence the individual citizen's decision-making (voter behaviour and other activity) and decision-making goes far beyond the rational calculation and evaluation of possibilities. (Ledoux, 1996). As suggested by statistics (Chapter 6.2.1.) there is a limited reach to platforms, hence, information, for 40% of Colombians due to socioeconomic factors, 73% of Colombians do not know how to identify fake news, and 47% of Colombians do not question what they read on the internet. Furthermore, in the new media environment, as the theory suggest, a news consumer can tailor the style and substance of the news to fit their own ideological preferences, in other words, there is a homogeneity in the consumption of information on the internet. This suggest an environment where it is easy to spread disinformation and propagate propaganda, and each side of the debate is armed with their own version of the truth.

As stated in the data, Colombia is a socio-economically divided society. Fake news often needs the nourishment of troubled times and structural divisions to take root, and it is exactly in this context that fake news finds its consumer (Goldman, 2016). The informants pointed out how a vulnerable situation in Colombia is used by political figures to propagate their propaganda.

Political marketing is, among other things (Chapter 3.1.), used to address different voter concerns and control political and electoral campaigns. Political marketing can be used to change agenda in the media and the public sphere, thus, advance ideology, policy, causes and legislation. Decision- making acts below the threshold of intentionality and consciousness (Connolly & Zeelenberg, 2002), and when in conflict, resulting in emotion, clearly overriding reasoning (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017).

The data gathered from informants suggest that Colombia, at least to some extent, finds itself in a post-truth era which is defined by “emotions over reasoning” (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017), that even further polarizes the public. According to Rúas and Capdevila (2017) there is an interest in gaining control of the voting market through emotional manipulation, which is easier in a social spectrum where facts are less important than the sensations they produce. In 2020, former President Santos admitted that fake news had a great impact in misrepresenting what the peace agreement really meant and that he underestimated the power of social networks and fake news. This was demonstrated when the 51% of the Colombian population voted NO for the referendum of the peace agreement.

Polarization makes it easier for content creators to inject more political bias in the news, and hence, increase their market share (emotional capitalism, Chapter 3.2.) The unequal fight that led to negative results of the referendum for peace and to the recent presidential elections, was described as going under the scheme “Colombia cannot end up like Venezuela”. Through massive messaging chains, the belief that voting NO to the agreement would be the best option to avoid becoming the “next Venezuela” and “protecting the family”, was massively advertised. In a later stage, the promoters of the campaign admitted that these had been ways to convince the population to vote NO. (Cabrera, 2020) This kind of advertising can be directly understood as the unethical use of marketing methods to gain control over the voting market.

The phenomenon of fake news in Colombia in the recent years was described as the transfer of confrontation between the political right and anyone who does not agree with their actions or forms. Fake news has been accepted in alternative communication channels, such as communal councils and social networks. The literate left has tried challenging them, but with less economic and political power.

According to the data Fake news has functioned as a justification for evading the implementation of what was agreed and have allowed attention to divert to invented situations. According to Cheminant and Parrish (2011) this is the basic idea of heresthetics: The powerful can systematically use hereshetics to obscure their own actions and avoid accountability in a way that outsiders find difficult to understand.

Political and media mismanagement in Colombia, overshadowed the relevance of the agreement, the history, and what the peace agreement could represent for the country's dynamics. Especially, for the future communities where the FARC had power and historical presence. From a social constructionism perspective fake news are a way of externalizing disinformation into the society, as a manipulative way of driving an ideological or financial agenda, or both. According to informants, Colombia has always been manipulated with disinformation, and the actual reporting of how the implementation is going, has not been managed, so the fake news about how much it is progressing, is the official version.

Marketing should be defined based on what the goal of outcome is. In that sense; straight and honest. In a democracy, the goals of politics should be democratic, fair, and ethical. Hence, Fake News can be understood, not as political marketing, but as the unethical use of marketing methods, in other words, political manipulation.

8.3 The societal implications of Fake news in Colombia

Taking advantage of Colombia being a socio-economically very divided country, to promote scaremongering and manipulation, is not only political manipulation, but it is drawing attention away from relevant issues in society that would benefit from the public's full attention.

