



The Anthropology of Digital Activism: The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding through Social Media

Dr. Shakeela Ibrahim¹

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University Islamabad, Pakistan & Post-Doctoral Fellowship, Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

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Corresponding Author:

Dr. Shakeela Ibrahim

Email:

Shakeela_ibrahim@comsats.edu.pk



ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on digital anthropology, a field that is gaining increasing importance in the digital world. People use technology for different purposes, such as making life easier. They utilise media platforms to resolve problems, acquire knowledge, and engage with their societies. This paper examines the role of youth in peacebuilding through social media. This research demonstrates that social media can serve as an effective platform that fosters democratic conversation and freedom of speech. However, due to the unregulated nature of the internet and social media, individuals lacking ethical principles and professionalism can exploit these platforms to spread misinformation. This kind of misinformation can result in the disruption of peace and trigger acts of violence. This study examines the relationship between social media and conflict prevention and peacebuilding, as well as how youth utilise social media for advocacy and activism. This type of motivation drives them and involves digital peacebuilding in their societies. This research covered the locality of Islamabad Universities to analyse youth behaviour for peacebuilding through media. A qualitative technique has been used to collect data from 100 respondents. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Three key informants were selected through social media channels to discuss their experiences and share their perspectives on the role of youth in peacebuilding. The research indicated that over 82 percent of those surveyed were active on social media, and the rest used social media to get information. A significant portion of the respondents had between 101 and 800 social media friends. Additionally, the research found that respondents utilised traditional media, such as television and newspapers, to enhance peace in society by obtaining information from social media. This research revealed that if the government were to regulate social media, users would primarily utilize it for social interactions.

Introduction

This research has determined that social media has a strong influence on society, which is changing rapidly. Everyone is involved in this social stance in their social, economic, and political life. Sometimes, these create problems for societies due to mishaps and misunderstandings. Social media has a strong influence on the minds of young people; sometimes, it distracts them from their original pursuits, and sometimes it provides them with a platform to promote peace and solidarity. Matingwina (2018) argues that today's youth, especially those aged 16 to 25, are fundamentally different from their predecessors due to their heavy reliance on digital platforms for obtaining news and engaging in political discussions. Stopping the false information is vital for peacebuilding. Identifying and comprehending the essential information is important, whether it is Fake information to spread in society. According to Macharia (2024), participating in social media also has several drawbacks, such as the propagation of false information. Disseminating false information on social media platforms is gradually eroding the credibility of these platforms. Salman and Mohamad Salleh (2020) and Saud et al. (2020) claim that political discourse uses social media sites, including Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Among other things, young people communicate directly with leaders through social media platforms. According to Wamuyu (2021), the young are not afraid to take direct action, voice their concerns, and confront authorities about corruption and their failure to address the populace's demands for social media growth, particularly in the political and social arenas. Social media is a medium of quick information that allows us to build norms and values. These norms and values promote peace and solidarity in society. When youth are involved in social media, some promote social solidarity and peace. Social media is a powerful entity that informs the community about peace or violence. The European Centre for Conflict Prevention's Vladimir Bratic and Lisa Schirch's study, "Why and When to Use the Media for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding," examines how the media is often oriented towards conflict and how it can be utilised to prevent and promote peace. Additionally, it discusses how new media may motivate individuals to participate in peacebuilding efforts and contribute to significant social change. The study focuses on how media can generate a critical mass for peace, provides examples, and discusses the role that new media have taken on in region-specific peacebuilding initiatives. In his paper titled "Youth and Peacebuilding," Dr. Roshan Danesh of the University of British Columbia (Canada), the European Peace University (Austria), the British Columbia Justice Institute, and a senior member of the International Education for Peace Institute highlights how youth are the lifeblood that fuels the war machine and how it is a natural tradition for children to play a significant role in all the violence of the conflict. As a result, young people have limited opportunities to participate in peacebuilding initiatives. Nonetheless, it is imperative to protect the next generation from the devastation caused by conflict and violence. As a result, the study emphasises how using young people as peacemakers challenges the custom of placing young people in combat roles. According to Ibrahim (2024), these communities, which are based on common identities, interests, or pastimes, frequently transcend geographic boundaries. Participants were engaged in various social interaction techniques, including text-based communication, multimedia sharing, and cooperative activities, to promote community and social cohesiveness. Youths utilise all media activities to view the world through their perception. If they are willing to build peace and harmony, they will do what they can. Still, the environment matters significantly for this objective, as research examines how youth use social media sites for activism and advocacy. It identifies the primary reasons behind their participation in digital peacebuilding initiatives. It analyses how social media affects efforts to promote peace and examines how it facilitates dialogue, increases consciousness, and stimulates mobilisation for nonviolent endeavours.

It is essential to recognise and value young people's diverse experiences and viewpoints, including how they observe the social system and its impact on peace and conformity. Youth possess a unique perspective on the challenges facing their communities, such as terrorism, unemployment, child labour, gender inequality, and health issues. Their contributions can lead to innovative solutions to these complex issues. By promoting diversity and inclusiveness, we can empower young people in peacebuilding efforts, leading to more effective and lasting outcomes.

