

WAYUU DIGITAL IDENTITY A PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION AND TERRITORIALIZATION



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Woumainpa'a, Wajiira

Photo: Interview with Professor Juan Valdeblanquez in the Koolerama'ana community

Wayuu Digital Identity A Process of Negotiation and Territorialization



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This report is based on the experience and support of Wayuu activists, educators, and leaders in the Colombian-Venezuelan Guajira.

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1. Abstract

Indigenous communities are characterized by their resilience and their constant adaptability to a changing and evolving world. Many minority communities are immersed in an inter-cultural process that allows them to negotiate and become familiarized with new horizons and knowledge. This report shows an inter-cultural process where two different worldviews come into play, with their own ways of inhabiting the digital space. On the one hand, the Wayuu culture and its use of the internet and, on the other hand, the dominant society with tools that expand due to globalization. The Wayuu community has a long history of dialog and spoken word as a mechanism to address challenges and take opportunities.

In the present world, data has become an asset, driven by an increasing access to services like communications and digital information. Data and information have gained a new meaning for both platforms and people. We rely on data to take a stance in the world. We use data to validate our existence in the digital space and to interact with people all over the world.

This paper has confirmed the power of data and information to close gaps and promote economic and socio-cultural development in populations around the world. However, the sophistication of the internet and new technologies has widened the gap between marginalized and privileged people. In this case, the Wayuu community has experienced a slow growth as well as a slow process of media and digital literacy, which in the long term creates information gaps and lack of skills in comparison to those who are better connected. In addition, this gap can also be seen in the vulnerability of the Wayuu community to cybercrime, phishing and identity theft.

Moreover, participants have highlighted the prevalence of a discourse of control and governance over the intellectual property of data and information produced by the communities. In this case, participants are aware that the engagement of all members ensures the development of content that represents the whole community, and such engagement implies managing and validating said data.

Keywords: Wayuu, territory, internet, interculturality, knowledge, orality, Wayuunaiki.

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2. Introduction

The Wayuu people have become a local reference to understand the process of appropriation and negotiation involving cultural elements among different ethnic groups. In their cultural memory, they keep historical milestones and events that have shaped the way they understand the world and interact with others. These processes were necessary for their survival in space and time.

At present, the Wayuu community accounts for 11% of the population in the state of Zulia in Venezuela and 45% of the population in the Department of the Colombian Guajira.¹ This community has historically inhabited the Guajira peninsula on both the Venezuelan and Colombian sides. The Wayuu historiography is characterized by several struggles and rebellions in colonial times to keep control over and autonomy of their territories. This was a challenging and turbulent time for indigenous populations in the Americas.²

Such rebellions and struggle for land highlight that the Wayuu community has had to defend itself and use its cleverness to keep its cultural elements. It has also learned how to negotiate and use new tools, which would give a new significance to its practices and values. Since then, the ability to negotiate and debate has been the trademark of the Wayuu population, even in modern times, with the expansion of the digital era.

As we know, humanity has experienced major changes since its multiple revolutions and innovations. The industrial revolution of the second half of the 18th century has been the most prominent one. This process was supported by the resources obtained from different regions of the world, accumulated by the European empires of the time. According to López (2012), the resources obtained from European colonies across various continents helped develop industrialized countries.

The 21st century saw the emergence of the digital age, data management, artificial intelligence and information technologies, as well as the development of an increasingly automated society, with at least some everyday life processes now being automated and digitalized. Some processes are exclusively managed from servers and digital spaces, such as banking operations, applications, communications, and so on.

¹ DANE data. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/grupos-etnicos/presentacion-grupos-etnicos-2019.pdf>

² The 1769 Guajira rebellion. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.banrepcultural.org/biblioteca-virtual/credencial-historia/numero-6/la-rebelion-guajira-de-1769>

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When it comes to digitality and new technologies, we automatically think of sophisticated devices and a vast knowledge of all things digital. However, what happens with periphery populations who are not at the center of political and territorial power? We are used to believing that digital revolution is the same across all populations in the world, but this report initiates a discussion and raises regional awareness about the questions we constantly ask.

This report gathers comments and viewpoints from Wayuu leaders, who have been taking action from their villages and personal spaces to promote their knowledge for positive interculturality, which is the process of understanding and respecting the various cultures that coexist in one single territorial space (Albó 2002, in Alarcón, Fernández & Leal, 2019)³.

This research project has been completed thanks to the support and interest of different social players, with whom we were in touch through several communication channels, and digitality and the use of new technological tools in the Wayuu communities always came to the forefront. Thus, this report helps describe and convey part of the experience that local communities have been having in relation to digitality in the Wayuu community.

³ Article by Boletín Antropológico. Vol. 38 July - December 2020. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/712/71266664009/html/>

3. Methodology and Data

This report is a descriptive case study. A qualitative method —understood as the detailed study of a particular situation— has been used (Barzelay & Cortazar, 2004). This involves a complete study of the particularities of a situation (Stake, 1999). Therefore, primary and secondary data sources were used, and different tools were used for the collection of data, such as semi-structured interviews, participant observation, field notes and audio-visual documentation.

Moreover, the sample of key actors was selected using a logical criterion, giving more prominence to the participants' experiences and the context in which they lead their everyday lives. In addition, seven people were interviewed (four women and three men), who are locals from different regions of the Colombian-Venezuelan Guajira. Two of them come from the Venezuelan Guajira and the remaining five belong to the Colombian Guajira. Here are the communities and locations visited for the purposes of this project: Paraguaipoa and Guarero in Venezuela. Piyushipana, Koolerama'ana, Riohacha and Uribia in Colombia.



Map 1. Communities visited for the purposes of this project. (2023).
(Openstreetmap with adjustments)⁴.

The objective of this research is to “describe and reflect upon the use and implications

⁴ Openstreetmap. Accessed in November 2023 at:
<https://www.openstreetmap.org/#map=10/11.6226/-72.2585>

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of digital media in the Wayuu community, considering the experiences of activists and educators in the Colombian-Venezuelan border.” This research intends to dive into the experiences and the shaping of the Wayuu identity in the digital space, which will help us discuss internet governance and autonomy of indigenous data.

Here are some questions that guided this process and came up during some discussions and meetings prior to this project:

N.º 1. How do the Wayuu people participate in the digital space?

N.º 2. How does digitality impact the Wayuu everyday life?

N.º 3. What are the advantages and disadvantages perceived by the Wayuu when it comes to digitality?

Each of these raised additional questions, which were used to develop a list of related topics that took into account the ethnographic aspect in their formulation.⁵

The time frame for this research, including its design and drafting, was three months: from July 1 to November 26, 2023. During that time, ethnographic in-person visits took place in the above-mentioned communities. The ethical aspect of this research was also considered, as informed consent was used during the visits, as well as cultural reciprocity elements between local actors and this researcher.