Rúas and Capdevila (2017) highlights that the loss of credibility and the general lack of trust in politicians has placed political communication in a scenario of a rising left-wing and right-wing population, in other words, a deepened polarization. According to the empirical research, there has been an increased mistrust in the people that are to live the agreement, leading to, for example, former leaders of the FARC returning to arms. As mentioned before, the polarization in Colombia was perfectly demonstrated in the results of the voting of the referendum that ended in 49% of the voters voting for and 51% against the peace agreement.

Fake news in Colombia regarding the peace process has mainly been about scaremongering, creating mistrust in the citizenry during campaigns and elections,

ultimately affecting the way people vote and the judgment of the outcomes of elections. The data suggest that there is a lack of common ground for the political left and the political right. As mentioned, in politics, the voter's judgment of a choice can be as crucial as the outcome of an election. (Cheminant & Parrish, 2017) Colombia has been polarized and prone by conflict for decades, but as mentioned before, according to the data, fake news has polarized the Colombian people even further.

Many people today live in an attention economy, in other words, people are paying with their attention. Politicians are in a large scale solely focusing on their personal interest and driving so called "politician's politics". The media is, simultaneously, inflicting with uncontrolled input and unverified information. (O'Cass, 1996) which, regarding politically intended messages, consequently, has led to an increase in political polarization. (Muqshith & Muzykant, 2019). The data stated that fake news began to circulate even before the referendum, which already then further polarized the views of the population.

One societal implication was also that misrepresentations of gender focus decisions (minorities) began to circulate around the agreement, which motivated - as the intention was - some religious variants to NOT support the plebiscite. The data suggested that the disinformation surrounding the peace process has generated the withdrawal of interest on and support for, the peace agreement, and for the FARC's laying down of arms, as an historic opportunity to deepen democracy in the country.

Culturally, there is an amnesia and indifference for the daily deaths of social leaders and ex-combatants, which is alarming. Many of the informants stated that the ignorance is because of the elites benefitting from the current structural conditions and distribution of power, that the elites are distant from the society and that the peripheral country stays outside the system. According to previous research (Chapter 6.1.1.) this kind of exclusion in Colombia has historically generated guerrillas, drug trafficking and poverty.

There is a very large difference between the nature of communication strategies of the individual political figure, and communication efforts of governments and public institutions. In the recent years, politics and the media have largely been suffering from a loss of credibility. From a social constructionist perspective, fake news has succeeded when it is objectivated by society as it has developed a factual truth or existence. Fake

news generally has consequences, such as the polarization in Colombia, leading to, among other things, radicalisation due to ideological views that are internalized into society. As one of the former FARC- combatants explained to the author of the thesis (chapter 6.4.3.), one of the goals with the peace process should be that young people would no longer have to train for war, and that the government would guarantee education for the people in the rural areas and land (that once was sold to private owners) to the former guerrilla and people in the rural areas, so that they can work and hence, have an equal chance to build and sustain a dignified life.

As of 2020, social leaders and former combatants are systematically disappearing and being murdered as other former combatants are returning to arms. According to the data, fake news has been a way of discrediting the peace agreement and delegitimizing the actors, thus, limiting their future political possibilities.

Fake news has very real and, at times, devastating consequences (Goldman 2016). As the Freedom House (2018) concluded, the peace process in Colombia has been strongly affected and shaped by social media and the proliferation of misinformation, online aggression, and fake news. The rise of ICTs and media technology has also been significantly influential and damaging to the democratic process in Colombia, as they narrow the audience's political horizon. According to social constructionism, the narratives that are created (*externalised*) – are highly affect the outcome of things. According to the social constructionist theory, the previous research, and the empirical data, explain that social constructions affect not only how political communication is interpreted in Colombia, but also how it is communicated.

During the negotiations of the peace agreement, the government lacked assertiveness to manage and communicate the achievements and benefits of the agreement and lost the opportunity in the presentation of the news. Political agenda, externalized, objectivated, and internalized into new truths, have historically deepened polarization in Colombia, and today, with the information landscape evolving, could continue to do so.

