Peace-building and Social Media in a Cosmopolitan Society

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Abstract

The aim or purpose of peacebuilding is toaddress the root causes of conflict create and promote peace. Peace is built on social, political, economic and ecological foundations that serve the welfare of the people. Many demonstrations, protests and social movements which utilises the use of non-violence has led some approaches to peacebuilding to focus not only on the root cause(s) of conflict but also on good governance and peaceful dispute settlement mechanisms.Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, among others, provide a space in which society can communicate freely and cheaply, articulating their divergent viewpoints. Social media has now become a new marketplace of ideas, equally disliked and needed by politicians, diplomats, international institutions, civil society groups and violent groups alike. Africa represents a cosmopolitan society given its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic richness. Nigeria is the most heterogeneous and multicultural society in Africa with over 300 ethnic nationalities and concurrent religious diversities. In Nigeria, individualism, ethnicity and tribalism are more prevalent than cosmopolitan ideas of universality and generality. Cosmopolitanism embraces an individual's willingness to engage with people of different tribes and culture while upholding universal standards of human rights. Social media has birthed the idea of virtual cosmopolitanism and the construction of virtual cultures. This article seeks to explore various means by which peacebuilding can be achieved through social media in a global and cosmopolitan era.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, Social Media, Cosmopolitanism, Non-violence, and Conflict

The Concept of Peace-building

The precise definition of the term 'peacebuilding' has remained unclear. The blurred nature of peacebuilding has been acknowledged by Roland Paris who holds that scholars have devoted relatively little attention to analysing the concept of peacebuilding itself, including its underlying assumptions (Haugerudbraaten, 1998). There are several dimensions on which the usage of the term differs. An important dimension of the concept was made by the former UN Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali in his book titled "An Agenda for Peace" where he made it clear that peacebuilding consisted of "sustained co-operative work to deal with underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). Ernie

Regehr has also stated that "peace is built on social, political, economic and ecological foundations that serve the welfare of the people." (Haugerudbraaten, 1998)

Other dimensions of peacebuilding include the following:

- Removing the root causes of a conflict or about finding ways to resolve old and new disputes in a peaceful fashion,
- Setting up outfits that entail security, humanitarian, economic or political intervention or all of these at the same time,
- Putting in place measures that sustains long-term humanitarian involvement in post-conflict recovery.

According to the report of the Berlin conference on peace-building in 1996, peacebuilding further has these dimensions:

- peacebuilding as a political undertaking and not a developmental or humanitarian one;
- the second priority of peacebuilding is not the ending of conflict as such, but to prevent the resumption of violence (Kühne, Cross, & Schümer, 1996)

Peace-building according to Idris (2020), can be defined as a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, political and also economic transformation. According to Fisher et al. (2000), peacebuilding is not primarily concerned with conflict behaviour but addresses the underlying context and attitudes that give rise to violence such as unequal access to employment, discrimination, unacknowledged and unforgiven responsibility for past crimes, prejudice, mistrust, fear (and) hostility between groups. Peacebuilding can be conceptualised either as the concrete actions taken to support and promote peace, or as an aggregate process. This process involves a modification of social structures (political, economic, social, cultural, psychological) through a number of broad developments, notably democratisation, economic development and demilitarisation.

Aims and dynamics of peacebuilding:

The primary aim or purpose of peacebuilding is to create and promote peace. It also seeks to address the root cause(s) of conflict. Conflict, as long as it does not take violent forms, may contribute to a dynamic and innovative society (Haugerudbraaten, 1998). Another aim of peacebuilding is to ensure the removal violence as a tool for conflict resolution (Barnett, Kim, O'donnell, & Sitea, 2007). Many demonstrations, protests and social movements fall within the category of non-violence which has led some approaches to peacebuilding to focus not only on the root cause(s) of conflict but also on good governance and peaceful dispute settlement mechanisms.

Peacebuilding also aims at a reduction of violence while trying to improve the living conditions of the population. The concept of peacebuilding generally includes projects contributing both directly and indirectly to building peace (Költzow, 2013). Peacebuilding involves undertaking programmes designed to address the causes of conflict and the grievances of the past and to promote long-term stability and justice (Fisher et al., 2000). Peacebuilding can take place during different phases of a conflict. Peacebuilding should not be limited to post-conflict recovery as it can also be a preventive mechanism. It is generally agreed that peacebuilding can take place during all the phases of conflict(Barnett et al., 2007; Boutros-Ghali, 1992; Haugerudbraaten, 1998). The work that is undertaken to promote peace could differ between the various phases of conflict.