Here is a list of key actors who participated in this process, arranged in the chronological order of our visits:

- **Norelys Bruges** (Colombia): Student and digital entrepreneur at the Kashiwa project. Native of the Ruaanama’ana community. Indigenous activist. The interview was administered on October 12, 2023 in Riohacha.
- **Juan Freddy Valdeblanquez** (Colombia): Researcher and educator at the Masülein institution. Editor of Wikimedia projects. The interview was administered on October 26, 2023 in Koolerama’ana.
- **Humberto Ramírez** (Colombia): Cultural expert, Wayuunaiki teacher, bilingual translator. Editor of Wikimedia projects. The interview was administered on October 26, 2023 in Piyushipana.
- **Nelbis Ipuana** (Venezuela): Deputy Director at the Fe y Alegría Paraguaipoa school, elementary school teacher. Editor of Wikimedia projects. The interview was administered on October 28, 2023 in Paraguaipoa.

⁵ Eighteen core questions were used, which varied according to the interviewees’ knowledge on the topics.

- **Ruberlys González** (Venezuela): Traditional culture expert, bilingual translator and Wayuunaiki teacher. Editor of Wikimedia projects. The interview was administered on October 28, 2023 in Guarero.
- **Luz Mery Epinayuu** (Colombia): Local Administrative Manager of the Weinüin Walapüin project with the support of Colnodo in Guajira. Local leader. The interview was administered on October 31, 2023 in Uribia.⁶
- **Ángel Castillo** (Colombia): Local Technical Manager of the Weinüin Walapüin community network with the support of Colnodo in Guajira. Local leader. The interview was administered on October 31, 2023 in Uribia.

Participants are Wayuunaiki speakers and are fully aware of the local context. During this research, certain particularities were noticed, which provide a different approach to the addressed topics. Such particularities included: Participants were 25-55 years old. There were differences of opinion between contexts, i.e., Venezuela vs. Colombia. The identification with the cultural identity and ways of life in rural and urban settings. Finally, the level of exposure to digitality and current technological tools.

⁶ This project was a result of a partnership between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Colombia, Fundación Hermanos Sin Condiciones (FHSC) and Colnodo. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://redescomunitarias.co/es/weinuin-walapuin>

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Origins of Inherited Inequality

Since colonial times, after the American conquest and the formation of Nation-States, subjugated countries (the newly independent ones) became part of the global economy as raw material exporters. This role was assigned to them by imperial countries who fought over the economic and material control of the world. According to Lenin (1969), cited by López (2012: 24), imperial countries fought over the territorial power and control of colonized countries, which classified developed countries under an extractivist economic model, whose purpose was to obtain raw materials for their own economic development.

López (2012) states that this classification of economic processes in Latin America helped imperial economies to develop and improve their technology, while colonies were left behind as a result of unequal relations. Asymmetrical relationships had a stronger impact on indigenous economies, as they were disrupted and absorbed by the new system imposed in the region.

Latin American countries are a result of a geopolitical game that hinders the development of periphery countries. Indigenous people are immersed in that game and are usually unaware of it. The same dynamics has permeated the development model of ethnic groups who were not recognized as capable of harnessing their resources at the time.

Later, Nation-States took control over such resources, leaving indigenous groups once again outside of globalized progress and denying them the autonomy of their territories. Instead, States devoted themselves to cultural assimilation and homogenization practices within ethnic groups in order to erase all differences. However, ethnic groups still prevail and survive in spite of the dynamics of cultural control⁷ and interethnic relations.

⁷ Bonfil Batalla defines it as a system where decisions are made about cultural elements. (The theory of cultural control in the study of ethnic processes.) Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/316/31641209.pdf>

As mentioned before, the current situation of ethnic groups⁸ in the region is preceded by a historical process of inequality that can now be seen in indigenous communities. In particular, the Wayuu people are aware of the violence inflicted by the dominant system, which has divided their territory into two and has confined them to remote areas in the peninsula. This is the current state of the Wayuu people, who inhabit a region far away from power hubs, in extraordinary survival conditions.

Nonetheless, every community has had its own experience of the colonial period, with different intercultural dynamics. Some communities started using utensils brought by colonizers and others decided to move to more remote areas in order to avoid contact or slavery, which was beginning to gain ground as a driving force in the colonial economy.

4.2 Appropriation of Tools

During the conquest period, the Wayuu started using strategies and elements brought by the Europeans. This allowed them to learn how to use new resources and redefine them under their own terms. Additionally, during the emergence of Nation-States, there was full awareness of who the Wayuu were, and their defense and autonomy mechanisms were known, according to Paz Reverol's (2000)⁹ citation of the Venezuelan Ministry of Interior and Justice in its 1840 minutes. The minutes state:

“These indigenous people have kept their independence and maintained their relations with foreigners by using the coast and interior towns in Nueva Granada and Venezuela; unlike other indigenous communities, they have resources others do not and they require the use of various rulings to be able to integrate them in the communities and consider them as goods brought by the society.” (Minutes of the Ministry of Interior and Justice, 1840:6-7 cited by Paz, Reverol, 2000:6).

Gustaf Bolinder (1957) wrote that the Wayuu had taken advantage of the fight among the Spanish and other Europeans—who were then fighting over the control of commerce and the administration of colonies—and had started conducting clandestine trade practices with the English, who would then become their main providers of guns, horses and even slaves. Meanwhile, the Wayuu traded salt, pearls and wood, among other things.

⁸ Bonfil Batalla describes ethnic groups as a group of people who are capable of reproducing biologically, have a common origin and consider themselves as “us” versus “them”.

⁹ Social Sciences journal from the University of Zulia. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://produccioncientificaluz.org/index.php/racs/article/view/25078/25690>

The new elements and tools in the community were immediately disseminated and over time they had an impact on the stratification of the group, i.e., the rich vs. the poor. Such elements became part of everyday life in the community and were named in the Wayuunaiki language by using loanwords and neologisms. On this, Gustaf Bolinder wrote:

“As we were riding through a parched and savage landscape we saw at a distance a number of mounted warriors divided into two groups, which were drawn up in semi-circles facing each other. We thought there must be some ceremony in progress and wanted to ride across. They were all magnificently got up and armed to the teeth with arrows, bows and guns. Our Indian guide stopped us.”

“Be careful!” “Be careful!” “That is a purchi.” (Indians on Horseback; 1957)¹⁰

In more recent times, specifically during the 1960s and the 1970s, indigenous movements pushed for reforms and legislation in line with the rights of indigenous peoples. These movements attempted to vindicate ethnic groups, but there was also an assimilation process driven by intercultural education, which taught indigenous children a statewide curriculum.

At present, indigenous communities use many elements that are external to their traditional ways, including schooling, language, clothing, trade and political structure. The use of these elements is a result of the need to be represented and have a voice within Nation-States, as well as a way to exercise their rights before government institutions and other agencies. This led to the proliferation of indigenous organizations across the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region.

4.3 Indigenous Rights

The recognition of indigenous rights by the states was a starting point for the emergence of several organizations in the region. This included the appropriation of a regulatory and organizational system for the benefit of ethnic groups, which also encouraged them to participate in public spaces and take positions of power. Some Wayuu leaders, both male and female, have participated in electoral races for public office and, in many cases, they have been elected as policymakers, mayors, councilors, and other government positions.

