

A Study on the Role of Social Media as a Tool for Promoting Dialogues on Peace Building and Non Violence among the Youth

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Introduction

Since times immemorial, people have had within themselves a very strong urge for communication and willingness to express themselves in front of others. In order to gratify this need they went at great lengths started way back from inventing the wheel to today's well developed "Media Industry". Now within the huge magic bag of media there are several sources that promote communication a grand deal. However there has been a predominance of what is alluded to as mainstream media, which incorporate electronic media like television and radio, print media like newspapers, magazines etc. More recently there has been the emergence of the new media which includes the social media. It has complemented mainstream media in imparting information to the masses. The mostly used social media platforms include; Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Google chat, Skype, Yahoo chat and Blogs.

A vast majority of those on social media are the youth. The reason behind their prevalence has been ascribed to the simple access from mobile phones. There is a Short Message Service (SMS) to Facebook for occasion, which sends content to the users each time something happens on Facebook. All the more essentially there is an application called 'Facebook', which had made the content delivery easier. In addition to those who access social media websites on their phone there are those who are more or less computer literate. Twitter is a social networking site a lot like Facebook. Tweets are twitter messages, which are message based with a most extreme of 140 characters in length. Dissimilar to Facebook messages which can contain photographs or videos, these messages are posted on the user's profile page and read by followers. While Facebook has a limit of 5000 friends for each part, Twitter has set no such limitations.

Likely 'the social media on political movement to touch off violence' has turned into a topical issue. In India for example the discourse encompassing it has been

portrayed as a dual of anecdotes between cyber utopian and cyber skeptics. Some perspectives encircle with the uses of social media. On one hand it is considered that popularity of social media will certainly direct to a more transparent government and democracy and on the other hand it is viewed as an elitist phenomenon that could bring danger because of the uncontrolled communication. The Arab spring in the Middle East and North Africa in mid 2011 has provoked calls for need of thorough study into the prospective role that the new media can play in peace building.

Despite the fact that social media is basically very important and has a great potential for exchanging democratic dialogue, conflict prevention and peace building, a number of risks can be identified.

In Indian there has been increasing access to internet which is the fundamental access to social networking; most of the users now have the greatest tool for expression and sharing of information. Nevertheless not everybody is morally and ethically guided while utilizing it, and in this manner the social media can be misused by such people. The other noteworthy concern is the trouble of ensuring reliability and accountability of facts and information disseminated through internet, unverified facts are usually circulated with proposed actions. The social media users regularly do not offer consideration regarding the precision of the information contextualization or authentication of such information. Vague or ambiguous information can have grave results on emergence of violence. As a new platform for communication, the social media acts in unpredictable ways and without regulations, ethical standards or professionalism any individual posting material can make events and revise them.

Another fret emerges from the unrestricted nature of the internet which is extremely hard to regulate. In truth controlling the internet is more troublesome than the traditional media. Further internet and other social media networks are not civil rights platforms. They have a business angle and thus they are jointly a part of a business dominated platform. The inventors of the platforms have priority on commercial interests and profits. Internationally Google and Facebook have been expelled from certain area sites taking after an Indian court choice on the premise of religious sensibilities. The inventors of the platforms have priority on commercial interests and profits. They may therefore not be interested in regulating content, but rather just offer what the market demands. However some actors have set up measures for reporting offensive communication.

The rise of social media has dared to de-formalize communication. Social media has given a method for consistent and quick communication, which interface in and around as well as locally. It has created a movement in the communication environment which was already ruled by the mass media. Social media has an idea

for power relations. Throughout history information is a key element in starting conflicts far and wide. The media can thus assume an imperative part of a watch dog of the general public, by exposing to the masses what is essential but hidden; however it can also be used to mobilize violence. Social media can therefore act as a tool for widening the democratic space, but can simultaneously lead to destabilization of peace. While there is no evidence proving the role of the social media in the Arab uprising, here is considerable debate of whether credit properly goes to the social media compared to other factors in precipitating this wave of political unrest.

In spite of the several debates, there is little systematic research on this area. There is insufficient material on the use and role of social media for conflict prevention and peace building. This could be comprehended as lack of control over the research environments, speedy changes of public attention, difficulties in measuring the casual impact of media intervention, and the heterogeneity of conflict environments and changing objectives in the conflict torn countries.