Research Methodology

This research was conducted at the University of Islamabad. Data was collected from undergraduate and graduate students. To assess the youth's use of new media, their comprehension of the concept of peacebuilding, and their awareness of the types of efforts that people their age can make in peacebuilding initiatives, a survey was conducted with a range of age groups and educational backgrounds. The participants were given a questionnaire, and the answers were then examined. As a descriptive study, its goal is to outline the current state of young people's involvement in peacebuilding efforts. The sample was chosen after thoroughly analyzing current social media usage trends.

Data Analysis

According to the survey, 53% of participants accessed the internet via laptops, 29% via mobile devices, 5.77% via both, and 12.23% via desktop computers. This provided the researchers with a better understanding of the respondents' comfort level in using the internet and new media. Since most respondents own a laptop and all use a smartphone with an internet connection, they deemed both techniques convenient. Forty per cent of them used media for social networking, shopping, and browsing, twenty per cent for reading or studying, and ten per cent for all these activities. These points have been discussed in the table on how youth use digital platforms for peacebuilding.

Table 1: Involvement of Youth in Peacebuilding

Age	Aspects	Details
18-25	Focus on using social media.	Youth engagement in digital activism for peacebuilding through social media.
18-25	Use of the media for a purpose	Social media dynamics, human rights education, online experiences, and current challenges
18-25	Impact of Media on Youth	Youth digital activism has a significant impact on peacebuilding, but its sustainability depends on resolving related issues.
18-25	Effects of social media on promoting peace	Youth are encouraged to maintain peace and are restricted from spreading fake news for the sake of peace and advocacy.

Table 2: Key Themes of Peacebuilding in Universities

Key Themes	Description	Percentage	Remarks
Youth engagement with social media	Encourages dialogue among groups in disagreement to foster empathy and comprehension.	20%	Twenty percent of people are involved and signed up in various groups to engage in dialogue with those creating or disrupting societal peace.
Awareness and Education for Peace	Highlights the significance of peace-	45%	Forty-five per cent of respondents discussed and emphasised the

	building initiatives and emphasises the need to foster social unity.		importance of peacebuilding in society. They expressed that they are active social media users who take the initiative to promote social unity.
Activism and Advocacy	Coordinates initiatives and activities that promote peace and justice.	15%	Fifteen percent of individuals actively engage in advocacy and peacebuilding efforts within society.
Countering Misinformation	Encourages the sharing of truthful information to address hate speech and falsehoods that fuel conflict.	10%	Ten percent of respondents are actively reporting misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation.
Community Building	Connects people and organisations to strengthen networks that foster peace initiatives.	10%	Ten per cent of respondents organise seminars, events, and talks to promote peacebuilding and raise awareness.

Integrating social media into peace-building strategies can enhance outreach, foster collaboration, and create a more interconnected and peaceful society.

Results and Discussions

Social Media and Youth Interest

Over time, youth become mature enough to understand social media and can quickly identify the difference between fake and original news, thereby contributing to societal peace. According to respondents' responses, social media is full of fake news, but it's our responsibility to disseminate the news in a way that does not create division in society. During the research, students discussed the role of media in peacebuilding. They said the media can easily convey messages to maintain peace and communicate on behalf of the public and authorities about why we need peace and how we can build as a younger generation. Through social media, we can help stop the spread of negative agendas. This is accomplished through mass media tools, to which new media is added. Students discussed using the media to influence people toward a specific course of action, motivating them to take or not take up a task for peacebuilding, and producing a global perspective on circumstances, events, communities, and people to work for society and maintain peace. It has also been observed that the media has the power to cause violence, conflict, and hatred among social groups; thus, youth need to avoid it. The same may be said about new media tools, including AI.

Impact of Social Media on Youth

Data revealed that social media has a substantial impact on the pressure on youth; they spend 7 to 8 hours daily watching random reels and short videos, often unconsciously. Sometimes, they don't have authentication for these brief videos, and the youth forward them to others. This query is also discussed with the youth, who are asked about the above observations. They say we do, but when we watch videos that can harm us and our country, we try to avoid them and refrain from sharing

them. We are aware that sometimes videos are generated using AI to create a problem for the country.

Pakistani Youth's Engagement in Peace-Building Process

Many universities are hosting events for peacebuilding, and numerous students are involved in societies that organise events to raise awareness about peacebuilding. By equipping young minds with knowledge about conflict resolution, tolerance, and non-violent communication, peace education cultivates a generation equipped to navigate conflict constructively. Integrating it into school curricula across all levels, from primary to higher education, can be a transformative force for societal harmony (UNESCO's 2013-2030 Youth Strategy emphasises the importance of this approach).

Conclusion

To summarise, youth are essential in influencing the future of peacebuilding and addressing global conflicts. By supporting and empowering young individuals dedicated to peace, we can develop a more inclusive, effective, and enduring approach to peacebuilding that benefits all sectors of society. Together, we can build a better future for ourselves and future generations.

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