¹⁰ Book titled *Indians on Horseback*, published in 1957 in Great Britain, written by Gustaf Bolinder.

The foundations of the position taken by the Latin American governments is the international legal framework, with documents like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples¹¹ of September 13, 2007, and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (N.º 169) passed on June 27, 1989 in Geneva, Switzerland¹².

This brings us to the present day and the Wayuu community, which now inhabits the digital space. This implies a new way of living and negotiating for ethnic groups, who now have to use technological tools. The digital space is supplementing and replacing the way in which we access information, considering that previously knowledge was accessed through the print media and books. Print books and publications have been shaped by the narrative of the privileged at the time, who exposed their ideas and culture with the dissemination of their achievements through texts, including theories, poetry, stories, religions and everything that can be adapted to the written word.

4.4 The Internet as a Human Right

Before describing the process of ICT appropriation by the Wayuu, we need to point out that internet access is currently a human right, as established on July 4, 2018 by the United Nations (UN)¹³, under a resolution indicating that internet use must be considered an important right and be guaranteed for all individuals. In the beginning, however, the internet was exclusively used by academics and governments, particularly by the military in developed countries. It was in the United States, a country with an advanced technological development, that the communication between networks started and the internet would later emerge.

The internet then started to expand in the 1980s, after the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) was created. ICANN would then be in charge of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority (IANA), which addressed topics such as protocol management and other intrinsic components of internet development. Afterward, Latin America obtained its own institution, the Latin American and Caribbean Internet Addresses Registry (LACNIC), created in 2002,

¹¹ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007). Accessed in November 2023 at: https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_es.pdf

¹² ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169). Accessed in November 2023 at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/documents/publication/wcms_345065.pdf

¹³ Internet access is a human right according to the UN. Accessed in November 2023 at: https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/S/HRC/d_res_dec/A_HRC_38_L10.pdf

which is in charge of managing and assigning internet-related resources¹⁴.

In the LAC region, the internet was disseminated through telecommunications and the development of computer and communication companies, such as radio, TV, and telephone services, among others. In some countries, the process was fast, while others are still working to close the gaps.

Some indigenous efforts use the internet, such as the indigenous languages activist movement, a regional board of directors where several processes take place in relation to the use and development of native identities on platforms, with the help of the internet. This board also focuses on providing training and promoting innovation from a local perspective¹⁵.

4.5 The Wayuu and the Internet

In this section, we analyze some quotes from participants that refer to the Wayuu presence on the internet. This includes some experiences related to internet use by key actors in this research.

The Wayuu community has prevailed over time thanks to its willingness to overcome barriers and adapt tools for its own benefit. According to Albo (2002), this process is not new, as humanity has been structured on the vestiges of big civilizations prior to current societies. This means that, in the modern age, we can find utensils and contributions from cultures that do not exist anymore, including knowledge, loanwords, tools, ideas and even food.

Currently, the Wayuu community is participating in several initiatives related to the internet and new platforms, including school and university projects, digital startups, digital memory projects, systematization processes, creation of web pages and blogs, and use of social networks. Some experiences regarding cultural and environmental awareness use the internet for promotion purposes. In this sense, an interviewee noted that:

“Well, personally, I manage to use Facebook” (Bruges, N. 2023).

¹⁴ LACNIC is one of all five existing RIRs in the world. Each of them is dedicated to its own region. Accessed in November 2023 at:

<https://www.lacnic.net/innovaportal/file/3733/1/el-desarrollo-de-la-comunidad-de-lacnic.pdf>

¹⁵ A process led by young people from different LAC regions. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://rising.globalvoices.org/lenguas/acerca-de/>



Photo: Norelys Bruges. Interview conducted in Riohacha. (2023)

All seven interviewees said they use the internet to go on social networks, in part with the purpose of keeping up with the news and world events. Social networks, mainly Facebook, are used to keep in touch with their families and colleagues. In this sense, Nelbis Ipuana said that:

“Nowadays, we use it to communicate with others. This has benefited us Wayuu, now that our families have moved to other countries” (Ipuana, N. 2023).

The need to communicate has also increased within the Wayuu community, as members of the population have increasingly started to migrate, while historically they had traveled to cities or agricultural areas to work for a limited time to then come back to their home communities. Similarly, the Venezuelan Wayuu have started a migration process by moving to other countries in the region. This process was exacerbated due to the ongoing socio-economic crisis in the country.

In any case, the Wayuu located in other countries communicate with their families through technology, such as video calls or Facebook messenger chat, the latter of which is the most commonly used in the community for both domestic and long-distance communications. WhatsApp voice notes are also highly used by the Wayuu. WhatsApp and Facebook are the most widely used platforms in Guajira, as they are not heavy to install on a mobile phone, they have a user-friendly design and they serve as global communication channels.

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The expanded use of social networks and apps for communication not only comprises the Wayuu community. At the regional level, apps like WhatsApp and Facebook are widely used across LAC. The June report of the 2020 study on mobile consumption in Colombia already showed these apps as the most frequently used in Latin America, mainly due to the affordability of mobile phones, which are less expensive than computers¹⁶.

Smartphones have become an important part of many people's everyday life around the world, and they are the main device used by the Wayuu to access the internet. Their widespread use in community life has expanded to the personal, social and work spheres.

Internet use through mobile phones makes no distinction between brands, capacity or sophistication, as the experience of digitality is achieved merely by being able to access a network. In this case, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many Wayuu families were forced to purchase mobile phones that supported WhatsApp, Facebook and PDF readers in order to receive updates and homework assignments from their children's teachers.

However, internet access was not always like it is today. As mentioned, the internet emerged as a tool for military and scientific agencies, then for academics and finally, trade and services. In this case, Nelbis Ipuana said that:

"I remember I started using the internet because I needed to search for some authors for my undergraduate paper. Back then, the internet was not available for everyone so I needed to use the internet at work in that moment" (Ipuana, N. 2023).

¹⁶ 2020 Report on mobile consumption in Colombia. Accessed in November 2023 at: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/co/Documents/technology-media-telecommunications/Brochure_ConsumoMovil_CO_LATAM_2020.pdf



Photo: Nelbis Ipuana. Interview conducted at Fe y Alegría Paraguaipoa. (2023)

Before the smartphone boom, people used to access the internet at cybercafés or institutions with network access through desktop computers. As such, access was very limited, as telcos were only just emerging. Back then, the Wayuu used educational institutions, and the intercultural process was already underway, which allowed the Wayuu at school to access the internet at those facilities. In this regard, Juan Valdeblanquez expressed that:

“We didn’t even have access; it was very limited. The internet was only for educational processes and no one had access to use, handle or become familiar with the device. It was only for educational purposes that we ever got an explanation on how to use it” (Valdeblanquez, J. 2023).

During this research, we contacted people with individual and collective initiatives related to internet use or digital media. Their insights will be used to depict the appropriation process of tools that had been previously unknown to the Wayuu’s material culture¹⁷. In this sense, Ruberlys González mentioned that:

“Today, some Wayuu write on the internet. They have woken up and mustered the courage to do it. They thought that it’d be better for us to write about our own culture, as we are the ones who know and live in it¹⁸”

¹⁷ Material culture encompasses inventions and tools developed by ethnic groups. Accessed in November 2023 at: [https://w.wiki/7\\$Yf](https://w.wiki/7$Yf)

¹⁸ Translated into Spanish by the author.