The Concept of Social Media

Social media alludes to the method for interaction among individuals in which they share as well as exchange information thoughts in virtual groups or systems utilizing technology. Kaplan and Heanlein (2010) have characterized social media as gathering of internet construct applications that work with respect to the ideological and technological establishments of the internet and that permit the creation and exchange of user-generated content. The content might include text, video, images, podcasts and other multimedia communications. The most prominent examples of social media include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google + Google talk, Yahoo chat, Skype, WhatsApp etc.

Facebook is a free social networking site that permits registered users to make profiles, transfer photographs and videos, send messages and stay in contact with families, friends and colleagues. Twitter is a free micro blogging site that permits registered individuals to communicate posts called tweets. Twitter members can broadcast tweets and follow other user's tweets by using multiple platforms and devices. Wikipedia is a free, open substance reference book made through the communitarian exertion of a group called the Wikipedians. Anybody enlisted on the site can make an article for production. Enlistment is not required to alter articles.

Besides, social networking relies on mobile and web based technologies to generate highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, discuss and modify user generated content. It acquaints substantial and persuasive changes

to communication between organizations communities and individuals. It is contended that social media has presented constructive outcomes, for example, permitting the democratization of the internet while likewise permitting people to advertise and form friendship. Much of criticism of social media has been that it has decreased face-to-face interactions, there have been issues of reliability of information presented, concentration, ownership of media content, and the meaning of interactions created by social media.

Social networking sites as defined by Boyd and Ellison (2007) as web-based services that allow individuals to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and categorization of these connections may vary from site to site. While we use the term “social network site” to describe this phenomenon, the term “social networking sites” also appears in public discourse, and the two terms are often used interchangeably. We chose not to employ the term “networking” for two reasons: emphasis and scope. “Networking” emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication.

According to Jolene Zywica and James Danowski (2008) on the other hand social networking sites allow users to create a personalized account that includes the information like; date of birth, hobbies, preferences, education status, relationships status and personal interests, etc. Whereas Heythornthwaite (2011) viewed that the term ‘social network site’ has been used to describe this trend, instead of the term, ‘social networking site’, as the latter is majorly understood as networking with regard to maintenance of relationships with friends or people know personally and/ or via the social network. Social network sites provide a lot of networking for people, but that is not their prime concern, as it appears. Social network sites let people connect to others, and enable them to speak their thoughts. This results in associations between individuals which are often described as ‘latent ties’. With the way social media space is flourishing, people think it has become very essential for them to create their own space on the social media, and there is no dearth of content, comments, pictures, videos, links or WebPages people are ready to share, to do so.

Social Media and Peace Building

The tools that we use in new media, especially the social media are powerful peace building tools, if we identify them so. All the activities in print or electronic media, as

we have realized it for quite a while now, with regard to building and maintaining peace and decorum in the society, have become better with the advent and continuous use of new media. The communities that work for peace building in the society transform social media into an extremely utilitarian entity as spreading awareness for peace building tasks is concerned.

Normally, media is utilized to engender plans to society, convey messages, and communicate on the behalf of both powers and the masses. This is finished with the utilization of devices of mass communications, to which new media like the social networking sites are included. History has a proven record of the utilization of media to attract individuals toward a specific strategy, to motivate them into taking or not taking up a task, and creating a world-wide view on situations, events, communities and people. It has moreover been seen that media can offer hatred among groups in the society and create violence. This hold true for social media also.

If the same stands true, tools of media and new media i.e. the social media can be utilized for creating and maintaining peace in the various sections of the society. They can be put to use to make people aware of conflict prevention strategies and can in themselves act as one, by communicating on those lines. It can be prevailing means to mobilize people to build peace. As far as youth is concerned, social media can be utilized very well by the youngsters to take up peace building tasks. The current study probes the possible role of social media for promoting dialogues on peace building and nonviolence among the youths by understanding the strengths of social media for the same.

Review of Literature

In their study 'Why and When to Use the Media for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding', Vladimir Bratic and Lisa Schirch (2007) discusses media's direction toward conflict and sees the medis' function in peace building and conflict resolution. Besides, it discusses how the use of new media can lead to change in the society and how it can encourage people to contribute to peace building tasks, and also support in the same.

