

Role of Youth in Peace Building via New Media: A Study on Use of New Media by Youth for Peace Building Tasks

Sumit Narula*

Amity School of Communication, India

Abstract

The present paper discusses how new media is put to use by the youth. The focal area is how youth is using or not using the variety of new media available, for peace building tasks. The study was conducted with 150 respondents, and aimed to relate the usage of new media by youth to peace building activities. With the innovations in new media, if the youth was completely abreast with the latest technologies, shall be a part of the findings of the study. Furthermore, it will try to comprehend if the youth is putting the knowledge of new media to optimal use. In majority of the cases, it is found that youngsters use new media to connect to people via social network sites, read online, use various application-based programs, and use new media for financial transactions, online shopping and bookings. It was a rarity that they would use new media for activities to enhance peaceful coordination and associations in the society, unless they belonged to such a social group or organisation that works for peace building tasks in the society. In all this, the fact remains that conflicts of the nation per se, and the entire world have to be resolved by one way or the other, in order to bring about universal peace. Herein, the role of youth in peace building comes into play. Hereby, the paper aims at gauging the number of youth (a representative section of a larger whole), willing to work for peace-building, with the help of new media. Peace building is a much diversified genre to be understood in basic terms. It can apply to almost every happening or event or people involved therein, in the society. The study conducted to understand if the youth was aware of the utilization of new media technologies for peace building tasks in the society, has been successful in finding valuable data and tried to arrive at workable solutions in that regard.

Introduction

New media and its tools has made it convenient for us to stay abreast with all that is happening in the society and more importantly, to be able to react to it. With the use of devices like laptop, mobile phones, Tablets and the like, we are not only making use of the new media, but doing it very efficiently and up-to-the-mark. Social network sites, weblogs, applications, software, emails, allow us to communicate and put new media to the best possible use.

These have become major tools for people to stay connected with friends and families and share their lives through pictures or words. People also utilize social network sites to stay updated vis-à-vis happenings in the society. And modes of new media have become a Zen for a number of people irrespective of their age. It is a medium that draws attention and people have started considering it a pivotal part of their lives, and for a lot of them their daily lives are almost connected rather governed by social media, of any sort.

New media has also been understood as a significant medium to understand the practices, norms, implications, cultural diversity of people hailing from different backgrounds. It can create a clearer, enhanced comprehension among cultures, enhance the levels of tolerance of people, and bring communities together. Hereby, SNS aren't just a medium to connect people; they rather connect social sects, and can bring about significant positive changes in the social setup too. After all, these are media of communication, and if used aptly they can get the right message across to the right audiences, thus helping in escalating people's social life index, also termed as satisfaction with life index [1]. To begin with, there is a need to understand the term social networking sites in general, and in the context of the present study.

Defining New Media

New Media Institute's Bailey Socha and Barbara Eber-Schmid define New Media as "a 21st Century catchall term used to define all that is related to the internet and the interplay between technology, images and sound". It is to be noted that the definition of new media will not be consistent over time and will see a change on almost an everyday

basis. To predict the character of new media for even a near future is a cumbersome task, so to say, due to its ever-evolving nature. However, to get a perspective, one needs a base-line to understand new media as a concept, even if it keeps changing constantly and is ever-growing. Hence, we hereby stick to how Wikipedia defines new media, which is "A broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century. For example, new media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the 'democratization' of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. What distinguishes new media from traditional media is the digitizing of content into bits. There is also a dynamic aspect of content production which can be done in real time, but these offerings lack standards and have yet to gain traction".

Socha and Eber-Schmid [2] in their paper also mention that it is to be understood that "Wikipedia is an example of combining Internet accessible digital text, images and video with web-links, creative participation of contributors, interactive feedback of users and formation of a participant community of editors and donors for the benefit of non-community readers. Facebook is an example of the social media model, in which most users are also participants".

*Corresponding author: Narula S, Director, Amity School of Communication, Amity University Madhya Pradesh, India, Tel: 07512496025; E-mail: suminarula@gmail.com

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A discussion on the term new media or new media technologies takes us to an understanding that all forms of new media are digital, and can be characterised by being manipulative, networkable, compressible and interactive in nature. The internet, and websites, blogs, emails therein are a part of new media.

Majorly, new media could be recognized as a term that patches various technologies and processes together. These technologies alter quickly, and it becomes difficult to give a comprehensible or static definition of new media. Confusion lies in the fact that it is termed 'new' which clearly gets related to the literal meaning of the word new. It explains that any technology or media that has recently arrived is termed new media. This could however, be refuted as the term is also often used synonymously with digital media. The one thing that new media or digital media are known to offer is boundless possibilities with regard to communicating, inventiveness, and enhancing levels of education.

Defining Social Network Sites

Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site [3].