9 Final discussion

In this final chapter of the thesis, the result of the thesis is discussed, and the research questions are answered, followed by an account of criticism of the research. The chapter is concluded with suggestions for future research.

9.1 Results and answers to the research questions

The aim of this thesis was to map and analyse perceptions of how marketing and communication of political agenda, in the form of fake news and misinformation, in the various media channels, has affected the political climate and the democracy during the (ongoing) peace process in Colombia.

The intention of this research was to create an image of the spread of fake news and misinformation in general, as well as of its effect on the development in Colombia. A one-year stay in the country made it possible to establish contacts with people who, on behalf of their professions, and throughout their professional lives, have followed the events in the country (e.g. as journalists, university professors, and political actors), as well as to meet and discuss with people who have directly participated in the armed conflict. To achieve a result, a comprehensive review of existing theory and an empirical research was conducted.

Based on the theoretical frame of reference and the data collected in this thesis, one of the conclusions of the this thesis is that Colombia is a good example of what the consequence could be when there is no general access to accurate and correct information, when the people that can manipulate will manipulate as they have agenda and the means to do so, and when there is no counterforce, like publicly available fact-checked journalism.

It is important to recognize that Colombia as a case, is rather unique. The historical events and happenings in Colombia, starting from the colonialization in the beginning of the 19th century, have created deep socio-economical and socio-political differences that are

deeply rooted in society, and they require solutions that would demand severe structural changes. As of today, the people in power have shown very little effort or interest in doing so, and those who have, have their hands tied behind bureaucracy. The distance between the rural areas and the epicentre of decision-making is immense; the voices of the conflict are not heard, and the state has no presence in the rural areas where it is needed the most.

The lack of infrastructure, healthcare, and education in many parts of the country is a perfect demonstration of the isolation of the rural areas. Still today, in 2020, equal rights and opportunities for all people of Colombia are missing. Social leaders and former guerrilla that are trying to create and encourage change, are disappearing and getting murdered, and thousands of people are suffering forced displacement. Where the FARC has left, there has been a lack of statal presence, and new guerrilla groups have arrived to take their place. The peace agreement has not been implemented in the way and pace that was promised, and many people are left in very vulnerable positions, with no means to demand compliance. Therefore, as reflected upon in the data, many people felt safer during war than during peace.

If there is interest to change structural conditions after 50 years of warfare, it is important to create channels to evenly distribute and disseminate updated information about what is happening. If there is information based on facts and basic knowledge among all citizens, a rumour or a deliberately spread falsification can be confronted with and weighed against information already obtained. Or the other way around: one single false accusation actively distributed, if objectivated in society, can lead to a situation where information arriving subsequently is questioned.

The government should have been proactive regarding the information around the peace agreement and the peace process so that there would have been no vacuum of lack of information. The information should have been correct and available for all, providing the means to navigate and understand the peace agreement and its content and implications fully. The peace agreement should have been presented with a neutral and consistent description of the history of Colombia and how the unstable situation in Colombia originally arose.

However, as the elites benefit from the current structural conditions and socio-economical divisions and refuse to embrace change, the information distribution was handled

accordingly. At the same time, a constructive dialogue require that the government recognizes its historical mistakes (e.g. land distribution), and that the state would pledge to eliminate the conditions that cause structural violence in Colombia.

What is recurring in the secondary data and the informants' statements is the ignorance among different population groups about the situation in the country, both historically and today. Previous events in the country's history cannot be tolerated in retrospect if one has never understood or known the causal connection that has motivated political parties in their decisions.

Thus, the battle against fake news is foremost a political struggle, that transposes into the media world as an ideological and partisan battle (e.g. the right wing versus the left wing in Colombian politics) and a discourse around social classes (the experts, graduates and urban populations versus the supposedly uneducated and easily influenced).

A long-lasting peace would require recognition, forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration of people's basic human rights – and a transparent fact-based communication. In the long run there should be focus on education, to strengthen democracy and equal rights and opportunities, and a mission to build a common understanding or/and truth of the history of the conflict in Colombia.

Both previously existing research and the primary data obtained in this research, suggest that there is no common view of what the fundamental problems in the Colombian society are, and they tell that the reason why Colombia has been in conflict for so long should be revised.