John Paul Lederach's approach

Lederach (2015) views peacebuilding as a form of conflict transformation. Conflict transformation from his perspective is a comprehensive orientation or framework that ultimately may require a fundamental change in our way of thinking. In conceptualizing conflict transformation, Lederach (2015) perceives that the phenomenon is more than a set of specific techniques; it is a way of looking as well as seeing. It emphasizes the importance of building right relationships and social structures through a radical respect for human rights and life. The rationale for conflict transformation is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change and respond to real-life problems in human relationships (Aggestam & Björkdahl, 2012; Lederach, 2015). A transformational perspective is built upon two foundations:

- a capacity to envision conflict positively, as a natural phenomenon that creates potential for constructive growth, and
- a willingness to respond in ways that maximize the potential for positive or constructive change

Conflict transformation pursues the development of change processes which explicitly focus on creating positives from the difficult or negative. It encourages greater understanding of underlying relational and structural patterns while building creative solutions that improve relationships (Lederach, 2015).

Goals in Conflict Transformation

According to Lederach (2015), There are four goals in conflict transformation which are:

Personal: The key essence of personal goal is to minimize the destructive effects of social conflict and maximize the potential for growth and well-being of an individual at physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels.

Relational: Relational goal seeks to minimize poorly functioning communication and maximize understanding between parties in a conflict.

Structural: The key essence of structural goal is to understand and address root causes and social conditions that give rise to violent and other harmful expressions of conflict. It also seeks to promote nonviolent mechanisms that reduce adversarial confrontation, minimize and ultimately end violence.

Cultural: Cultural goal seeks to identify and understand the cultural patterns that contribute to the rise of violent expressions of conflict. It also builds upon resources and mechanisms within a cultural setting for constructively responding to and handling conflict. Conflict transformation ultimately involves de-escalating and engaging conflict, building peace and fostering constructive change. Transformation's guiding question is this:How do we end something not desired and build something we do desire?

Social Media: An Overview

Social media are internet-powered communication channels that enable users to continuously exchange information (Schirch, 2019). Zeitzoff (2017), defined social media as a form of electronic communication and networking sites that allows users to follow and share content (text, pictures, videos etc.) and ideas within an online community. Summarily, social media platforms are online sites and services that host, organize and circulate user's contentwithout having produced or commissioned it (Poletti & Michieli, 2018).

LeFebvre (2017) posited that although social media are often used for keeping in touch with friends, it is increasingly common for people to use social media to get news and stay informed. According to Sun (2021), social media is different from traditional media in the past such as newspapers, radio and television. Its unique characteristics of massive information, rapid transmission and openness, communication and interaction have quickly become the main platform for information release.

Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, among others, provide a space in which society can communicate freely and cheaply, articulating their divergent viewpoints (Lunga, 2020). According to Valenzuela, Piña, and Ramírez (2017), sharing news over Facebook, Twitter and other social media has become an everyday practice for online news users around the globe. Social media has now become a new marketplace of ideas, equally disliked and needed by politicians, diplomats, international institutions, civil society groups and violent groups alike (Ünver, 2019).

de Graaf and Meijer (2019)posits that social media use and social networks have the potential to dramatically change the relationship between government and citizens. Gohdes (2018), argues that the availability of digital communication technology thus affects the information flow of both government and non-government actors. It can help non-traditional

'citizen journalists' have their voices heard in larger contentious discourses where state forces are censoring traditional media outlets.

The Evolution of Social Media

Social media began around May 1844 with a series of electronic dots and dashes tapped out by hand on a telegraph machine. The first electronic message was from Baltimore to Washington, D.C where the Morse code was used as a form of electronic messaging (Maryville, 2020). While the roots of digital communication run deep, most contemporary accounts of the modern origins of today's internet and social media point to the emergence in 1969 of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network — the ARPANET (Hendricks, 2013; Maryville, 2020). In 1987, the direct precursor to today's internet came into being when the National Science Foundation launched a more robust, nationwide digital network known as the NSFNET. A decade later, in 1997, the first true social media platform was launched. This gave rise to the earliest social media networks, beginning with the short-lived Six Degrees profile uploading service in 1997 (Hendricks, 2013; Maryville, 2020; McIntyre, 2014).

