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THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

Conflict is an inevitable part of organizational life, arising from differences in perspectives, interests, beliefs and communication styles. If managed poorly conflict can harm productivity and morale. However, if managed effectively, conflict can lead to innovation and improved relationships. Social media has transformed the landscape of conflict resolution by providing platforms for communication, awareness, and negotiation. While it facilitates dialogue, mobilizes communities, and spreads real-time information, it also has the potential to escalate tensions, spread misinformation, and reinforce biases. This paper explores the dual impact of social media on conflict resolution, analyzing case studies from political, organizational, and social contexts. It also provides recommendations on how social media can be leveraged as a tool for constructive conflict resolution.

Keywords: social media, communication, conflict resolution.

1. Introduction

The advent of the twenty-first century brought about communication advances that allow individuals to send and receive messages instantly and with feedback. Interaction becomes more immediate and intimate, bridging the temporal divide. In the digital age, social media has become a powerful tool for shaping public discourse, influencing opinions, and resolving conflicts at various levels. According to the World Bank, Sub-Saharan Africa currently has nearly 650 million mobile phone customers, outnumbering the United States and the European Union, indicating an exceptional surge in the growth, use, and popularity of modern communication technologies in the developing world. Adepetun (2020) notes that in the year 2020, platforms for social networking such as Facebook, Instagram, and, most notably, Twitter were major mobilization tools used by young Nigerians demanding that the government dismantle SARS, cease police brutality, and reform the Nigerian police force. It has evolved into a call for Nigeria to be reformed. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have been used to mediate disputes, foster dialogue, and promote peace initiatives. Many Nigerians use social media

constantly to discuss their own and their family and friends' experiences, which is fueling the demonstrations.

However, social media can also amplify conflicts through misinformation, polarization, and cyber aggression. Social media is a hot topic right now. People nowadays rely a lot on social media platforms for the latest news and information. According to Kietzmann, Hermkens and McCarthy (2011), individuals and groups employ mobile and web-based technology to construct highly interactive platforms where they may share, produce, talk, and change user-generated content. Arens, Weigold and Arens (2011) mentioned that "these sites are called social, primarily, for their ability to connect like individuals in a manner that have never been seen before". According to Rohwerder (2015: 23) "the extensive social conflicts in Nigeria have frequently played out against a backdrop of profound poverty, illiteracy, and poor governance systems weakened by unfavorable trade conditions, debts, and administrative incompetence". This paper examines both the positive and negative roles of social media in conflict resolution and suggests strategies to enhance its constructive use. The study will explore the following objectives.

- To explore the role of social media in facilitating or hindering conflict resolution.
- To analyze real-world cases where social media has been instrumental in conflict mediation.
- To propose strategies for using social media effectively in conflict resolution efforts.

2. Literature Review

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre (2011) introduced the "honeycomb framework," identifying seven functional building blocks of social media: identity, conversations, sharing, presence, relationships, reputation, and groups. This model provides a structured approach to understanding how social media platforms facilitate user interactions and content dissemination. The authors emphasized that these elements collectively shape user experiences and influence behaviors on social media platforms. Their work underscores the importance of recognizing these components when analyzing social media's impact on societal issues, including conflict resolution.

Rohwerder's (2015) report for the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC) examined the role of social media in conflict management within post-conflict and fragile contexts. The study highlighted that social media can both aid and hinder conflict resolution efforts. On the positive side, platforms have been used to hold governments accountable, coordinate relief efforts, and build bridges across divided communities. Conversely, they have also been exploited to spread misinformation, polarize societies, and promote violent agendas. The report emphasized the

need for careful consideration of the dual nature of social media in conflict scenarios.

Akinfeleye (2020) explored the dual role of social media in Nigeria, highlighting its capacity to both facilitate peace and exacerbate conflicts. The study noted that while social media platforms have been instrumental in promoting dialogue and raising awareness on critical issues, they have also been used to spread hate speech and misinformation. The research emphasized the importance of media literacy and regulatory frameworks to harness social media's potential for peacebuilding effectively.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating literature review, case study analysis, thematic analysis, and a survey questionnaire to examine the influence of social media on conflict resolution. This methodology ensures a comprehensive understanding of both qualitative and quantitative perspectives on the topic.