According the social constructionist theory, every generation maintains and reaffirms parts of the social world, recreating discarding and repairing others. We are not limited to constructions; we can construct alternatives.

It is possible to dismantle structural problems by creating different narratives. However, they need thorough examination. Social constructionism implies that cross-cultural changes require collaborative effort. New realities are created based on everyone at the table, hence, inviting, involving, and considering all parts concerned.

A democratic dialogue, based on reflections and the expression of reality, where strategies are public and universal, could, in theory, lead to a recovery of confidence in politics. How stories are told, according to social constructionism, often determines how we listen. The social constructionism approach, the theory, and the data, hence suggest that the peace process, implemented with all concerned parts actively involved, in theory, could have presented a historical opportunity to promote the establishment of a peaceful and democratically civil society in Colombia.

In conclusion, fundamental differences between existing theory and the results of the research did not emerge. This research shows that fake news and misinformation are issues affecting the goal to implement a peace agreement and long-lasting peace in Colombia. They have been used as an unethical marketing tool to counteract and oppose a transparency that has been needed and as a way of preserving current structural conditions. The analysis of the perceptions of political discourse suggest that narratives of hate, that are amplified by social media, increase violence. Transparent communication is essential for a democracy and for bringing about change.

From a social constructionist standpoint, the results of this thesis are also a construction, the conclusions are neither an objective truth nor a falsification of the truth, only a demonstration of one perspective of the subject area.

In this part of the chapter, the research questions of the thesis are answered briefly and concisely. The questions are presented in the same order as in the introduction chapter (chapter 1) of the thesis.

- *In the context of the ongoing peace process in Colombia, what are fake news and what is their societal impact?*

In the context of the ongoing peace process in Colombia, fake news is a way to draw attention from important matters, a way to discredit the peace agreements, and a way to divide and polarize the country even further. Fake news generally has consequences, such as polarization, leading to, among other things, radicalisation due to the polarized ideological views.

- *How can different perceptions of communicated political agenda in Colombia be understood from a social constructionism perspective?*

With a social constructionist approach, one can explain the existence of several differing perceptions of the history of Colombia and the current peace process in the country. There is a lack of common ground in Colombia for what the history of the country is, and why Colombia has been in conflict for over 50 years. In other words, there are many different subjective truths, that consequently can explain how political communication is understood differently throughout the Colombian society. From the type of modern endless supply of “news” existing, everyone can personalize their consumption and find information that support one’s own worldviews.

- *Can fake news be understood as the unethical application of marketing methods to the political spectrum?*

There are generally two motivations behind fake news: the financial motivation and the ideological motivation. There is financial motivation behind fake news going viral and providing content-creators with clicks that are convertible to advertising revenue. The motivation is ideological when fake news stories are produced to promote ideas or people that they favour, often discrediting others. Marketing should be defined based on what the goals of outcome is. In that sense; straight and honest. In a democracy, the goal of politics should be democratic, fair, and ethical. Hence, Fake News can be understood, not as political marketing, but as the unethical use of marketing methods.

9.2 Criticism towards the thesis

As this thesis primarily applies a qualitative research approach to perceptions by people with higher education on, the impacts of fake news and misinformation in the peace

process, the perceptions cannot be generalized across a population or larger masses. This is something that could have been achieved by using a primarily quantitative method.

However, given the purpose of the research and the social constructionist approach, the qualitative focus supported by secondary data, was the more appropriate choice of method. A mixed-method approach provided a broad and more generalized understanding of the research problem.

Nine informants were recruited for the empirical investigation in this thesis – based on resources, schedule, and purpose of the thesis. All informants can be considered having within the subject area. The thesis can be criticised for the limited number of informants. Informants representing all social groups could have given a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, possibly resulted in more varied data or further strengthened the correlations in the data.

The interview guide that was designed for the interviews, focused on the key subject areas to support the research problems and the purpose of thesis. Even though the interview guide covers important subject matters, the interview guide could have focused on more personal experiences and the backgrounds of the informants. This could have supported the social constructionist approach even further and provided the research with more varied data.