Social networking sites allow users to create a personalised account that includes the information like; date of birth, hobbies, preferences, education status, relationships status and personal interests, etc. [4]. 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' [5]. Another aspect that we come to know of the social network sites is that people don't necessarily want to meet new people, rather they want to stay connected to the people who are already there in their social circle, or extended social circle. Since, people are not precisely 'networking'; these are better termed as 'social network sites' [6].

Social network sites vary with regard to the features they offer and the user-base they have. There are social network sites that allow users to share personal content, comments, photographs and more with their online friends, or extended social circle, for instance Facebook, Orkut, Instagram. Apart from private conversations, commenting, sharing thoughts, videos and more, some social network sites only allow you to only share photographs, like Instagram. This has inbuilt feature of editing photographs before posting them online. Another content sharing network is Pinterest, Twitter and Google+. This not only allows users to share photographs, but other content too. Other social network sites allow you to create your professional space online, where you can connect with employers and employees, and/or prospective employers or employees like LinkedIn and Flickr.

Other ways of building your social network is by creating your own webpage or blog, which has become a very utilitarian way of staying connected to people. Blogging is a very well known activity in the field of social network. An individual who wants to share his or her ideas

on a web portal can easily come up with a blog, which might as well become a platform for discussions on any said topic. Hence, blog posts are an extremely well-received form of social network too.

With the way social media space is booming, people think it has become extremely 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.

New Media and Peace Building

The tools that we use in new media are potent peace building tools, if we identify them so. All the activities that print or electronic media, as we have understood it for a long time now, indulge in 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 activities in the society turn new media into a very utilitarian entity as far as spreading awareness for peace building tasks is concerned [7].

In general, media is used to propagate agendas to the public, deliver messages, and communicate on the behalf of both authorities and the masses. This is done with the use of tools of mass media, to which new media is added too. History has a proven record of the use of media to enticing people toward a particular course of action, 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 also been seen that media has the ability to give rise to hatred among communities in the society, create conflict and violence. This holds true for the tools of new media as well [8].

If the same stands true, tools of media and new media can very well be used 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, new media can be utilised very well by the youngsters to take up peace building tasks. The current paper studies the understanding of new media by the youth, and aims to look up workable ideas toward peace building activities.

Review of Literature

A study titled 'Why and When to Use the Media for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding' by Vladimir Bratic and Lisa Schirch (European Centre for Conflict Prevention) [9] discusses media's orientation toward conflict and understands how media functions in conflict prevention and peace building. Furthermore, it discusses how the use of new media can lead to change in the society and how it can inspire people to contribute to peace building tasks, and also assist in the same. The study also with examples, discusses region-specific peace building tasks that the new media has taken up, and focuses on how media can create a critical mass for peace.

Communication for Social Change Consortium, in an essay by Bernardo Monzani titled 'Media in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: An Opportunity for E.U. Leadership' [10], 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.

An essay by Zarrin Caldwell [11] won the National Peace Essay

Contest with the one titled 'New Media for Peacebuilding and Conflict Management'. The essay was focused 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 behaviour to spread more easily across borders.

Dr. Roshan Danesh, University of British Columbia (Canada), the European Peace University (Austria), British Columbia Justice Institute, and a senior member of International Education for Peace Institute in his paper titled 'Youth and Peacebuilding' emphasizes that youth is the life-blood feeding the machinery of war, and how it is an innate tradition that youngsters will become a significant part of all the violence of the war. To this, there is minimal hope for the youth to get involved in peace building activities. However, the need to save the youth and the posterity from the ravages of war and violence is indispensable. Hence, the paper focuses that using youth as peace-agents stands as a challenge to the conventions of putting youth on war footing.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted with youth of Gwalior, and nearby areas-Datiya, Shivpuri and Morena in Madhya Pradesh, as sample. It was decided to conduct the study with university students pursuing under graduation, post graduation and PhD, and belonging to age groups 19-36 to see their usage of social network sites and their behaviours therein. A sample of 150 students was taken for the study, with an attempt to have equal gender representation [12].

The purpose of conducting the survey with different age groups and educational streams was to be able to gauge the usage of new media by youth, their understanding of the concept of peacebuilding and their knowledge about the kind of efforts that can be put in peacebuilding activities by people their age. A questionnaire was given to the participants, the results of which were later analysed. It is a descriptive research and hence aims to describe the current status of the phenomena of role of youth in peacebuilding tasks. The sample was selected after careful observation of the current trends in social media usage.

Data Analysis

The survey shows that 50% of the respondents used internet from their laptops, while 30% used mobile phones for internet usage, mere 6.67% used both and 13.33% used desktops for the same (Table 1). This helped the researchers understand the comfort level of the respondents for using internet and new media in general. Since, all the respondents used a smart phone with an internet connection and a majority of them own a laptop, either of these methods was found convenient by them. A percentage of 40 each used new media for surfing, shopping and social networking, 20% for reading or academics and 10% performing all of these tasks with the use of new media (Table 2). This shows the prevalent trend and the popularity of new media along with lining its usage.