3.1. Research Design

A qualitative and quantitative research design is used to explore the role of social media in conflict resolution. The qualitative aspect involves case study analysis and thematic coding, while the quantitative aspect is based on survey responses from social media users.

3.2. Survey Questionnaire

A structured survey was designed to gather data on how individuals perceive and experience the role of social media in conflict resolution. The survey includes demographic questions, multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions. It was distributed online to social media users across different regions.

3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

The study employs the following approaches in analysing the data obtained.

- **Thematic Analysis:** Qualitative data from case studies and close-ended survey responses are categorized based on recurring themes, such as misinformation, digital activism, polarization, and online mediation strategies.
- **Descriptive Statistics:** Survey results are analyzed using statistical tools to determine trends in perceptions of social media's role in conflict resolution.
- **Comparative Analysis**: Results from case studies are compared to survey responses to identify consistencies and differences in public perception vs. real-world applications.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of their anonymity and the voluntary nature of the survey. No personally identifiable information was collected. In addition, secondary data sources (case studies and literature) were cited appropriately.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

A total of 17 persons in Africa (Nigeria) were surveyed. The survey was thoroughly carried out with precision and discretion. The data shows that 70.59% of them are of the age grade of 18-24, 17.65% are of the age grade of 25-34 and 5.88% are of the age 45-54. The highest level of education shown in the data with 4 high school or below is 23.53% and with 17 bachelor's degree (76.47%). The data also shows the consistency in using social media platforms with 16 people using it multiple times in a day (94.12%) and 1 person using it a few times a week (5.88%). The surveyed have used social to engage in discussions related with 2 persons using it frequently (11.76%), 7 people occasionally (42.18%), 3 rarely uses it (17.65%) and 5 people who has never used it (29.41%).

The data shows that the surveyed believes that social media helps in raising awareness about conflicts and disputes with 17 people answering yes, to a great extent (100%). Also, the data of the respondents shows if they have ever been involved in a conflict on social media with 0 person saying yes, and it as resolved peacefully (0%), 1 person answered yes, but it remained unsolved (5.88%). Also 8 persons replied no, but I have seen others in conflict (47.06%) and 7 people saying no, I avoid online conflicts (41.18%).

Table 1: Which social media platforms do you use most frequently for news and discussions? (Select all that apply)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	10	19.61
Twitter/X	3	5.88
Instagram	7	13.73
Tiktok	8	15.69
WhatsApp	15	29.41
LinkedIn	1	1.96
YouTube	6	11.76

Source: Author's compilation

The data shown above shows the social media platforms surveyed used frequently for news and discussions. With Whatsapp being used the most (29.41), followed by Facebook (19.61%), then tiktok (15.69%), Instagram (13.73%) and then YouTube (11.76%). Then we have the least two social media platforms Twitter (5.88%) and LinkedIn (1.96%). This shows that Whatsapp is mostly used and LinkedIn is rarely used by the respondents we surveyed.

Table 2: Have you ever witnessed a conflict being resolved through social media?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes, multiple times	8	47.06
Yes, but only once or twice	4	23.53

No, I have never seen this happen	1	5.88
Not sure	4	23.53

Source: Author's compilation

The data above shows that 8 persons have witnessed a conflict resolved through social media multiple times (47.06%), 4 people have seen but only once or twice (23.53%), 1 person has never seen this (5.88%) and 4 persons not sure (23.53).

Table 3: Which conflict resolution strategies have you observed being used effectively on social media? (Select all that apply)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mediation by third party	5	18.52
Fact-checking and misinformation correction	10	37.04
Open discussions and debates	7	25.93
Community-led peace initiative	5	18.52
None of the above	0	0

Source: Author's compilation

The data above shows the commonly used conflict resolution strategies the surveyed has seen. From the percentage above, this shows that open discussions and debates and fact-checking and misinformation correction are mostly seen by the surveyed.