According to the social constructionist approach, there are no objective truths. Social constructionism does not aim to find *the* truth, or eliminate any perspective, it is simply a way of explaining things. Social constructionism also suggests that the (scientific) observer is a part of a community, hence, the results are based on traditions of the community to make a study. The analysis in this research is based on several subjective truths, and the secondary data are constructed by other experts and the communities they stem from. This research can thus not be described as objective from a social constructionist perspective.

9.3 Suggestions for future research

There are several suggestions for further research to be found based on the subject areas of this thesis. At the time of writing, we are living in a time when the belief in new media and the power of electronically conveyed information is tremendous – the most exposed example being the current president of the United States (2020) who seems to judge that the power of social media is sufficient to even override the power of democratic institutions. The author of this thesis thus feels a strong need for studies of the various consequences of the free and uncontrolled use of the different medial tools. What actions can be taken to promote new and critical media, and to broaden the capacities of the common citizen to assess the credibility of information and information sources? What are the possible consequences of further development of artificial intelligence on freedom of speech? What are the potential risks of the development of artificial intelligence? And will there be ethical limits of research and development of artificial intelligence?

10 Svensk sammanfattning

RUBRIK:

Tekniker för politisk marknadsföring: Ett socialkonstruktivistiskt perspektiv på nyhetsdistribution som en del av fredsprocessen i Colombia

- **Uppfattningar om konsekvenserna av falska nyheter och felinformation**

Inledning

Kommunikation är en nedärvd lust som präglar människan. Ingen ömsesidig förståelse kan uppnås eller existera utan kommunikation av något slag. Kommunikation utgör kärnan i mänskliga relationer, och därmed framskrider och fortskrider kultur och civilisation i den mån som detta möjliggörs av kommunikation (Gergern, 1985).

Det sägs att vi lever i en informationsålder där datorer och nätverksteknologier har gjort det möjligt för oss att övervinna begränsningar i tid och rum som tidigare präglat kommunikation. Kommunikationen sker nu med större hastighet, i större utsträckning, med större flexibilitet och har en större bredd av innehåll. (Al-Fedaghi, 2012)

Dagens globaliserade och digitaliserade värld och medielandskap gör det enklare än någonsin för auktoritära ledare, såväl som olika icke-demokratiska stater, att sprida propaganda. Många gånger verkar det vara viktigare att vinna debatter och sälja kommersiella och emotionella budskap än att sprida fakta och kunskap. Colombia är en korrupt nation som fortsättningsvis idag (2020) är ett av de farligaste länderna i världen för journalister och aktivister, där felinformation och falska nyheter har präglat samhället i hög utsträckning redan länge. I denna avhandling belyses uppfattningar om vilka konsekvenser felinformation i media, om den colombianska fredsprocessen har, i politiska miljön och samhället i stort. (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017)

För att bilda sig en uppfattning om hur falska nyheter har påverkat det politiska klimatet och demokratin i Colombia krävs en djupgående förståelsekunskap om kommunikationskanalerna i medierna och hur felinformation används som ett verktyg i

politiska sammanhang. Därför behandlas följande ämnesområden utförligt i avhandlingens teorikapitel: kommunikation, politisk marknadsföring, falska nyheter och social konstruktivism. Det sistnämnda utgör både en forskningsstrategi och en kommunikationsteori i denna pro Gradu-avhandling.

Social konstruktivism fokuserar på de metoder med vilka människor tillsammans konstruerar en förståelse av världen. Detta innebär med andra ord att åsikter och den egna uppfattningen om verklighet utvecklas i samspel med andra och följaktligen vävs in i den sociala strukturen (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