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(González, R. 2023¹⁹)

Several interviewees are members of a group called Wikimedistas Wayuu²⁰, which includes educators, activists, students and people who have great knowledge about everyday life in the community. Four interviewees are members of this group, where they develop audio, video and text content to support the Wikipheetia, Wikipütchimaajatü and Wikimedia Commons²¹ projects.



Photo: Editing workshops attended by Wayuu educators and leaders. (2022)²²

In addition, recent entrepreneurial initiatives have used the internet as a window and a means to sell products made by Wayuu craftswomen, including backpacks, hats, blankets and other home-made products. In this particular case, the internet serves as a means to meet financial needs and sell products made at shelters and *rancherías*. In this sense, Norelys Bruges added that:

“Companies are now on the internet. They use it to conduct their business and sell their products” (Bruges, N. 2023).

¹⁹ Concluding thoughts provided by research participants. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F52AnPwzHk>

²⁰ Information site about the Wikimedistas Wayuu. Accessed in November 2023 at: https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/WikiMedistas_Way%C3%BAu

²¹ Wikipheetia süka wayuunaiki is an official project supported by the Wikimedistas Wayuu. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://diff.wikimedia.org/es/2023/05/31/wikipheetia-suka-wayuunaiki-un-repositorio-del-conocimiento-wayuu/>

²² Image obtained from the Wikimedistas Wayuu category. Accessed in November 2023 at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikimedistas_Wayuu

Norelys Bruges is part of the Kashiwa project, which focuses on vindicating the cultural and economic value of Wayuu backpacks. It takes a lot of effort and time to make them, which is often overlooked by the market and businesses when commercializing them²³. This is an example of how the community uses the internet for vindication purposes and the development of its economic autonomy.

This report also includes the experiences of four teachers, two from Venezuela and two from Colombia. From their point of view, the internet has served and should serve to optimize students' and new generations' learning processes. They see the internet as a great tool for consultation and fact-checking, which in the case of the Wayuu also serves to depict and show the cultural world to new generations. Juan Valdeblanquez added:

“I know that somewhere along the line someone will have access to that information, and when they look for it, they should find the correct information” (Valdeblanquez, J. 2023²⁴).



Photo: Juan Valdeblanquez, interview conducted in Koolerama'ana, a rural area in Maicao. (2023)

According to Valdeblanquez (2023)²⁵, the information available on the internet works as a resource that benefits not only teachers but also students, as they will have information available that is similar to what they already know, but first students

²³ Documentary on the Kashiwa project. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kb1hL0xv5AI>

²⁴ Concluding thoughts provided by research participants. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F52AnPwzHk>

²⁵ Classroom teacher and Koolerama'ana community researcher.

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and the rest of the community must learn to search for it and use the internet the way it is meant to. On this topic, he said:

“Today there are many universities and students who search for this information, but with the purpose of improving the knowledge they already have” (Valdeblanquez, J. 2023).

This was also true to the mind of Humberto Ramírez, who said that the internet is important for the development of the Wayuu community in relation to information use, but that information should be correct, as this tool can help with learning processes and the expansion of local knowledge. He stated:

“When appropriately used, I think this could be a useful tool for the Wayuu. The community needs to use this tool, as we are living in a technological era, in times of advanced information” (Ramírez, H. 2023²⁶).

Ramírez believes that it is necessary to keep pace with the globalized world, as information evolves and knowledge is constantly being updated with new data. In this case, the interviewee said that Wayuu knowledge should be systematized and put on the internet in order to share their knowledge and disclose the communal collective experience, in particular for the benefit of new generations, which are immersed in an increasingly technological and digital world.



Photo: Humberto Ramírez, cultural expert of the Piyushipana community.
Interview conducted in the rural area of Maicao. (2023)

²⁶ Concluding thoughts provided by research participants. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F52AnPwzHk>

The appropriation of tools such as the internet varies based on a person's age, location, socio-economic class and basic needs. During this research, it became apparent that communication needs are experienced by people of all ages. Internet access varies depending on the area. Peripheral areas of villages and towns are still places with better mobile phone connectivity. Rural areas are still behind and connectivity levels are low, so people have little exposure to content.

It was also seen that people in the academic sector tend to search for ways to connect, as connectivity is needed for their work. Additionally, we saw an initiative for the collective appropriation of the internet. In this case, the Weinüin Walapüin project in the 3 de abril community in Uribia is a collaborative effort to use the internet for the benefit of the whole population.

According to local managers, Weinüin Walapüin²⁷ promotes the support and inclusion of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. It also intends to bring dignity to the Wayuu who have come back to or migrated and settled in the 3 de abril area of Uribia. As Ángel Castillo said, the community network:

“...is mostly used by young community members to complete their homework assignments and by older people who use it to communicate. I remember this was hard to do before. We had to leave our community and come here to connect to the internet” (Castillo, A. 2023).



Photo: Luzmery Epinayuu, manager of Weinüin Walapüin, Uribia (2023).

²⁷ A project supported by UNHCR Colombia, Fundación Hermanos sin Condiciones and the COLNODO Association.

Wayuu Digital Identity. A Process of Negotiation and Territorialization

As we have seen in this section, the Wayuu community is currently inhabiting the digital space and using the internet thanks to several initiatives, with external support. These initiatives engage local actors through workshops, talks and meetings for the preparation and development of content. These experiences show that Wayuu participation follows two logics. On the one hand, activist participation through structured projects supported by local, national and international organizations. On the other hand, the everyday use of the internet through smartphones, which is characterized by the need for communication and entertainment.

In general, all projects are governed by an ethnic approach, or at least try to set themselves apart from the regular internet, as participants agreed that the Wayuu population requires several considerations, including linguistic, social, economic and academic factors. The community is, nonetheless, aware that they should learn how to use digital media and the internet, considering that older generations have already gone through a process of appropriation of external cultural elements.

So far, identity and culture have had a strong influence on the conducted projects and everyday internet use, as some practices have prevailed, i.e., the use of Wayuunaiki during phone calls and text messages. The modesty in the use of Wayuu images and the fear of using what is new have also prevailed. Additionally, participants have also expressed some concerns, which will be addressed in later sections.

4.6 Wayuu Epistemology in the Digital Space

As mentioned in the previous section, several projects are promoting Wayuu participation on the internet. In turn, their participation comes with an increase in the amount of information available about them in the digital space, which marks the beginning of the development of epistemologies that differ from the dominant one. Knowledge is power, which was apparent during colonial domination in Latin America, when imperial forces who settled here tried to hide all differences, as controlling information is an important element in the process of cultural assimilation.