Table 4: What are the biggest challenges to resolving conflicts on social media? (Select up to three)

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Misinformation and fake news	16	39.02
Online harassment and hate speech	12	29.27
Political or ideological bias	6	14.63
Lack of accountability for users	5	12.2
Algorithm-driven echo chambers	2	4.88

Source: Author's compilation

The data above shows the challenges in resolving social media conflicts with misinformation and fake news and online harassment and hate being the top challenges in resolving social media conflicts.

Table 5: Do you believe social media platforms should take a more active role in resolving conflicts?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes, by moderating discussions and preventing misinformation	15	88.24
Yes, but only through user-led initiatives	0	0
No, social media should remain neutral	1	5.88
Not sure	1	5.88

Source: Author's compilation

The data above shows if social media platforms should take a more active role in resolving conflict. 15 people believe it should by moderating discussions and preventing misinformation (88.24%), while 1 surveyed believes that social media should remain neutral (5.88%), and 1 person is not sure (5.88%).

Table 6: What improvements would you suggest to make social media a better tool for conflict resolution? (open-ended question)

Responses	Frequency
Fast checking information before conclusion	1
Stop the promotion of fake or unidentified news	2
Stop those who uses aggressive words on social media	1
Create more awareness in conflict resolution through education	3
Communicate openly and honesty. Identity the source and nature of the conflict, that would make social media a better tool	1
Right mediation	2
Stoppage of misleading information	2
A more streamlined content for users and viewers to enable the right age interact with topics within their level of understanding	

Promoting empathy	1
It is almost impossible to resolve conflicts in social media due to the large audience with diverse perspectives	1

Source: Author's compilation

The above data shows an open-ended question about the improvements you would suggest to make social media a better tool for conflict resolution.

Table 7: Overall, do you think social media is more helpful or harmful in conflict resolution?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage %
Mostly helpful	4	23.53
Somewhat helpful	7	41.18
Neutral	5	29.41
Somewhat harmful	0	0
Mostly harmful	1	5.88

Source: Author's compilation

The data above highlights the question of social media being harmful or helpful in conflict resolution. 4 people responds that it is mostly helpful (23.53%), 7 people responds that it's somewhat helpful (41.18%), 5 people think it's neither helpful nor harmful (29.41%), and 1 person responds to it as being mostly harmful (5.88%).

4.2. Discussion of Findings

The statistical analysis of the survey conducted among 17 respondents in Nigeria provides valuable insights into how social media influences conflict resolution. The findings suggest that social media plays a crucial role in raising awareness about conflicts, yet its effectiveness in resolving disputes remains mixed due to challenges such as misinformation and online harassment.

- **Demographics and Social Media Usage:** The survey shows that the majority of respondents (70.59%) fall within the 18-24 age group, with most having at least a bachelor's degree (76.47%). Additionally, social media usage is very high, with 94.12% of respondents engaging multiple times a day. Despite this high engagement, only 11.76% frequently participate in conflict-related discussions, while 29.41% have never done so. This suggests that while social media is widely used, active participation in conflict discourse remains relatively low.

- **Social Media as an Awareness Tool:** A striking 100% of respondents agreed that social media helps raise awareness about conflicts. This aligns with the role of digital platforms in

disseminating real-time information, mobilizing support, and amplifying voices during crises. However, while social media serves as a tool for awareness, its effectiveness in direct conflict resolution is debatable.

- **Engagement in Online Conflicts and Resolution:** Interestingly, none of the respondents reported being personally involved in an online conflict that was resolved peacefully, while only 5.88% experienced an unresolved conflict. However, 47.06% have witnessed others in conflict, suggesting that while people may avoid direct confrontations, they are still exposed to online disputes. A significant 41.18% actively avoid conflicts, which may reflect a preference for maintaining a positive digital presence rather than engaging in contentious debates.

- **Preferred Platforms for News and Discussions:** WhatsApp emerged as the most frequently used platform (29.41%), followed by Facebook (19.61%) and TikTok (15.69%). In contrast, platforms like Twitter (5.88%) and LinkedIn (1.96%) were less popular. This distribution indicates that closed-group communication, as seen in WhatsApp, is preferred over public discourse platforms like Twitter, potentially impacting how conflicts are discussed and resolved.