Syfte och ämnesmotivering

År 2016 undertecknade de revolutionära beväpnade styrkorna i Colombia (FARC) och president Santos regering ett gemensamt fredsavtal som kom att ”avsluta” mer än fem decennier av våldsam konflikt. Idag är fredsavtalet nära en kollaps. Några orsaker till detta är missnöjet med Colombias nya president Ivan Duque (vald 2018) – politisk ersättare till före detta president Álvaro Uribe Vélez (som för närvarande är under utredning av Högsta domstolen för hans påstådda roll i krigsförbrytelser), FARC-befälhavaren Ivan Márquez tillkännagivande om ”en ny fas av beväpnad kamp”, och den sittande regeringens nedskärningar som en del av implementeringen av fredsavtalet. En oroväckande mängd av dödliga attacker riktade mot aktivister och människorättsförsvare har lett till utmaningar gällande yttrandefriheten i Colombia. Fredsprocessen i Colombia har påverkats, och formats starkt av sociala medier och spridningen av felinformation, online-aggression och falska nyheter. (The Freedom House, 2018) Därför är Colombia speciellt vid denna tidpunkt ett intressant objekt för diskussion och forskning av detta slag.

Dagens forskning indikerar att den nuvarande politiska kommunikationen produceras med målsättningen att uppnå den nödvändiga legitimiteten för media och medborgare. Samtidigt söker människor efter autentiska drag för att kunna lite på det politiska etablissemanget. Traditionella och nya medier spelar en viktig roll när det gäller ansträngningen att överbrygga avståndet mellan politiska kandidater, partier, regeringar,

institutioner och medborgare. (Rúas & Capdevila, 2017) Redan år 2013 kom World Economic Forum ut med en rapport som fastslog att felinformation är att betrakta som en global och brådskande utmaning. Felinformation kan inte bemötas eller bekämpas endast genom att peka finger på dem som skapar eller betalar för skapandet av innehåll, utan det råder också ett behov av att undersöka de strukturella förhållandena som banar väg för felinformationen och falska nyheter (Hendricks & Vestergaard, 2017). Falska nyheter och deras samhällspåverkan är därmed ett mycket intressant och aktuellt forskningsområde.

Syftet med denna avhandling är att ge en sammanhängande och grundlig bild av fenomenet i fråga genom att kartlägga och analysera uppfattningar om hur marknadsföring och kommunikation av politisk agenda, i form av falska nyheter och felinformation, i olika mediekkanaler har påverkat det politiska klimatet och demokratin under (den pågående) fredsprocessen i Colombia

Presentation av metod och material

Eftersom syftet med denna pro Gradu-avhandling är att analysera och kartlägga hur falska nyheter har påverkat det politiska klimatet och demokratin under fredsprocessen, har en metodkombination tillämpats som forskningsansats. Med andra ord har både kvalitativa och kvantitativa forskningsmetoder tillämpats.

Ostrukturerade och semi-strukturerade intervjuer har utförts för att försöka besvara forskningsfrågorna, medan sekundära data i form av tidigare forskning, Internetkällor, statistik och Nättopografi har studerats för att bredda kunskapen om sammanhangen och för att kunna tolka och förstå forskningsproblemet mer djupgående.

Redogörelse för undersökningen

Den empiriska delen av forskningen utgörs av 9 individuella, ostrukturerade och semi-strukturerade djupintervjuer med olika colombianska samhällsaktörer (bland annat

journalister och akademiker). En stor del av intervjuerna har genomförts per telefon och en del via datorkommunikation, på grund av distansen (Colombia – Finland). Tillika har före detta FARC-soldater och före detta vice presidenten intervjuats (2018), för att ge en mer komplett bild av hur fredsprocessen bemötts av olika aktörer, och hur konflikten påverkat människor i olika områden och olika livssituationer.

Data har samlats in baserat på informanternas personliga erfarenheter, observationer och livssituationer. Det vill säga ur ett socialkonstruktivistiskt perspektiv.

Resultat

Resultatet har tagits fram på basen av en sammanställning av avhandlingens empiriska resultat och den teoretiska referensramen.

Sammanfattningsvis konstaterar denna forskning att falska nyheter och felinformation inte är de största utmaningarna som präglar Colombia och påverkar möjligheterna att genomföra en fredsprocess med målet att åstadkomma permanent fred i landet. Däremot har falska nyheter och felinformation utnyttjats som ett oetiskt marknadsföringsverktyg för att distrahera konstruktiv dialog och transparens som hade varit nödvändigt för en hållbar implementation av fredsavtalet. Forskningen tyder på att hatpropaganda förstärks av sociala medier, förstärker polariseringen i landet, och ökar osäkerhet bland befolkningen. Transparent kommunikation är nödvändigt för en demokrati, och för att åstadkomma hållbara strukturella förändringar. Fred i Colombia skulle förutsätta erkännande, förlåtelse, försoning och återställande av människors grundläggande mänskliga rättigheter, samt en transparent och faktabaserad kommunikation.