They introduced users to digital communication through email, bulletin board messaging and real-time online chatting. Weblogs, or blogs began to gain popularity with the 1999 launch of the Live Journal publishing site which influenced digital social communication (Maryville, 2020). This service was followed in 2001 by Friendster. These rudimentary platforms attracted millions of users and enabled email address registration and basic online networking. This coincided with the launch of the Blogger publishing platform by the tech company Pyra Labs, which was purchased by Google in 2003 (Hendricks, 2013; Maryville, 2020; McIntyre, 2014).

In 2002, LinkedIn was founded as a networking site for career-minded professionals. By 2020, it had grown to more than 675 million users worldwide. It remains the social media site of choice for job seekers as well as human resources managers searching for qualified candidates (Maryville, 2020; McIntyre, 2014). After the invention of blogging, social media began to explode in popularity. Sites like MySpace and LinkedIn gained prominence in the early 2000s, and sites like Photobucket and Flickr facilitated online photo sharing. YouTube came out in 2005, creating an entirely new way for people to communicate and share with each other across great distances (Hendricks, 2013; Maryville, 2020).

By 2006, Facebook and Twitter both became available to users throughout the world. These sites remain some of the most popular social networks on the Internet. Google's attempt to elbow its way into the social media landscape, Google+, launched in 2012. A rocky existence came to an end in 2018, after the private information of nearly 500,000 Google+ users was compromised by a data security breach(Hendricks, 2013; Maryville, 2020).

Today, there is a tremendous variety of social networking sites, and many of them can be linked to allow cross-posting. This creates an environment where users can reach the maximum

number of people without sacrificing the intimacy of person-to-person communication (Hendricks, 2013). With the advent of social media apps that could run on smartphones, end users could take their communities with them wherever they went. What began as a desktop or laptop experience shifted to mobile phones and tablets. The capabilities of cellular phones expanded, turning them into "smartphones"; and high-speed wireless internet became more readily available in homes, businesses, and public spaces (Maryville, 2020).

The Cosmopolitan Society

Cosmopolitanism refers to "cosmo-politics" and a vision of world government, global democracy and world citizenship (Cheah & Robbins, 1998). 'Cosmos' meaning the world as a whole and 'Polis' meaning a self-governing political entity. Cosmopolitan according to Cambridge (2022), refers to, containing people and things from many different parts of the world, or having experience of many different places and things: Cosmopolitan could therefore mean multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, pluralistic or multi-national.

According to Kaldor (2003), Cosmopolitanism refers both to a 'positive political vision, embracing tolerance, multiculturalism, civility and democracy'. Cosmopolitanism is regarded as an alternative to nationalism and identity politics. Pogge (1992), identifies three elements which provides the basis for the understanding of cosmopolitanism: the first is *individualism* as the fundamental units of concern are human beings, in contrast to collectives such as tribes, family lines, ethnic, cultural or religious communities, nations or states. The second element is *universality*. This refers to the equal status of all living human beings, not merely to for example men, whites, or blacks. The third and final element is *generality* and this status has global force, meaning that human beings are the "ultimate unites of concern for everyone".

Cosmopolitanism was promoted as a long-term preventive strategy and as an alternative to the identity-based politics that caused inter-ethnic tensions. Cosmopolitanism is about worldviews and places emphasis on the individual & the global. In cosmopolitanism, individuals are seen as citizens of the world and not nation, ethnic or religiously biased towards others (Kaldor, 2003, 2013). Cosmopolitanism embraces an individual's willingness to engage with people of different tribes and culture while upholding universal standards of human rights. In cosmopolitanism, the world is inhabited by individuals with fundamentally equal rights and obligations towards each other.

Africa represents a cosmopolitan society given its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic richness. Nigeria is the most heterogeneous and multicultural society in Africa. Nigeria is a country with her proliferated ethnic nationalities with concurrent religious diversities (Ntamu, Abia, Edinyang, & Eneji, 2014). In Nigeria, individualism, ethnicity and tribalism are more prevalent than cosmopolitan ideas of *individualism, universality and generality.* Cosmopolitanism embraces an individual's willingness to engage with people of different tribes and culture while upholding universal standards of human rights (Björkdahl, 2005).

Peacebuilding thrives better in an environment where cosmopolitan values are upheld (Goetze & De Guevara, 2014). Cosmopolitans believe that the primary units of moral concern are individual human beings, not states or other forms of communitarian or political associations (Goetze & De Guevara, 2014; Kaldor, 2003). Social media has birthed the idea of virtual cosmopolitanism and the construction of virtual cultures (McEwan & Sobre-Denton, 2011). Cosmopolitanism can be facilitated through mediated social spaces in which people can transcend cultural boundaries (Evanoff, 2006).