Throughout contemporary history, there have been significant examples of how controlling information can hide or highlight the cultural characteristics of a community. A noteworthy example is the expansion of North American culture. Communication media, including TV, social networks, platforms, and shows, have influenced how the world thinks development and progress look like. The same happened with Europe and it is now happening with some Asian countries.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2011)²⁸ argues that discussing epistemologies in Latin America implies understanding that there is knowledge that needs to emerge from its own valid processes of construction of meaning, which are of scientific and non-scientific nature. This means that new epistemologies seek to break down the barriers imposed by academia and other institutions, which invalidated their development processes, overlooking their potential contribution to tackling and understanding current phenomena.

Plurality on the internet is a process achieved through the participation of different groups of people. Representing such plurality involves discussing epistemological aspects related to knowledge and insights within a certain social group. Colonialism could not wipe out multiculturalism, which is now demanding space for participation.

In the particular case of the Wayuu community, content is being compiled and it is intended to develop an identity on the internet. The Wayuu community now needs to look up certain cultural aspects in the digital space, especially with the increasing schooling process and the participation of new generations in the educational, scientific and cultural field.

The school curriculum and the guidelines of institutions —like Ministries and Departments of Education— have had an influence on the education sector regarding the use of technology and the internet in local educational strategies. The community itself has asked to use new technologies at school. They consider that the world has made progress and teenagers and children need to master ICTs, as accessing the labor market and navigating everyday life require more skills due to the increasing competition and the constant sophistication of ICTs.

However, Wayuu education is an innate quality of the community. The elderly, who do not want their children and grandchildren to be at school and away from their community, claim that traditionally educated Wayuu children tend to be embarrassed by their own culture and become distant from their families. Conversely, the Wayuu living in urban areas try to blend into the dominant culture and encourage their children to value Spanish more than their native tongue.

²⁸ *Las epistemologías del sur*, considering there are several ways to understand and exist in the world. Accessed in November 2023 at: https://www.boaventuradesousasantos.pt/media/INTRODUCCION_BSS.pdf

The projects mentioned before aim at attacking and stopping the assimilation process and the loss of the Wayuunaiki language due to ICT use in dominant languages. They also aim at populating the internet with Wayuu content made by the community. In this regard, Humberto Ramírez pointed out that:

“I think information is necessary. I think all people, not only the Wayuu but also non-Wayuu people, want to know about the community, its history, its origins. Lots of people do. They want to know about our practices and traditions” (Ramírez, H. 2023).

During this research, interviewees agreed that inhabiting the internet means ensuring that there is content for future generations. They acknowledge its long-term quality and they think access will be better in the future, as there are currently some accessibility challenges as well as language and generational barriers, which will be addressed in later sections.

4.7 Data and Information Management

Participating educators and activists were asked about who should be able to manage information about the Wayuu community on the internet and how data should be documented. Answering this, Humberto Ramírez said:

“The Wayuu have their history and their worldview. This should be included in the information. The Wayuu worldview needs to be told in writing, because most of it has been transmitted orally” (Ramírez, H. 2023).

Participants acknowledged the oral nature of their language. However, they mentioned some progress is being made in the standardization of Wayuunaiki in writing. As an example, they talked about ALIV²⁹ (alphabet for indigenous languages in Venezuela) as the proposed and widespread alphabet used on both sides of the Wayuu territory. This alphabet was proposed by the Mosonyi brothers and the national institute of indigenous languages of Venezuela. They also mentioned the Linguistic Summer Institute³⁰, an alphabet used by some Wayuu translators and writers, especially when it comes to the Bible and other religious documents.

²⁹ ALIV. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/347/34701710.pdf>

³⁰ AILV and its work in Colombia. Accessed in November 2023 at: https://www.sil.org/system/files/reapdata/11/30/38/113038048588116682162614376228676160596/IL_V_y_su_labor_en_Colombia.pdf

For the Wayuu, it is important that information be well-founded and based on the opinions and insights of the elderly, who are considered the keepers of cultural practices. Participants think it is important to establish a consultation and data validation process to avoid portraying incorrect or misleading information or creating false expectations for the Wayuu and non-Wayuu people. Juan Valdeblanquez expressed the following on the compilation of information:

“It needs to be done in a collective way so that we can all contribute with ideas. If everyone does so, we can reach a conclusion and that creates information. Plus, all of it needs to be based on actual facts” (Valdeblanquez, J. 2023).



Photo: Participation of elder members is fundamental to an appropriate validation process. From left to right: Joander González, María de los Santos Ipuana, Juan Valdeblanquez and Leonardi Fernández. (2023).

Importantly, interviewees agreed on the use of informed consent and the socialization of the achievements and objectives of the projects that intend to be executed in their territories. They also argued that results must be shared with the population or, at least, with the community where they were executed. Similarly, they

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argued that the community should be the protagonist in the process, from its design to its completion, in order to truly empower the population. With regard to the process of writing and documenting the Wayuu culture, Ruberlys González said:

“For all of it to make sense and be useful, the Wayuu must be the ones to write it. They must choose what to write in consultation with the elderly, our grandparents, and our mothers, so that it is consistent with what we know. This way, children, teens and ourselves can access this information and be reminded of our culture when using the internet”³¹
(González, R. 2023³²)



Photo: Ruberlys González (maache'e), cultural expert and Wayuunaiki teacher. Interview conducted in Guarero (2023)

Similarly, four of the participants expressed there are aspects of the Wayuu cultural life that should not be put on the internet, as they are sacred and confidential, and only the Wayuu should know about them. Sacred elements involve the group's spiritual beliefs and practices, which are meant to be known and conducted by the people selected for such roles. In this sense, Ruberlys González said that:

“The Wayuu culture has elements that are only meant to be

³¹ Translated by the author

³² Concluding thoughts provided by research participants. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3F52AnPwzHk>

*known by the internal community, our grandmothers and mothers. They are reserved. They should not be exposed to others. Only we know about their usefulness. But there are some things that should be known by the Wayuu and the non-Wayuu, too*³³ (González, R. 2023)

As described in this section, the Wayuu community still has a strong sense of belonging thanks to the elements added to its culture and it intends to manage data in a collective manner, with validation processes that the Wayuu population must be familiar with. They also state that there are some cultural practices that must be reserved for the intangible life of the community. In any case, the Wayuu community, especially the schooled and professional sector of it, intends to inhabit the internet in communion with the monolingual elderly. Ruberlys González argues:

“We need to get together and develop workshops and give talks to encourage the systematization of the Wayuu knowledge, so that we are not left behind and hear from other people that we know nothing, that we don’t know how to use the internet. We need to avoid being made fun of.

We the Wayuu are a very knowledgeable people. We speak two languages. Wayuunaiki is our native language and we speak Spanish as a second language” (González, R. 2023)

Four of the interviewees, especially the older participants, said that their data should be in Wayuunaiki. They argue that:

- The Wayuunaiki should be recognized as their official and native language.
- The native language must be valued so that new generations do the same.
- The Wayuunaiki should transcend and adapt to new tools.
- The Wayuunaiki needs to be more dynamic and stronger in all settings.

However, many people also said that Wayuu information uploaded to the internet should be in Spanish so that other people can read it. This way, the Wayuu knowledge can be disseminated to other non-Wayuunaiki speaking populations. Similarly, according to two other interviewees, using other languages to transmit Wayuu information raises awareness of the Wayuu cultural particularities and allows people outside the community to understand their cultural exchanges.