- **Effectiveness of Social Media in Conflict Resolution:** Nearly half of the respondents (47.06%) have witnessed conflicts being resolved through social media multiple times, while 23.53% have seen it happen once or twice. This suggests that while conflict resolution does occur online, it is not universally experienced. Common strategies include open discussions, debates, and fact-checking, highlighting the importance of dialogue and misinformation correction in digital conflict resolution.

- **Challenges in Resolving Conflicts on Social Media:** The data identifies misinformation and fake news, along with online harassment and hate speech, as the biggest challenges in resolving social media conflicts. These issues often escalate tensions rather than de-escalate them, making conflict resolution more difficult.

- **The Role of Social Media Platforms:** A majority (88.24%) believe that social media platforms should take an active role in moderating discussions and preventing misinformation, while only 5.88% believe they should remain neutral. This reflects a growing expectation for platforms to implement stronger policies in managing online discourse.

- **Perceived Harmfulness or Helpfulness:** When asked whether social media is helpful or harmful in conflict resolution, 41.18% said it is "somewhat helpful," while 23.53% found it "mostly helpful." However, 29.41% felt it was neither helpful nor harmful, and 5.88% viewed it as "mostly harmful." These mixed responses indicate that

while social media has the potential to facilitate conflict resolution, its effectiveness depends on how it is used and the presence of mitigating factors like misinformation control.

- **Recommendations for Improvement:** Respondents suggested several improvements, including mediation, reducing misleading information, and promoting emotional empathy. These recommendations emphasize the need for structured interventions and ethical digital engagement to make social media a more effective conflict resolution tool.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the influence of social media on conflict resolution, using both survey data from 17 Nigerian respondents and case studies involving Nigerian celebrities. It examined how digital platforms contribute to awareness, engagement, and potential resolution of conflicts, while also highlighting the associated challenges. The research found that social media is widely recognized as a powerful tool for raising awareness about conflicts, with all respondents acknowledging its role in disseminating information and mobilizing public support. However, while awareness is high, active participation in conflict resolution is relatively low, suggesting a gap between engagement and impact. The majority of users prefer to avoid direct conflict, and only a few have personally experienced peaceful conflict resolution online.

Additionally, the study revealed that platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook are more commonly used for discussions compared to Twitter or LinkedIn, indicating a preference for more private, controlled environments. Respondents pointed to misinformation, harassment, and lack of regulation as significant barriers to effective conflict resolution on social media. Nonetheless, nearly half had witnessed successful online conflict resolution, showing that with the right strategies—such as open dialogue and fact-checking—positive outcomes are achievable. Importantly, the study underscores the need for social media platforms to take a more active role in moderation and misinformation control, a sentiment shared by most participants. It also highlights the value of empathy, ethical communication, and structured mediation in transforming social media into a more constructive space for dialogue and resolution.

In summary, while social media holds potential as a tool for conflict resolution, its success depends on informed use, responsible platform policies, and user willingness to engage constructively. These insights contribute to ongoing conversations about the evolving role of technology in peacebuilding and conflict management.

Owing to the influence of social media in conflict resolution, the study made the following recommendations.

- **Encourage Digital Literacy:** Educating users on identifying misinformation and engaging in respectful dialogue.
- **Implement Fact-Checking Mechanisms:** Platforms should collaborate with fact-checking organizations to prevent the spread of fake news constructively
- **Promote Algorithmic Transparency:** Social media companies should adjust algorithms to reduce echo chambers and encourage diverse perspectives.
- **Leverage AI for Hate Speech Detection:** Automated tools can help detect and mitigate inflammatory content before it escalates conflicts.
- **Use social media for Mediation:** Governments, organizations, and communities should develop structured online mediation programs to resolve disputes.

Despite the findings of the study, the study suffers basically from two limitations. First is the issue of self-reported data bias. Survey responses are based on personal experiences, which may introduce bias. Second, the study suffers from limited sample size. The survey sample may not fully represent all demographics or regions. In addition, due to the evolving nature of social media, findings may need frequent updates as new social media trends emerge. These limitations do not affect the significance of the study's findings and policy recommendations.

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