Ur ett socialkonstruktivistiskt perspektiv, är även resultaten av denna forskning konstruerade. Med andra ord utgör resultaten ingen objektiv sanning, eller falsifiering av sanningen, utan bidrar med en demonstration av ett perspektiv på ämnesområdet i fråga.

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Appendix 1

El título preliminar de mi investigación es: “Técnicas de marketing político: Una perspectiva social construccionista acerca de la distribución de noticias en el proceso de paz en Colombia – percepciones sobre el impacto de las noticias falsas y la desinformación en el proceso de paz en Colombia”.

Es por lo anterior que me gustaría conocer su perspectiva personal acerca del proceso de paz y el impacto de las noticias falsas y la desinformación.

He escogido este tema para mi tesis debido a que encuentro muy importante establecer contacto entre los países nórdicos y Colombia, teniendo en cuenta, claro está, los diferentes antecedentes históricos que los caracterizan.

He preparado seis preguntas que me encantaría usted pudiera responder (puede ser de manera escrita u oral, lo que más le convenga).

Por favor, no permita que las preguntas restrinjan la presentación de sus opiniones o puntos de vista acerca del tema. Estoy muy interesada en escuchar sus opiniones más profundas sobre estos asuntos.

1. ¿Podría, por favor, contarme acerca de usted? Enfocado en su experticia en el área de mi investigación.
2. En relación con el proceso de paz, ¿podría darme, en sus propias palabras, una visión general del proceso de paz tal como lo ha experimentado?
3. ¿Qué factores han afectado el proceso de paz (de manera positiva o negativa)?
4. ¿Qué tanto ha afectado las noticias falsas y la desinformación al proceso de paz? ¿Qué efectos han generado?
5. ¿Qué tanto han afectado las noticias falsas y la desinformación al proceso de paz en las siguientes etapas:
 - a) Contacto inicial entre el gobierno del presidente Santos y las FARC.
 - b) Inicios de las conversiones entre el gobierno del presidente Santos y las FARC.
 - c) Negociaciones entre el gobierno y las FARC
 - d) Implementación del acuerdo de paz entre el gobierno del presidente Santos y las FARC.

Annex 1

ADR

During the graduation ceremony of the ex-combatants, Colombia's rural development agency (ADR), confirmed that there are 40 programs in the territorial areas of reincorporation (8 of March 2018). Some of these projects are based on livestock, fruits, banana production, vegetables, among others. The cost of these programs are 15 billion Colombian pesos (about 4,2 million Euros), and 10 billion (2,75 million Euros) - more will be allocated to provide technical assistance. A project will be carried out in Tumaco (a region in Colombia), where there will be investments for almost 5 billion (1,37 million Euros) pesos. The Agency have developed an interdisciplinary group called "The peace group" (Grupo de Paz), consisting of 22 people to materialize the agreements and the work with other institutions.



PICTURE 18 JUAN PABLO DÍAZ GRANADOS, VICE MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN COLOMBIA

When interviewed during the ceremony, former minister of Rural Development, Juan Pablo Díaz Granados, said that there is an agreement between the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agency for Reincorporation, and Fundapanaca to finance educational projects worth

5 billion pesos (1,37 million Euros). They also work with substitution of illicit crops, supporting training initiatives that provide technical assistance to families that voluntarily benefit from the program. This work is being done throughout the territory but especially in the areas of influence of the territorial spaces of reinstatement, where projects for more than 15 billion pesos (4,2 million euros) are being co-financed.

The Colombian reintegration agency (ACR/ARN) has a permanent monitoring plan and systematic support for the productive projects that arise. The aim of this is not only to benefit technicians, but it also accompanies the proposals presented by former combatants trained in the programs of this type, literacy processes and technical training that, in agreement with SENA (The national training service), have been developed in the territorial spaces with more than 3,400 ex-combatants.