³³ Translated into Spanish by the author

4.8 The Wayuu and Internet Governance

Internet governance is the process of developing tools “of shared principles, norms, rules, decision-making procedures, and activities that shape the evolution and use of the Internet”, according to UNESCO³⁴. In this sense, we can talk about Wayuu internet governance. As an indigenous community, it is important to understand the several principles, practices and cultural elements that differ from the ones in national societies regarding internet use.

Certainly, as evidenced so far, all interviewees have talked about autonomy and control over their data, which in this case is related to internet governance. In this sense, we need to highlight that their discourse is not empty or isolated, but derives from a set of experiences people have had as a community.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples³⁵ referred, at the beginning, to a principle of self-determination of ethnic groups in the management of their resources and cultural elements. Nonetheless, with the emergence of the digital era and a more accessible internet, there was a new challenge for indigenous peoples: managing the quality and quantity of the data about their communities available on platforms. The internet boom also enabled the development of similar movements for data liberation and open science, which in a way interferes with the way indigenous groups think about data.

According to Dr. Oscar L. Figueroa Rodríguez (2021)³⁶, indigenous data can be divided into three categories: data about the territory and knowledge about the surrounding environment, personal and identification data, and general data as an autonomous people or community. Rodríguez (2021) argues such data has an impact on the present and the future of indigenous groups, given that information is sensitive and communities do not often have legal control over it. This includes designs, names, territories, insights and medicinal knowledge.

Indigenous sovereignty over the control of their data appears as an inherent need for the construction of information, which will ultimately have an impact on the

³⁴ Internet governance according to UNESCO. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.unesco.org/es/internet-governance>

³⁵ UN Declaration. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/512/10/PDF/N0651210.pdf?OpenElement>

³⁶ WEBINAR: Gobernanza de datos indígenas: Principios FAIR y CARE (CREA). Accessed in November 2023 at: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/news/files/webinar_-_oscar_l._figueroa_rodriguez_0.pdf

population. In this case, some examples include demographic statistics, government data, ethnographic research, books, audio-visual material, historical data kept in libraries and museums, among others. In this sense, following the recommendations provided by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, indigenous populations have the right to oversee, participate in, use and comment on the construction and use of data about their cultures, including territory information, research, languages, practices and traditions and other elements that belong to the community.

Indigenous groups have witnessed how their data was hidden by the official historiography of Nation-States. Similarly, academia has used data to understand indigenous particularities so as to develop cultural assimilation strategies in favor of national identities. Additionally, religion has used cultural information to create syncretism for the indoctrination of indigenous groups.

The Wayuu community has recently experienced a religious syncretism process, whereby Wayuunaiki is used to create audio-visual content to indoctrinate people and reach monolingual populations. Wayuu characters have also been used to portray Christian texts. Some data has been used to persuade Wayuu leaders to participate in projects executed in their territories. Similarly, some communities, particularly the elderly, have complained about the lack of commitment of some social intervention initiatives that do not comply with the Wayuu reciprocity principle.

Past, present and future projects in the Wayuu territory aim at engaging the community, as well as the Wayuu discourse about participation in digital projects, which focus on internet use for the benefit of the community. We can see a sense of belonging and a need to have a knowledge repository as a way to immortalize the wisdom of the elderly.

In addition, there is a need for more control (governance) over the Wayuu data, including data collection, intellectual rights and information use. This need has increased with the schooling process and the pressure of globalization on the population, where some elements are starting to disappear, including their language and fundamental practices. Some elder Wayuu are also concerned about the loss of their values and principles. In this case, some argued that the internet has helped devalue the importance of cultural elements and has placed a foreign cultural model at the center (fashion, language, stereotypes, among others).

According to Juan Valdeblanquez (2023), the construction of data and information should be based on facts, as this also contributes to stopping the process of loss experienced by the community with the emergence of information that is foreign to the Wayuu culture. Researchers must have a commitment to the community, and so must the projects executed in their territory. In this sense, Valdeblanquez (2023) mentioned the research conducted by Dr. Weildler Guerra Curvelo, which was necessary for the creation of Junta Mayor de Palabrer³⁷ (Board of Leaders) and the ensuing recognition of the pütchipü'üi (mediator) as intangible heritage of humanity³⁸.

When it comes to indigenous data governance, some initiatives seek to promote ethnic rights related to information, particularly informed consent. One of them is the CARE³⁹ (collective benefit, authority to control, responsibility and ethics) principles. This initiative focuses on reflecting upon and providing information about the existence of a conceptual and legal framework that protects the ethnic right to have control over their data.

The CARE⁴⁰ principles have provided support to indigenous initiatives so that they can inhabit the digital space and oversee and control the flow of information extracted by public and private organizations and NGOs. In the Wayuu case, these principles have been developed in a very empiric manner, as the community itself or at least the people participating in this research project argued that information must be produced by the Wayuu and the extracted data must have a purpose. However, this empiric progress does not exempt the Wayuu from being vulnerable when data is extracted by government bodies or private companies, given that, with conflicting interests regarding land, there are evident persuasion practices imposed on leaders to control or influence the decisions made by the community.

Importantly, the data produced by any community, including the Wayuu, can be used as a tool for their own development and decision-making processes in line with their historical circumstances. This control or internet governance system by ethnic groups, the Wayuu in this case, allows them to have a voice and control what

³⁷ The first Wayuu *palabrero* and mediator. Accessed in November 2023 at:

<https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra/la-paz-se-cuenta-no-2-weildler-guerra-relata-el-origen-mitico-del-pajaro-utta-primer-palabrero-y-mediador-wayuu-864003/>

³⁸ Intangible heritage of humanity. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://ich.unesco.org/es/RL/el-sistema-normativo-de-los-wayuus-aplicado-por-el-putchipu-ui-palabrero-00435>

³⁹ Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://www.cepal.org/es/notas/gobernanza-datos-indigenas-principios-fair-care>

⁴⁰ Concept by Wikipedia in Spanish. Accessed in November 2023 at: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principios_CREA

can and cannot be published. This aligns with the thoughts of Ruberlys González about respecting the internal and spiritual aspects of the community that cannot be treated as public. She expressed the following:

*“Publishing something sacred would have consequences on the aseyuu. The Wayuu have aseyuu, which means something sacred, like when our grandmothers tell us not to look at something because it is bad. That is related to spiritual concerns and we shouldn’t mess with that”*⁴¹ (González, R. 2023)