Sheldon Himelfarb and Megan Chabalowski (2008) in their study *Media, Conflict Prevention and Peace building: Mapping the Edges* had mentioned that there is growing recognition among policymakers and conflict management experts that the media should be a building block of any comprehensive peace building strategy. Yet there are scant guidelines in this regard. Projects are still planned and implemented in a relatively ad-hoc manner, with minimal reference to lessons learned from previous initiatives.

Whereas Sacha Wunsch-Vincent and Graham Vickery (2007) had said the social media and UGC are characteristics of what is called Web 2.0 or the “participative web. The participatory feature of the web is now a reality to many users. When reading the news, internet users can see and rate comments, as well as make comments. Many Internet users interact with overlapping online and offline community over digital social networks like Facebook.

In an essay ‘Media in Conflict Prevention and Peace Building: An Opportunity for E.U. Leadership’ Communication for Social Change Consortium, Bernardo Monzani (2009) states that ‘media often promote violence’. The study takes up the classic examples of the Rwandan genocide and the explosion of mass protests on Moldova, to enumerate on how media often builds up tensions instead of building peace. The study talks about the role of media in general and new media technologies per se in channelizing the debate on new media affecting the social set up and promoting violence.

In his essay titled ‘New Media for Peace building and Conflict Management,’ Cladwell (2012) highlights on how new media is ‘used to create peace or more tragically to foment violence’. It is understood that the knowledge revolution has created bridges and divides in the society and how new media when portrays information, makes it easier for destructive behavior to spread more easily across borders.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted among the two districts of Madhya Pradesh viz Gwalior and Morena among 100 youths who are pursuing their under graduates and post graduates courses of the age group between 19-25 to see their usage of social networking sites and their behaviors therein with an effort to have equal gender representation. A questionnaire was given to the participants, the results of which were later analyzed. It is a descriptive research and hence aims to describe the current status of the phenomena of role of youth in peace building tasks. The sample was selected after careful observation of the current trends in social media usage.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table :1 Social Media Accession	
Accessing social networking sites from desktop	6%
Accessing social networking sites from laptop	20%
Accessing social networking sites from smart mobile phones	45%
Accessing social networking sites from any two tools	29%

From table 1 Social Media Accession it is evident that 45% of the respondents are using social networking sites from their smart mobile phones, while 29% are surfing social networking sites from any of the two tools, mere 20 % of respondents are using laptop and 6% using desktops for the same This helped the researchers understand the social media accession behavior.

Using Internet for Reading	9%
Using internet for surfing and shopping	10%
Using internet for social networking sites	38%
All of the above	43%

Table 2 Common Trends And The Popularity of New Media and Its Usage indicates that a percentage of 10% each is using new media for surfing, shopping and social networking, 9% for reading or academics and 43% performing all of these tasks with the use of new media while 38% of respondents are using internet for social networking sites. This shows the prevalent trend and the popularity of new media along with lining its usage.

2-3 hours	23%
4-6 hours	33.33%
6-7 hours	30%
Lesser hours in Internet	13.33%

With regard to daily internet consumption on a routine basis was concerned, the results revealed that 33.33% spent four to five hours on the internet, 30% spent six to seven hours, and 23% spent two to three hours and 13.33% spending the least number of hours using new media

Awareness about cyber culture	30%
Awareness about virtual space	33%
Awareness about digital divide	26.66%
Awareness about crisis mapping	10%

From Table 4 it is evident that awareness of cyber jargon question on cyber jargon revealed that 30% were aware of the commonly used term cyber-culture, 33% were like to virtual space, 26% understood the concept of digital divide and 10% had an idea about the term crisis-mapping.

Table: 5 Purpose of Using Internet	
Blogs	6.66%
Apps	13.33%
Emails	40%
All of the above	40%

Table 5 indicates 6.66% of respondents are using blogs and 13.33% are using mobile and computer applications, whereas 40% of the respondents are using emails 40% of the respondents are using all the applications.

