

# MEDIATING CONFLICT IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Authors:

1. Theimi Rashadang

2. P. Thontalakbou

Research scholar, Research scholar

Department of Political Science

Manipur University

Imphal, Manipur, India.

Email: [rashadangtheimi@gmail.com](mailto:rashadangtheimi@gmail.com)

## Abstract:

The advent of social media has significantly transformed the landscape of communication, activism, and conflict resolution in contemporary society. This paper explores the multifaceted role of social media as a tool for conflict resolution across various contexts, including ethnic, political and communal disputes. It argues that social media platforms can serve both as catalyst for peace and as accelerator of conflicts, depending on their use and regulation. On the one hand, social media facilitates dialogue, promote inclusivity, disseminates real time information, and empowers marginalized voices, thereby contributing to peace building and reconciliation efforts. It enables grassroots movements and civil society actors to mobilize support, create awareness, and foster cross community understanding. On the other hand the rapid spread of misinformation, hate speech and echo chambers on these platforms can exacerbate tensions and polarize communities. This paper highlights both the opportunities and challenges posed by social media in conflict resolution and calls for strategic engagement, digital literacy, and regulatory frameworks to harness its potential for sustainable peace. Through case studies and theoretical perspectives, the research underscores the importance of responsible digital citizenship and multi-stakeholder collaboration in leveraging social media as a constructive instrument in conflict resolution processes.

**Keywords:** Communication, social media, Catalyst, Peace building, reconciliation, Digital Literacy, sustainable peace, constructive instrument.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, social media has fundamentally transformed the nature of communication, activism, and conflict resolution across the world. It has played a particularly visible role in regions affected by ethnic, political and communal disputes. The dual role of social media as both a tool for peace building and a contributor to conflict has sparked a scholarly attention and practical concern alike. This paper seeks to explore how social media platforms, depending on their use and regulation, can either exacerbate tensions or act as instruments of dialogue and reconciliation.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS A CATALYST FOR PEACE

Social media offers unprecedented access to real-time information and enables marginalized voice to be heard. Platforms such as Twitter, Face book, whatsapp and YouTube allow peace advocates, civil society organizations and grassroots movements to mobilize support, disseminate inclusive narratives and foster cross-community understanding. When strategically used, social media contributes significantly to peace building by enabling dialogue, reconciliation, and the creation of common ground among conflicting groups.

1. For instance, during the Syrian conflict (2011), social media platforms were employed by humanitarian organization to spread awareness, coordinate relief and highlight the human cost of war.
2. Arab Spring (2010-2012) Social media played a pivotal role in organizing protests, documenting state violence, and amplifying democratic voices in Tunisia, Egypt and beyond.

In Tunisia, social media helped unite citizens across divisions and led to a relatively peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy.

3. Similarly, in Colombia peace activist use social media to advocate for the government- FARC peace process, sharing stories of reconciliation and recovery. Activist used hash tags like #SiALaPaz (yes to peace) to support the peace deal between the Colombian government and the FARC rebels. It promoted national dialogue and public support for disarmament and reconciliation after decades of civil war.

4. The role of social media in the Black Lives Matter (BLM) in America (2013-2020) has been central and transformative. Platforms like twitter and instagram became central tools for mobilizing awareness around racial injustice and police brutality. Following the police brutality and consequent murder of George Floyd in 2020 Hash tags like **#BlackLivesMatter**, **#IcantBreathe**, and **#SayTheirNames** brought widespread attention to systematic racism.
5. Ukraine Crisis (2022). Ukrainian citizens and officials used social media to humanize the conflict, share verified war updates, and call for global peace efforts. Social media has been instrumental in mobilizing international solidarity, debunking disinformation, and supporting humanitarian causes and humanitarian aid.

## ***SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN AGENT OF CONFLICT***

Despite its potential, social media can also be weaponized. The rapid spread of misinformation, fake news, hate speech, comments and echo chambers can deepen mistrust and escalates conflicts. In many cases, algorithms prioritize sensational content, encouraging polarization and reinforcing biases.

1. In Myanmar, social media was infamously used to incite violence against the Rohingya Muslim minority. Hate speech and false information shared on face book and whatsapp helped mobilize public opinion against the group, contributing to mass displacement and violence.
2. Similarly during the Manipur 2023 conflict in India, digital platforms saw a rise in inflammatory posts that inflamed ethnic tensions. Research shows that social media handles affiliated with each ethnic group (Meitei and kuki) emerged rapidly, coordinating narratives on X, amplifying fear, hatred, and mobilizing followers for violent action. ([thingkholemajalcha.com](http://thingkholemajalcha.com))
3. Social media acted as a powerful agent of conflict during the Israel- Hamas war by amplifying misinformation, deepening polarization, and fueling emotional outrage across global audiences. Platform like X, TikTok, and telegram were flooded with unverified videos, propaganda, and hate speech, intensifying hostility and shaping biased narratives.
4. Social media intensified the India- Pakistan standoff during operation Sindoor by amplifying disinformation, Fake reports, and nationalistic rhetoric bringing the two countries perilously close to conflict. (Guardian report)

## ***OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES***

The opportunities offered by social media in conflict resolution are enormous. It allows for instant mobilization, international attention, and the democratization of peace processes. However, the challenges are equally daunting. These include:

- Lack of digital literacy among users.
- Poor regulation and content moderation.
- Government censorship or manipulation.
- Spread of disinformation and propaganda

Balancing these opportunities and challenges require strategic engagement, ethical usage, and nuanced understanding of the digital ecosystem.

## ***THE ROLE OF DIGITAL LITERACY AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP***

Digital literacy plays a critical role in minimizing the harmful effects of social media during conflict. Educating users to critically evaluate content recognizes misinformation and responsibly engage online can reduce the risk of violence fueled by online discourse.

Promoting responsible digital citizenship where users are aware of their digital rights and responsibilities can cultivate a safer, more inclusive environment. Schools, governments and social media companies must invest in programs that foster critical thinking and empathy in the digital space.

## ***THEORETICAL INSIGHTS AND STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION***

Theoretical perspectives from communication and conflict resolution studies highlight the importance of narrative framing, information dissemination, and agenda setting. Multi stakeholders collaborations between governments, civil society, media organizations and tech platforms is essential to ensure that social media is harnessed constructively.

Collaborative initiatives such as fact-checking alliances, digital peace campaigns and regulatory frameworks can help build digital ecosystems that favor peace over polarization.

## ***CONCLUSION***

Social media is neither inherently good nor bad but it is a reflection of users, their intention, and the regulations that govern it. While it holds immense potential to contribute to sustainable peace through dialogue, awareness, and empowerment. It also carries the risk of amplifying conflict through division, misinformation, and hate.

To truly mediate conflict in the digital stage, societies must invest in digital literacy, enforce ethical standards, and encourage inclusive digital practices. Only through such concerted efforts can social media evolve into a constructive instrument of peace and reconciliation.

## ***REFERENCE***

1. Galtung, J. (2000). Conflict Transformation by Peaceful Means.
2. Cottle, S. (2006). Mediating Conflict: Journalism, Politics and the Public.
3. Lynch, J., & Mcgoldrick, A. (2005). Peace Journalism.
4. Castells, M. (2009). Communication Power.
5. Wolfsfeld, G. (2004). Media and the Path to Peace.
6. Howard, P.N., & Hussain, M.M (2013). Democracy's Fourth Wave?
7. Tufekci, Z. (2017). Twitter and Tear Gas.
8. Shirky, C. (2011). "The Political Power of Social Media." Foreign Affairs.