5. Benefits of Inhabiting the Internet

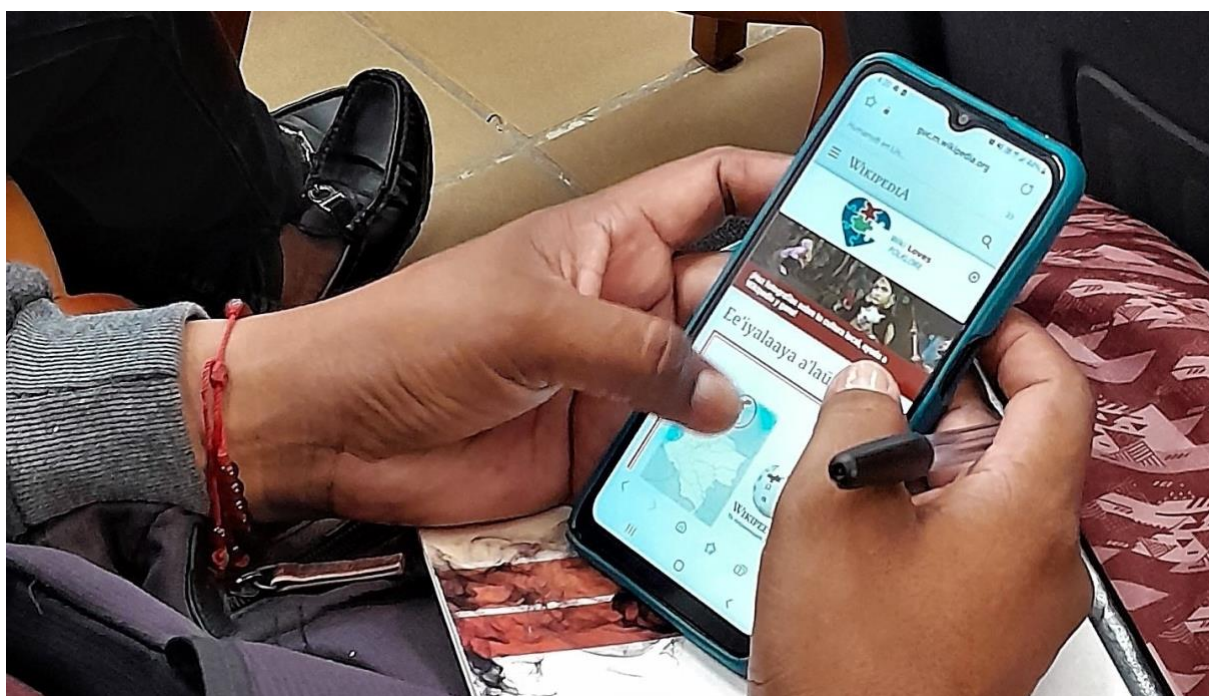


Photo: A smartphone being used at a systematization workshop. (Riohacha, 2022)⁴²

The COVID-19⁴³ pandemic highlighted that the appropriation process of ICTs and the internet is not seamless. The digital gap became apparent between urban and rural areas. The pandemic also underscored the lack of support for indigenous communities in the development of data governance processes. However, the health crisis encouraged the community and multiple institutions to address such gap.

⁴¹ Translated into Spanish by the author

⁴² Image available at Wikimedia Commons. Accessed in November 2023 at:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Wikimedistas_Wayuu

⁴³ Coronavirus. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19>

After the pandemic, Guajira received several digital projects, featuring ICT literacy and digital security literacy. This was positive support, and the Wayuu community needed to take advantage of it. The pandemic accelerated the ICT appropriation process. In the local context, this process was very slow, which has not changed that much yet.

However, the participants of this research anticipated multiple benefits related to the process of internet appropriation, such as data management autonomy, positive interculturality, a repository for local knowledge and a tool to strengthen learning processes. Emphasis was also put on new generations, taking into account that children and adolescents will have greater access to information in the future.

Entrepreneurial projects that use the internet are currently being developed. Schools, especially those in urban areas, are developing apps for tourism. The Wayuu, particularly those who have been schooled, are interested in mastering ICTs⁴⁴ to develop their capabilities and competitiveness in the market, which increasingly requires mastering computer tools, email, and all things related to a professional job position.

Participants were also interested in strengthening the use of the language in the digital space, as they are aware that the internet is a part of young people's everyday life and it will "certainly" be a part of the new generations' lives, so it could be a way to create reading strategies in collaboration with schools and educational institutions. According to Humberto Ramírez (2023), there is a need to connect young people with the Wayuunaiki language. This would prove that their language can transcend instead of being left behind. So far, it is only being used among family members and households. It could be updated, as many other languages have.

6. Challenges and Barriers of Internet Use in the Wayuunaiki Language

As mentioned at the beginning of this report, some areas and territories have been subjugated and marked by a historical process that prevented them from developing in several aspects. In this case, the Guajira area is not an exception. It is mainly a rural territory with very particular survival conditions. It has a commercial

⁴⁴ Information and communications technologies. Accessed in November 2023 at: <https://w.wiki/3aYR>

sector characterized by contraband, with corrupt institutions in a very exoticized socio-cultural context.

For the Wayuu, inhabiting the internet comes with a challenge, as there are many barriers to the enjoyment of its benefits, including economic, political, infrastructural, environmental and linguistic aspects. During this research, access to some communities was difficult, as rivers had flooded due to heavy rains in the territory. This situation explains a portion of the reason why there is a digital gap in rural communities.

Here is a list with all the challenges and barriers mentioned by the interviewees. Each of their comments are related to one another.

1. Economic Aspect:

Internet access is often limited by the lack of economic resources to purchase smartphones, tablets, laptops or desktop computers. During the pandemic, many parents purchased “second-hand” or used mobile phones available in the informal market. They gave them to their children so that they could access the internet and get their homework assignments done.

Similarly, economic limitations prevent users from paying for monthly data plans, so they purchase 1–6-day data packs. This is the situation in the Colombian Guajira. On the other hand, on the Venezuelan side of the territory, the situation is even more complex. Users do not have the purchasing power needed to buy high-end smartphones. Additionally, the Venezuelan electric system is unstable, which fails to ensure secure and uninterrupted connections.

Another economic factor is related to basic needs, such as food, drinkable water, housing and utilities. Many communities do not have utilities and time is spent trying to obtain resources to survive instead of trying to ensure internet access for households. This situation is experienced by many ethnic groups. This is the main reason why indigenous peoples are the last ones to access innovation, which also has an impact on digital literacy levels.

Importantly, internet access is more relevant for some of the participants, such as educators, who need it for research and communication, while other occupations are not associated with internet use, so it is not that important in their

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everyday life, especially when it comes to people over 60 who live in rural areas. Students are beginning to show dependency on and interest in internet access.

2. Political Aspect:

In Venezuela, the political aspect has had an impact on the development and use of the internet, as the country has been submerged in political conflict for several years. This has severely decreased the purchasing power of the population and led to the instability of fundamental utilities. Moreover, government entities do not have the power to tend to the needs of internet users. This situation has severely impacted the Wayuu in the Venezuelan Guajira, who do not have a stable electric service. This means electricity fluctuations interfere with mobile internet and the population is therefore disconnected.

In Colombia, the initiatives to connect rural areas have been scarce in comparison to the progress made on the internet these last few years. However, some communities have benefited from government connectivity projects, especially schools. Other projects have been developed, including the one supported by UNHCR Colombia, Fundación Hermanos sin Condiciones and the COLNODO Association, which highlights a process of inclusion and information democratization. While some communities and schools receive resources through government programs, such resources are often stored and not used for the purpose they were donated.