Social Media and Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation (Idris, 2020). According to Baytiyeh (2019), Social media in conflict-affected regions may help promote peace by encouraging dialog among antagonists and it can affect the perception of violence, reshape attitudes, and promote tolerance and mutual understanding. In the last ten years, Social Media has become an important context where youth connect with their peers (Elsaesser, Patton, Kelley, Santiago, & Clarke, 2021). Savrum and Miller (2015), were of the opinion that the media provides freedom of choice in selecting which broadcast best represents their interests and also improve ethnic relations, intercultural relations and conflict resolution.

LeFebvre (2017), believes that social media has the power to unite people in common causes,at the same time, social media can highlight divides among people in conflict. Fisentzou (2019), asserts that technological advancements revolutionized the social interactions of global society and in turn influenced the means and methods of warfare; increasing the involvement of civilians in hostilities, not only as victims but also as participants. According to Zeitzoff (2017), social media can help publicize perceived wrongs committed by a regime, through creating and helping mobilize protestors. He views social media as 'Liberation Technology', given the ability of social media to more easily facilitate connections among activists, lower communication costs, get feedback on protest platforms and raise funds. Dambo et al. (2020), also opined that social media removes all forms of barrier and empowers average members of (the) society. Actors engaged in conflict do not simply use social media as a way to mobilize supporters, but they also use it to actively shape the narrative about their group (Zeitzoff, 2017).

Achieving Peacebuilding via Social Media

Social media can be used to facilitate peacebuilding through the following means:

1. Building bridges between people and groups: Social media platforms facilitate collaboration, interaction and sharing of content among users, hence allowing audiences to shape their pre-expectations based on the information they receive regardless of who is the creator that shares the information. The various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp amongst others can be used as a tool to building communication gaps among various members of a community and influence peace.

2. Providing early warning of potential conflicts; Digital technology has made it possible for people to get information in real-time and in many cases with digital video evidence (Ekoh & George, 2021). Denskus (2019), pointed that social media tools can contribute to peacebuilding via warning, collaboration and policy change. It can improve the knowledge for conflict prevention and increase contact and understanding between opposing groups. Social media can also be useful to crowdsource information for conflict prevention measures and enables people to engage their own initiatives for peace and allows for interactive dialogue. The Ushahidi platform in Kenya is an example of how social media can be used as an early warning mechanism.
3. Improving governance: Online social media networks have proved to be effective tools in advocacy and emergency communications (Rutechura, 2018). Social media has been argued to eliminate the top to bottom structure of governance where leadership is placed in the hands of leaders who alienate their people and also not instilling trust in the people they lead (Dambo et al., 2020). Social media can be used to bring the government closer to the people. Different initiatives can be launched via social media to encourage citizen participation in the development of a state.
4. Increasing knowledge of complex issues: ICTs can be used to monitor various post-conflict agreements and other commitment violations (Ünver, 2019). Some of the affordances of social media is that it offers new opportunities for social action. It can increase an individual's social capital by expanding their network.It can also provide creative new platforms for social organization (Dambo et al., 2020). Social media can be used to sensitise the citizen on the root-causes of issues and seek out suggestionsfrom citizens on the best way to resolve and forestall conflicts.
5. As a motivator for action to promote peace:Lanz and Eleiba (2018) asserts that new technologies increasingly shape the environment of peace mediation, as conflict parties and mediators resort to technology for different purposes. Social media is a useful tool for mediators to broaden a process, hearing the views of a broad range of stakeholders, without necessarily enlarging the negotiation table as such. Lunga (2020), argues that social media can be used to promote peace and tolerance if used carefully.

The utilization of social media offers a vast array of opportunities in peacebuilding. The average youth is connected to one social media platform or the other. Promoting a culture of peace via social media will reach wider audience and birth more positive results than using the newspapers or the television.

Conclusion

Digital technology has made it possible for people to get information in real-time and social media has been used to dramatically alter and change the relationship between people globally. Non-violent movements, conflict intensification campaigns and post conflict peacebuilding has taken a new turn with the advent of social media. The world is now a cosmopolitan society with different cultures and people virtually connected through the internet.Cosmopolitanism embraces an individual's willingness to engage with people of different tribes and culture while upholding universal standards of human rights. This work has highlighted various means in which peacebuilding could be achieved through social media such as being used as a tool to build bridges between people, and as a motivator for action to promote peace. We therefore recommend that various institutions, organizations, communities and other stakeholders embrace this new era of using the internet and social media as a tool for building peace.

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