Table: 6 Significance of social media	
Social media can be used for civilian peacekeeping	16%
Social media can be used for making space for democracy	12%
Social media can be used for women empowerment	16%
Social media can be used for all of the above	56%

Table 6 tries to understand the significance of social media usage from youth perspective. On asking further about the significance of social media it came into view that 16% understood that social media can be used for civilian peacekeeping. Accordingly 12% of the applications of social media can be used in making space for democracy and 16% for women empowerment. A huge 56% agrees that the power of new media can be used for all of these.

Table: 7 Effect of Peace Building on Youth	
Peace building invokes cognitive changes	27%
Peace building invokes attitudinal changes	24%
Peace building invokes behavioral changes	14%
Peace building invokes all of the above	35%

From table 7 effect of peace building on youth it is imperative that it can lead to behavioral changes in 14% of the cases, cognitive changes in 27% and attitudinal changes in 24%.

Table :8 Crisis Mapping	
Awareness about peace building	7%
Awareness about conflict prevention	5%
Awareness about both	8%
Awareness about none	80%

When further technical concepts on peace building were asked, it came into view that 7% understood the terms peace building and 5% understood about conflict prevention and 8% understood about both peace building and conflict prevention a chunk of 80% had not heard of these.

Conflict Resolution in Social media Platform	16%
Social Media can create theories of peace building	10%
Social Media as a platform for peace building and intercultural dialogue	36%
All of the above	38%

From the above table 9 uses of social media in peace building dialogue it is clear that 38% of respondents believed that peace building activities can be escalated with the use of social media and 36% feel that new media can play a significant role in the same by coming up with peace building dialogues, 16% believe that taking conflict resolution to social network platform can be of assistance, approximately 10% state that creating a theoretical framework to deal with conflict resolution with the help of new media can be fruitful, and 20% agree that all of these are required to gear up with peace building tasks in the society.

Creating awareness among youth for peace building activities a	58%
Influencing youth for peace building activities	24%
Decision implementation regarding peace building	7%
All of the above	11%

As far as participation of youth in peace building activities through social media concerned, 58% believed that enhancing knowledge to that effect can be of immeasurable assistance, 24% agree that influencing the youth can do the task, 7% target on implementations of decisions, and 11% same percentage believes that all of these are required to encourage youth to get involved with peace building activities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that social media is an important communication tool among the youth. Social media's popularity can be recognized to certain key element which includes:

- a. it responds to the youth's desire for communication;
- b. It is inexpensive and has the opportunity for instantaneous communications.

Most of the youths in the study bought internet bundles to connect to social media and those who didn't relied on their friends and relatives to connect. This means that internet has been made available in price that can be afforded by the users especially those who are hailing from area with socio-economic challenges.

The study had also concluded that a major portion of teenagers and university goers use internet on mobile, laptop and desktop in the decreasing order. We also come to know that the respondents use internet for surfing, shopping and social networking, followed by reading online. A majority spends five to seven hours on the internet, with others spending an average of four hours. It is also understood that a good number of respondents are aware of the concepts of internet like cyber culture, virtual space, digital divide, with very few having the knowledge of crisis-mapping. The respondents of the study use emails, mobiles and computer applications and blogs, which bring out the fact that they are side by side with the innovations in new media technologies. Nevertheless a majority did not seem to be aware of the concepts of peace building and conflict management. There was an understanding among the respondents about the areas where social media can contribute constructively. The following study revealed that social media has been used for social reasons and not much in conflict prevention and peace building. Therefore it presents a great potential for scaling up peace building initiatives and peace building among the youth who should be target for conflict prevention and peace building. There is however need to popularize the use of social media as a tool for conflict prevention with very user friendly interfaces for it to be a effective tool for conflict prevention.

The study thus reveals that conflict prevention and peace building activities invoke behavioral changes, cognitive changes and attitudinal changes, in that order. It further states that social media can assist in creating peace by taking conflict resolution and strategies to a social network platform, leading to peace building intercultural dialogues among members of the social setup, and coming up with theories with regard to same. With the increasing penetration of mobile telephones specially the smart phones among the youths especially those represented in this study provides the opportunity to integrate mobile telephony and internet based social media platforms to increase the participation level of the youth in reporting violence and taking part as well as reporting peace building activity. This will enable those who posses ordinary mobile phones (which cannot connect to internet) to participate, since they can simply use SMS to report violence or peace building activities to the concerned place. Likewise they can receive warning and alerts for conflict and take precaution.

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