3. Infrastructure:

Many communities sometimes lack virtual classrooms with good connectivity. Some schools have received equipment, but they do not have access to the network. Mobile phones are the most frequently used when accessing the internet in rural areas and urban areas with Wayuu presence.

In the Venezuelan Guajira, the infrastructure of virtual classrooms or computer rooms often lacks the necessary equipment or has outdated equipment.

4. Environmental Aspect:

Guajira is a semi-desert, with temperatures typically above 35°C (95°F). This also hinders the existence of indoor virtual classrooms, while outdoor spaces are

challenging due to sand and salinity that can damage the existing equipment. Electricity is usually unstable in many *rancherías* and territories.

On top of this, the rainy season in Guajira usually causes floods in rivers and creeks, another factor that coexists in the Wayuu territory. During rainy seasons, many communities become isolated and school is suspended in institutions located in the territories. This is why the educational process is not constant and has gaps in it.

5. Linguistic Aspect:

Three interviewees expressed that they usually do not understand the language of technology (the language used by manufacturers and developers). When they try to explore the technical part of a platform, instructions are in English or a language they cannot understand. This is a barrier that usually pushes users away and prevents them from accessing information or developing their technical skills, including programming, the ability to make equipment work or to maintain networks or systems.

Sometimes, the articles or content they want to look at is in different languages. Code language was also mentioned, as it is often in English. Technical terms and the use of words in English hinder their understanding of how the network operates.

6. Writing:

It is no secret that the Wayuunaiki language is just now exploring the use of writing. The standardization of their alphabet has not been quite defined by the community yet, but there have been some steps toward the development of a project to standardize Wayuunaiki writing. Information within the community is still orally transmitted and the use of Wayuunaiki is extended in everyday life and the family environment.

Since Wayuunaiki is taking its first steps toward the written word, many people, especially monolingual individuals and those unrelated to the educational and linguistic fields, do not recognize the writing process. Furthermore, the elderly are not familiar with how to write in Wayuunaiki. In this case, this hinders the complete development of the language on platforms, as reading is also difficult for those who are not familiar with the use and spelling rules of Wayuunaiki.

There have been projects to promote Wayuunaiki in writing and similar initiatives related to the development of written content, including translations and interpreting. However, the audience of these texts are specialized people who were able to attend and learn the rules of the Wayuu alphabet. There are also Wayuunaiki courses people can take to learn how to write it, which somehow excludes low-income populations.

7. Digital Literacy:

Digital literacy is still a major challenge, as the boom of technology is relatively new and the first ones to master ICTs were the developed countries and big cities in the country. Therefore, indigenous communities have been marginalized in the process of ICT expansion. With the current availability of smartphones and other sophisticated devices, many adults and young people have had to become digitally literate in a more empirical manner.

On the other hand, schools in indigenous areas are focusing on teaching content related to hardware but they overlook content on software and the dangers associated with ICT use. Therefore, many indigenous children and young adults are not able to fully grasp digital security issues or topics related to platform development.

Moreover, the projects executed in Guajira do not focus on training local leaders or thought leaders, i.e., on the transfer of knowledge to the communities in order to truly empower them.

The age gap is also notorious. Older people still express their concerns about internet use, as they argue that they barely know how to access platforms and thus fear they might deconfigure or damage the visual part or any other aspect of a device.

As mentioned in this section, many factors hinder the full development of Wayuunaiki on the internet. These are often cross-cutting, as they are related to survival and other aspects of everyday life. In several aspects, survival and meeting basic needs are a priority instead of a complete engagement with activism initiatives.

7. Taking Action through Dialog and Reciprocity

All the people participating in this research project agreed on the implementation of empowering and inclusive strategies. They also expressed a sense of belonging linked to an appropriation process to improve literacy and reinforce their identity.

Moreover, the Wayuu would make a different use of the internet, characterized by an ethnic approach and its usefulness to support processes for the development, acquisition and strengthening of the indigenous community's skills and abilities. While there are some limitations to access, the interviewees agreed that the internet is a useful tool that can improve the capabilities of new generations.

All of them agreed on the steps below to support and enable the internet in a responsible way, from an ethnic approach:

- Providing more digital literacy workshops targeted at the Wayuu community.
- Considering aspects of the Wayuu cultural life when providing digital literacy workshops, including reciprocity, attention to the elderly, the importance of meetings, the respect for their image and data confidentiality.
- Designing training courses with empowering strategies for native Wayuunaiki-speaking young adults.
- Creating and developing materials in Wayuunaiki, including audio-visual materials, handbooks, and other content that can be used in learning processes.
- Supporting self-sustainability in projects executed in the Guajira territories.
- Enabling the Wayuu to be the protagonists in the development of use strategies.
- Engaging with the educational sector and universities.
- Using diagnostics and socializing project achievements.
- Providing basic tools and support.

8. Conclusion

This report sought to explore the Wayuu participation on the internet as well as mention some aspects that have conditioned said participation from colonial times to the present day. As mentioned before, historical processes have had a major impact on the development of some indigenous communities, in this particular case, the Wayuu people.

Historical processes have created gaps that still affect the Wayuu community. However, some important initiatives seek to promote Wayuu participation on the internet, such as Wikimedistas Wayuu and the Wikimedia projects, local efforts, special education processes, ethnic projects and the development of pilot community network projects like Weinüin Walapüin and the Wayuu digital network. Government efforts like the Educar program and Wi-Fi areas in Guajira should also be mentioned. In Venezuela, some efforts like Canaima were made.

This research project has been marked by the willingness of its participants, who devoted their time to answer questions and engage from a Wayuu perspective. This shows that the community knows how to organize and is always aware of the efforts that require community participation. It also paints a picture of the innovation capacity of the Wayuu people to reinvent themselves and prevail over time.

As a community with a long history of negotiation and cultural exchange with other communities, we note some leadership and learning abilities that enable them to interact smoothly in interculturality. The Wayuu know about the advancements in the world and they are interested in inhabiting the digital space to close the gap.

This project has allowed us to listen to and understand the concerns of participants, who expressed to be upset by the gradual loss of Wayuunaiki due to globalization and the use of ICTs. For them, the digital era is weakening the relationship between young and older people, as well as devaluing community values and principles. However, they feel hopeful, as the internet and the digital era also bring an opportunity to expand, protect, build, improve, strengthen and connect with future generations through a solid digital identity.

Additionally, the international legal framework supports and sides with

communities so that indigenous peoples have the right to inhabit the digital space under their own terms. We have seen that there are signs of Wayuu internet governance, as interviewees expressed that Wayuu participation should be differentiated, and there is information and cultural data that should not be made public.

This makes it clear that there is a deviation from free and open access to information without a prior consultation process. Many States and other agencies have tried to use indigenous information without consulting them first, and they have also used Wayuu images in contexts that do not represent the entire community.

Finally, a list of recommendations and participants' comments was developed. By sharing their experiences, they have contributed to the development of the Wayuu identity on the internet, which shows an epistemology that differs from the dominant one and seeks to reach current and future generations.

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