With regard to spending time on internet 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, 23% spent two to three hours and 13.33% spending the least number of hours using new media (Table 3). A question on cyber jargon revealed that 30% were aware of the commonly used term cyber-culture, 33% were akin to virtual space, 26% understood the concept of digital divide and 10% had an idea about the term crisis-mapping (Table 4).

Tools of new media are significant and the younger generation

was seen adept with the use of a majority of them with 40% each using emails and mobile or computer applications, 13.33% aware of and using weblog services, and 6% approximate users of all of these services (Table 5). When further technical concepts on peacebuilding were asked, it came into view that 20% understood the terms peacebuilding and conflict prevention and a chunk of 66.66% hadn't heard of these. According to 13.33%, the applications of new media can be used in civil peacekeeping, making space for democracy and women empowerment each, and a huge 60% agrees that the power of new media can be used for all of these (Table 6).

When the use of peacebuilding was questioned, it came to light that it can lead to behavioural changes in 30% of the cases, cognitive changes in 26% and attitudinal changes in 23% approximately (Table 7). With this, 20% observes that conflict prevention and peace building invoke all of these. Respondents believed that peacebuilding activities can be escalated with the use of new media and 30% feel that new media can play a significant role in the same by coming up with peacebuilding dialogues, 26.66% believe that taking conflict resolution to social network platform can be of assistance, approximately 23% 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 peacebuilding tasks in the society (Tables 8 and 9). As far as involvement of youth in peacebuilding operations is concerned, 46.66% believed that enhancing knowledge to that effect can be of immeasurable assistance, 26.66% agree that persuading the youth can do the task, 13.33% target on implementations of decisions, and the same percentage believes that all of these are required to encourage youth to get involved with peacebuilding activities (Table 10).

Data Presentation and Analysis

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	Accessing internet from desktop	13.33%
2	Accessing internet from laptop	50%
3	Accessing internet from mobile phone	30%
4	Accessing internet from any two tools	6.67%

Table 1: Comfort level of the respondents for using internet and new media in general.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	Using internet for reading	20%
2	Using internet for surfing and shopping	40%
3	Using internet for social networking	40%
4	All of the above	10%

Table 2: Prevalent trend and the popularity of new media and its usage.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	2-3 hours on internet	23%
2	4-5 hours on internet	33.33%
3	6-7 hours on internet	30%
4	Lesser hours on internet	13.33%

Table 3: Spending time on internet on a routine basis.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	Awareness about cyber culture	30%
2	Awareness about virtual space	33%
3	Awareness about digital divide	26.66%
4	Awareness about crisis mapping	10%

Table 4: Cyber jargon.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	Usage of blogs	13.33%
2	Usage of applications	40%
3	Usage of emails	40%
4	Usage of all of the above	6.66%

Table 5: Usage of internet for different purposes.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	Awareness about peacebuilding	6.66%
2	Awareness about conflict prevention	6.66%
3	Awareness about both	20%
4	Awareness about none	66.66%

Table 6: Crisis-mapping.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	New media can be used for civilian peacekeeping	13.33%
2	New media can be used for making space for democracy	13.33%
3	New media can be used for women empowerment	13.33%
	New media can be used for all of the above	60%

Table 7: Significance of new media.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	Peacebuilding invokes cognitive changes	26.66%
2	Peacebuilding invokes attitudinal changes	23.33%
3	Peacebuilding invokes behavioural changes	30%
4	Peacebuilding invokes all of the above	20%

Table 8: Peacebuilding effect on youth.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	New media takes conflict resolution to social network platform	26.66%
2	New media creates theories for peacebuilding	23.33%
3	New media creates peacebuilding with dialogue	30%
4	All of the above	20%

Table 9: Use of new media and its significant role in coming up peacebuilding dialogues.

S. No.	Topic	Percentage
1	Creating awareness among youth for peacebuilding tasks	46.66%
2	Persuading youth for peacebuilding tasks	26.66%
3	Decision implementation regarding peacebuilding	13.33%
4	All of the above	13.33%

Table 10: Involvement of youth in peacebuilding operations.

Conclusion

The data analysis reveals that a major chunk of teenagers and university goers use internet on laptop, mobile, 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, mobile and computer applications and blogs, which bring out the fact that they are abreast with the innovations in new media technologies. However, a majority did not seem to be aware of the concepts of peacebuilding and conflict management. There was an understanding among the respondents about the areas where new media can contribute constructively. These areas were civilian peacekeeping, making space for democracy and women empowerment. The study reveals that conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities invoke behavioural changes, cognitive changes and attitudinal changes, in that order. The study states that new media can be assistive in creating peace by taking conflict resolution and strategies to a social network platform, leading to peacebuilding dialogues among members of the social setup, and coming up with theories with regard to same. Creating awareness among the youngsters regarding peacebuilding tasks in society can lead to productive results, followed by persuading them into action.

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